Community, Difference, and Voice in Teacher Education

By Jill C. Lynch

This article explores the ethical, methodological, and practical issues of translating critical theory and research into praxis through a case study analysis of a graduate capstone seminar that explored the familiar, and seemingly benign, concepts common to educational discourses: "Creativity, Collaboration, and Community." My graduate students and I deconstructed "community" to consider its composition of forces that simultaneously include and exclude. Focusing on the tensions between the inclusionary and exclusionary forces within community was the entry point for examining how difference, equity, and access operate within classroom and school communities. As a teacher educator and an educational ethnographer I hoped to further develop my understanding of how to teach, translate, and engage educators in critical discourses in education in ways that would impact their practice in their own classrooms.

My broad interest in translating critical theory and research into educational praxis was refined into a more specific set of qualitative questions:

- What happens when teachers question their assumptions about community, particularly with respect to difference and voice within community, through art and community-based projects?
- How do their experiences impact their instructional practice and their classroom communities?

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I used content analysis to analyze my students' final assignments and examine the extent to which the goals of the course were achieved.

Data analysis demonstrates that the teachers were unconvinced of the need for or unable to translate the seminar's critical themes into the classroom curriculum. Findings suggest that teachers are readily capable of navigating the tensions between the demands of a standards and outcomes-based teaching environment with a commitment to constructivist teaching and learning strategies. The ability to navigate this tension offers an encouraging response to concerns that increased emphasis on content standards narrows the curriculum. However, the seminar's emphasis on difference, diversity, and student voice within community did not translate into practice. The final curriculum products stood in stark relief to the content of the seminar during which participants were engaged, interested, and, indeed, demonstrated little resistance to sensitive or critical themes of equity, access, and power that has been documented in the multicultural teacher education literature (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Kumashiro, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Whithead & Wittig, 2004). The results were disappointing yet ripe for exploring the practicalities of translating critical pedagogy into praxis. How do I, as a teacher educator, engage in the pedagogically "risky" practices (Smith, 1999) of honoring the popularity and usefulness of community as an important classroom construct while also exploring the more dