A Critical Look at Four Multicultural Reform Efforts in One Urban College of Education

Mary K. Gove, Dinah Volk
Kristine Still, Grace Hui-Chen Huang
& Sashelle Thomas-Alexander

We were told that our cat had fleas; I had never seen a flea in our place, ever. But once you had the Borax down, then suddenly, every now and then, you could see fleas hopping…

—Edward, Faculty Member

The urban college of education where we teach has a strong mission statement that is concerned with diversity. In 2007 a group of education faculty formed a diversity self-study group that engaged discussion around diversity issues as they occurred in our lives, our teaching, our research, and at our college. What was found is that these discussions and the subsequent actions taken by this group were similar to putting Borax on a cat with fleas. We quickly discovered that racism and classism were ever-present but invisible, ignored, and/or denied. All of the initiatives created through this self-study group opened up space for discussion and we were able to identify what we called *trailblazers* in the effort to reflectively confront diversity issues through collaborations within the college.

This analysis encompassed four different projects that were implemented as reform initiatives at the college. Our collaborative work and this subsequent analysis have drawn on insights from Cochran-Smith (2004), who describes teacher education as both a "learning problem and a political problem" (p. 1) that involves the creation of inquiry communities. Grounded in a critical perspective, our work and the projects described have all involved critical sociocultural theory (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007), critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009), and a critical literacy perspective (Shannon, 1990).

Following the descriptions of the individual projects below, we jointly analyze the projects through a lens created by four dimensions of critical perspective (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006). Striving to meet Cochran-Smith's (2004) challenge, we then "work the dialectic" (p. 3) by generating both theory and practice from local knowledge that advances our college's mission relating to diversity.

The four projects in question are:

1. Analyses of student responses from an evaluation form about their placements in urban schools;
2. Lessons learned from discussions of the faculty diversity self-study group;
3. Teaching and learning issues related to culturally responsive pedagogy in an early childhood methods class; and
4. Teaching and learning issues related to critical literacy in professional development sessions conducted at a local elementary school.

Mary K. Gove is an associate professor, Dinah Volk is a professor, Kristine Still is an assistant professor, Grace Hui-Chen Huang is an associate professor, and Sashelle Thomas-Alexander is a program coordinator with the Office of Field Services, all with the College of Education at Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Pedagogy

Critical perspectives on pedagogy examine many ways that unequal relations of power and privilege are entwined through interactions of teachers, parents, children, teacher educators, and pre- and in-service educators in school contexts and beyond (Apple, 2010). This requires a critical examination of perspectives and ideologies, both invisible and visible, frequently identified as "natural" (Anderson, 1989; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). The role of the teacher/researcher is to "connect the dots" (Tatum, 2007, p. 39 ff) by exploring the integration of outside forces at play in everyday interactions as well as the agency of participants on the inside to affect change (Moje & Lewis, 2007; Lewis et al., 2007).

Equally relevant to critical pedagogical perspectives is the practice of self-reflection that is engaged by all participants. Children, pre- and in-service teachers, and teacher/researchers should interrogate their histories, practices, and beliefs as well as those of others (Leistyna & Woodrum, 1996; Rogers, 2003). Such self-reflection is co-constructed and provides a basis for deeper learning, the introduction of previously-silenced voices, and the opportunity to extend beyond the personal in order to take action in pedagogical and political realms, thus moving toward social justice (Kubota, 2004; Nieto, 1999; Shor, 1992).

This movement is not linear or prescribed but is an unfinished and emergent process (Luke, 2004; Nieto, 1999), suggesting that each instantiation of a critical pedagogical approach is also unique, co-constructed, and situated in local events and knowledge, while sharing general characteristics of critical pedagogy (Leistyna &Woodrum, 1996).

Four Dimensions of a Critical Project

Research on critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006) provides a framework of inter-related dimensions for understanding varied critical approaches. In this article, we use four such dimensions to illuminate our critical analyses of the four projects:

1. The first is termed *disrupting the commonplace*, a process of providing new lenses to consider taken-for-granted occurrences by problematizing them and raising questions.
2. The second, *interrogating multiple viewpoints*, provides a means to hear and consider the *multiple and contradictory* voices of participants. This is particularly critical for those often excluded from interactions in which decision-making and other activities of the powerful may dominate.
3. The third, *focusing on sociopolitical issues*, draws attention to *outside* forces in society that are typically *invisible* by revealing the ways such forces are often embedded in learning interactions.
4. The fourth, *taking action and promoting social justice*, addresses the idea of agency, through which participants use knowledge and understandings generated by collaboration, activity, and self-reflection to create greater equity.

Local Contexts of a Critical Pedagogy

The four projects took place in our college of education, whose mission stresses a commitment to collaboration with urban communities and organizations. All education students in the college are required to take a course in diversity and to complete an urban placement for one of their major field experiences. Faculty include in their courses readings, discussions, and clinical experiences relevant to urban and culturally responsive education.

Despite these founding orientations and a plethora of significant efforts, the college's ability to prepare teachers for urban schools has become a matter of concern. In-house research indicates that while students gain knowledge of culturally-responsive urban education, they have few opportunities to practice what they have learned (Peterman & Beebe, nd). Other studies (B. Harper, personal communication; Thomas-Alexander, 2009) found that for many students negative attitudes about urban children and urban schools persist and may be reinforced by mentor teachers.

What follows are descriptions of the four projects, which were analyzed using the frame of the four interrelated dimensions of a critical perspective suggested by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002). For each project, we describe the goals, report relevant data, and provide an analysis using either *a priori* or emerging themes (Falk & Blumenreich, 2005, pp.117-118). The first project, which analyzes students' written responses to placement in urban schools, crystallizes our overarching concerns and serves as the backdrop for the other projects presented here.

Project #1
The Realities of the Field Experience: What Prospective Teachers Are Saying about Urban Field Experiences

by Sashelle Thomas-Alexander

This first project investigated preservice teachers' evaluations of field placements in urban and suburban settings. Numerical ratings and written comments on exit questionnaires and other written correspondences were compared and contrasted. Data for this project were primarily collected from an on-line survey, the *Intern Evaluation Mentor Teacher Survey,* given during the 2008-2009 school year.

Interns' perceptions of their field experience's ability to prepare them for a career in education were measured using a Likert scale (Yusko & Moss, 2008). The sample included 273 (56 male and 217 female) pre-service interns. Over 83% of respondents identified their race as White. Student teachers accounted for 60.1% of the sample; practicum interns, 36.3%; and 2.9% were methods interns. Additional data were collected through written correspondence with interns.

Emerging Themes

After analyzing the results, it was concluded there were no statistically significant differences between interns' positive ratings of *experiences* in urban and suburban placement sites. However, interns' negative comments concerning *urban placements* contradicted the favorable numerical ratings concerning their *experiences in classrooms*. From the interns' comments, three overarching themes emerged.

Urban placements are undesirable. Although students are required to complete a major field experience in an urban setting, some perceived the urban placement as punishment for attending a university in an urban setting. A typical student response was, "I don't think it's fair that just because we go to college in [the city] means we get stuck teaching in the [city school district]."

Feeling entitled to suburban placements. Interns believe they are entitled to receive a suburban placement for one of their experiences as evident in this response, "Even though I requested to do student teaching in a suburb…I was about one day from being placed at in an urban high school ...again. I stopped it just in time."

Although interns in the literature consistently report being inadequately prepared to teach in urban schools (Dana, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2000), interns in this college expressed disdain about not being prepared for suburban settings. One wrote,

> I am not applying to ANY urban schools for employment. I am not interested in working in one and do not feel that placement would be best for me. So pretty much, [the university] did not help me prepare for the setting I want to be in.

Although the university's policy states that one of the major field experiences must be in an urban setting, there is no mention of guaranteeing students' suburban placements. One student summarized the thoughts of many:

> I feel the Office of Field Service did not try as hard as they could to find me a non urban setting for my student teaching. I therefore was FORCED to spend BOTH of my teaching experiences (practicum and student teaching) in a [city] school… My particular placement was mishandled and I do not appreciate that other interns were allowed a more enjoyable and profitable experience.

Intern bias. One student wrote,

> My parents and I drove past the school and none of us felt comfortable with the school and the area it is in. The parking area has a low fence with no apparent security. The neighborhood did not look very safe. My parents are concerned for both my personal safety and the safety of my vehicle if I go to this school.

Another intern argued that since she was not from Ohio, she trusted her church members when they warned her not to risk her life in such a bad area. Though she had requested the site on her application, she later wrote, "Why would I request to go to the ghettos of [the city]?"

Sometimes intern concerns were about racial mismatch between the intern and the students, as in this request for a placement change, "I don't want to teach Black

children." Another requested a change stating, "Black kids want to be taught by Black teachers and White kids want to be taught by White teachers." Such statements of intern concerns often lead to the field placement office changing placements through a college policy of responding to student petitions.

In summary, the most encouraging finding of this project is that overwhelmingly interns' on-line evaluations indicate satisfaction with *their experiences in the field even when placed in urban sites*. They agree their mentor teachers helped prepare them for careers in education. In spite of positive numerical ratings about their experience in urban classrooms, negative comments written by interns about urban school placements remain a cause for concern. Research provides evidence that students' attitudes and perceptions about working with culturally diverse groups can change (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Therefore, colleges of education like ours must investigate pre-service programs and field experiences to assure that there are processes for encouraging this change.

Project #2
Exploring Diversity: Lessons Learned from an Education Faculty Self-Study Group in an Urban College of Education

by Grace Hui-Chen Huang

Recognizing the importance of preparing teachers to teach all children and the related challenges (Martin, 2010), a group of education faculty formed a diversity self-study group. The composition of this group has continuously changed year to year. The goal of this project was to analyze the discussions occurring during the first year of the study group (2007-2008).

Fourteen members from four of the college's departments and two offices attended bimonthly meetings. Among these 14 participants were four African Americans, nine White Americans, and one Asian American; the gender breakdown was 11 females and three males. Approximately five members came to each session. Grounded in qualitative methodology, data collection and analysis involved audio-recording group discussions, categorizing patterns, and identifying *a priori* themes drawn from the Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) critical literacy model (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A Priori Themes

The self-study group, designed to *disrupt the commonplace*, examined members' practices by challenging views and bringing about new lenses through which to analyze. Participants identified a gap between the college's urban mission and faculty's urban practices, despite the college's positive evaluation following a recent accreditation process. This incongruity disrupted taken-for-granted assumptions and provided new perspectives.

Sam,[1] a White male faculty member, explained that he tended to convey negative messages regarding urban teaching though he was aware of the importance of engaging students in the urban mission.

> I kind of told them horror story stuff and then I realized that … I was not selling this right. I would say: I cried in my car a lot; … I didn't think I was going to make it. But I wasn't telling them how I grew ... All I'm telling them is how bad it was and yet I still survived.

Interrogating multiple perspectives was an ongoing process in this group. Participants described students as lacking diversity knowledge, using deficit models and color blind approaches, lacking the ability to self-reflect, and emphasizing subject area content while ignoring diversity issues. After discussions of student "deficits," participants began to see the importance of viewing students through different lenses. They commented on students' learning of diversity as developmental and following different trajectories, acknowledging that students should be respected for where they were in the trajectory.

In the context of the politically-correct-dialogue culture in the U.S., it was challenging to have authentic dialogue concerning societal stereotypes (Banks, 2009). However, during the 2008 presidential election season, the group discussed the interwoven nature of *sociopolitical issues*. This campaign facilitated open dialogue concerning hidden issues of ethnicity, gender, and politics. Edward, an African-American male faculty member, used "Our cat has fleas" to describe this process (see the introductory excerpt).

Participants also explored how gender and ethnicity factors impacted on candidates and voters. For example, Edward commented,

> Honestly, there is very little difference between Barak Obama and Hillary Clinton on the issues that are very important to me. And so then it becomes a matter of cultural lens. A Black male is more likely to make decisions similar to my own.

During different phases of discussion, the group *initiated several action steps*. Participants identified fragmentation within and across programs impeding the delivery of clear messages about diversity and transformed the group into an *ad hoc* committee examining college-wide practices. The committee initiated a discussion of the urban mission in college and department meetings, conducted a needs assessment to solicit information on faculty needs, and coordinated diversity presentations and workshops. Some group members collaboratively organized a publication team to prepare manuscripts and proposals for presentations about their own research around diversity.

Project #3
Kidwatching and Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Action Research Project

by Dinah Volk

This project investigated whether a kidwatching assignment would facilitate students' ability to practice culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002). There were three inter-related goals informed by the concept of "visibility" (Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009): making children's strengths visible and valued; helping education students "see" race and other aspects of diversity *as teachers*; and helping the instructor "see" and respond to students' learning trajectories.

The project spanned two semesters in an Early Childhood methods class with 30 undergraduates and eight graduate students, 13 of whom were African American, 24 White, and one Jordanian American. Students completed 20 hours in a classroom with one assignment involving kidwatching.

The definition of kidwatching was expanded to "taking note of what [children] know and can do" *in school, at home, and in community settings*, "attempting to understand their ways of constructing and expressing knowledge" *alone and with others, in all three settings*, and "using what [we] learn to shape curriculum and instruction" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 3). All students got to know two children through conversations and observations and graduate students conducted "family and community engagements," taking a learner's stance vis-à-vis families (Long & Volk, 2010).

Data collected included responses to questionnaires, audio-recordings of discussions and presentations, instructor's written reflections, students' oral and written reflections, and students' work. A multilayered pattern analysis identified themes and situated students' developing perspectives within broader contexts (Gregory & Williams, 2000).

Emerging Themes

Making strengths visible and valued. Like Ballenger (1999), students "began with these children expecting deficits… because [they] did not know how to see their strengths" (p. 3). The kidwatching assignment was effective in *disrupting these commonplace views* and giving many the skills and confidence to see children in new ways. The comments of Edie, who is White, were typical:

> I think this is such an amazing, amazing eye opening experience to look at kids in a completely different way. And to see them for the people that they are...

Uma, who is African American, observed a child during basketball practice who was listless and disengaged in the classroom. She commented,

> He has such a different personality on the court … He's very sociable with the other kids. He's lively and energetic.… He goes above and beyond what's expected …

A number of students *began the process of taking action* by using information learned in their lessons. Basheera discovered a child making books at home and asked him to share during a book-making project. Talia learned that a child helped his father with yard work and, when the school participated in a park clean up, asked him to teach the class the names of tools and how to rake leaves. Lindell created a bulletin board about what children learned from elders.

Seeing race. Developing understandings of diversity followed differing trajectories. White students learned they could talk about race and other aspects of diversity while African-American students were practiced at doing so. For example, Susannah's comment was typical of the White students:

> I learned that being open and honest is better than avoiding a 'pink elephant' that is lingering around the room, that everyone sees that no one wants to talk about.

All were challenged to understand diversity as teachers and began to *interrogate multiple viewpoints*. For example, Brooke, who is African American, wrote without hesitation about "the entitlement Whites enjoy in this society," though in her field placement she struggled to identify the strengths of an African-American boy who was labeled as a problem learner.

Seeing the teacher education students. Class discussions provided safe spaces for students to reflect critically, although they tended to focus on pre-planned messages rather than on students' negotiations with culturally responsive teaching, reaffirming rather than challenging what everyone knew.

During a discussion about assumptions, several students detailed racist and classist assumptions made by *others*. In contrast, Theresa, an African-American teacher, told about assumptions she had made about a Mexican-American child that later proved false. The instructor followed with a generic statement about not making assumptions, neglecting Theresa's *self*-reflection and the issue of bias among people of color. The discussion ended focusing on child development—safe ground in an Early Childhood class—and children's frequent acceptance of teachers' deficit perspectives. An opportunity was missed to *focus on the sociopolitical* by analyzing power and privilege fundamental to such assumptions. Missed opportunities became clear as did the need to understand developmental trajectories of children, students, *and* instructors.

Project #4
Teach Reflect Teach Process (TRT): Supporting Culturally Responsive Practices for Nurturing Critical Literacy

by Mary K. Gove & Kristine Still

This was a multiyear project involving the Teach Reflect Teach Process (TRT). The project team worked with seven 1st-to-3rd grade teachers and one literacy coach in an urban school to help teachers learn how to use critical literacy to engage urban children in expanding literacy skills. This project involved intensive monthly on-site professional development opportunities consisting of focused group work sessions.

These sessions targeted a variety of topics including "best practices" in literacy instruction as well as specific instructional activities encouraging the use of authentic picture books. Specifically, this project led teachers through team-based action research studies with their current students involving a process coined by the researchers as the TRT Process.

The goal of this professional development was to lead urban teachers in exploring authentic literature while reflecting on practice through the TRT Process. In so doing, it was expected that teachers would incorporate appropriate classroom texts focusing on themes of citizenship, diversity, multiculturalism, and the environment. The process aimed to build capacity within the district by fostering teacher leadership.

Data analyzed included teacher action research projects, related student generated artifacts, and observations. This analysis was qualitative and employed constant comparative data analysis (Merriam, 1987), finding *a priori* themes drawn from the Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) paradigm.

A Priori Themes

The particular texts presented generative themes leading to dialogue designed to *disrupt the commonplace*. An example of what appeared as representative of the status quo was expressed by two teachers in an initial professional development session: two teachers verbalized they would not incorporate books like *The Other Side* by Woodson, which tells the story of an interaction between a White girl and an African-American girl over a fence separating their yards. These teachers expressed that their first and second graders "loved each other" and they did not want to disrupt their students' perceptions.

Analyzing the teacher action research projects, we found an instance of *disrupting the commonplace*: one team read *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say to a class of special education children. Students identified with the term Grandfather, however, it was not an everyday notion that a person could move from one country to another and yearn to be in both places. This experience is far from commonplace in the lives of mainstream U.S. children, especially these special education students.

We found an instance of *considering multiple viewpoints* when one team used the books *The Color of Home* by Hoffman and *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Surat and Mai, both about children displaced to the U.S. by war. These books brought to the attention of non-immigrant second graders a new viewpoint. The 2nd grade class with predominantly mainstream children developed questions to find out about the lives of Somali 3rd grade schoolmates; this provided a forum for the immigrant children to talk about their lives before and after coming to the U.S. and for the mainstream children to perceive school mates through a more sociopolitical frame.

This team of teachers accomplished both *focusing on the sociopolitical* and *taking action that promoted social justice* as illustrated in their comment, such as the following,

> It was clear that both sets of students realized while from different backgrounds they shared many similarities. The honesty of the student interviewers and interviewees opened barriers between students and newfound acceptance and understanding flourished. The discussions sparked by stories read were catalysts for positive attitude changes.

Discussion:
Four Projects Related to the Critical Framework

The analysis offered in this article

is based on the four critical dimensions (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006) with the intention of illuminating certain aspects of the teaching and learning occurring in the teacher education program at one urban college of education. We decided to do this because of a growing realization that deliberate attempts were needed to expose inequities in how we conduct our teaching, field experiences, and professional development efforts in an urban setting. Next we look *across* these four projects using the magnifying glass provided by these four critical dimensions.

Disrupting the Commonplace

Considered first in this study was the *Realities of the Field Experience* project because it clearly articulated the need for the overall study's goal: honest dialogue leading to healthy action. By bringing to the fore the gap between the stated mission of the urban college of education and the "real-time" negative comments of some prospective teachers, it precisely illustrated the need to disrupt the status quo.

Considered next was *Exploring Diversity*, the self-study group project that examined discussion topics in a safe space. Issues emerged when commonplace views of race, culture, gender, and politics were challenged, and teaching and research practices were reviewed. The group discussed concerns about the college as a whole. One common denominator in these two projects was examination of the institution, its rigidity, and its hierarchical relationships. The *need to disrupt the commonplace* in the areas highlighted by these two projects is on-going and evolving, with no end in sight.

Projects 3 and 4, *Kidwatching* and *Nurturing Critical Literacy*, were concerned with teacher-student relationships and understandings co-constructed during teaching. Individual change was an integral component in each of these projects. Both of the projects were bounded ones, i.e., the two-semester study of a course and the professional development efforts have ended. The insights learned addressed directly teaching practice, where the over-arching goal was for the participants, pre-service and in-service teachers, to reflect on their practices in relation to cultural issues.

Considering Multiple Viewpoints

In the *Realities of the Field Experience* project the quantitative analysis of student responses on the evaluation form's Likert scale showed equally positive evaluations of urban and suburban classroom experiences. In contrast, the qualitative analysis of students' written comments was overwhelmingly negative concerning *urban placements*. We suspect that the written comments were probably the true feelings the prospective teachers had about urban settings, but further investigation is needed in order to confirm this. Juxtaposed with the college's urban mission, these expressed negative feelings about urban placements underscore the need for the airing of multiple viewpoints in ongoing dialogue around issues of diversity.

In the self-study group it was acceptable for there to be multiple perspectives. However, when the study group members ventured out to respective department meetings to discuss issues of racism and classism, some colleagues felt uncomfortable about the topics, others criticized colleagues—sometimes harshly, and still others fell silent.

As the self study group was a safe space to talk frankly, the classroom in the *Kidwatching* project and the professional development classrooms in the *Nurturing Critical Literacy* project were places where culturally responsive teaching could also be openly explored. In the former, both the instructor and students were able to bring multiple perspectives into the discussion and in the latter, multiple perspectives were voiced in two of the five teacher action projects. In both classroom-oriented studies, the pedagogical issue of encouraging voices of all students was central.

Focusing on the Sociopolitical

In all of the projects there were a *few* participants who focused on the sociopolitical. The *Realities of the Field Experience* project examined the perspectives of prospective teachers within the existing sociopolitical system. In the self-study group, the "*our cat has fleas*" metaphor crystallized the diversity of opinions concerning race and gender. In the *Nurturing Critical Literacy* project, one of the teacher action research projects focusing on the sociopolitical involved increasing opportunities for subordinate groups so they could participate in school to a greater degree.

In the *Kidwatching* project, the ability of some students to make the leap from personal and pedagogical analyses to the sociopolitical was highlighted even while the instructor had difficulty making a sociopolitical analysis explicit. This reluctance to help students understand challenges and biases with a systemic analysis of societal power has been reported in other studies, as researchers, faculty, and students sometimes colluded to avoid these more challenging issues (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Marx, 2006).

We also noted that in both the *Exploring Diversity* and the *Kidwatching* projects African Americans and White students participated in noticeably different ways. The African Americans often brought their personal reflections to a critical sociopolitical analysis while other participants commented on more general societal viewpoints, moving themselves away from personal connections.

Taking Action

The *Realities of the Field Experience* project shows the need for action dependent on the expanded understandings and perspectives emphasized by the other three dimensions of a critical pedagogy. The self-study group, whose issues were described in the *Exploring Diversity* project, began by exploring personal teaching practices. This group has become action-oriented, coordinating presentations and workshops emphasizing teaching about diversity, creating discussions in the different departments in the college concerning the college's urban mission, and generating and promoting short and long term initiatives. Thus, a self-study group transformed itself into an action-oriented one after focusing on disrupting commonplace views, integrating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on the sociopolitical.

In the *Kidwatching* and *Nurturing Critical Literacy* projects, a few students and teachers began taking action leading to greater visibility of the strengths and life experiences of diverse students. In *Kidwatching* there were teachers and students who began including in their lesson plans ways to use children's interests and strengths to increase their achievement and in *Nurturing Critical Literacy* one of the teacher teams broke down barriers between immigrant children and mainstream children.

Implications

These four projects from a single education college pinpoint a need to delve further into our mission to prepare prospective teachers and teacher educators in urban contexts. In the process of this study we uncovered a few *trailblazers*, individuals who worked to transform the negative, quietly resistant attitudes about urban teaching into energizing, healthy, interactions. The members of the self-study group in *Exploring Diversity* examined their own teaching practices and began initiatives to engage the rest of the faculty and staff in dialogue. A few prospective and in-service teachers in the *Kidwatching* project incorporated into their lesson plans an understanding of the link between culturally responsive teaching and achievement. Finally, two teachers in the *Nuturing Critical Literacy* study engaged immigrant school mates from Somalia by talking about their experiences before and after coming to the U.S. to break down barriers between children from differing cultures.

Implications for practice are programmatic and motivated by concerns for change in teaching practices as well as in the organization and structure of programs. This suggests the need for safe learning spaces where students, faculty, and staff can urge each other to critically reflect and interrogate practice. At the same time, it is important to recognize that White students and faculty should not make safe spaces a condition for challenging the racism and classism that people of color, working class, and poor people live with daily (Gay, 2010).

We have found that emphasizing the need for multiple perspectives is one way to set the stage for these uncomfortable dialogues. With genuine collaboration and the backing of colleagues, it becomes more possible to enact dramatic changes that might disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus explicitly on the sociopolitical, and take action.

Final Thoughts

If change is to be programmatic, it is imperative to have critical and ongoing analyses spanning across teacher education programs that can be mined for insights into challenges and thus create action plans and directions for deep-seated change that will go beyond the mere "tweaking" of accreditor-approved programs.

It is important to appreciate and help students understand the aim of culturally responsive teaching, urban experiences, and critical pedagogy, among other innovative approaches, with the goal of ultimately improving the achievement of all children, particularly those from poor and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. A more critical perspective which does not contribute to the transformation of children's work on standard assessments nor their abilities to think analytically cannot by itself be considered effective. In sum, this series of projects pinpoint a need to delve further in preparing prospective teachers for urban contexts.

Note

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

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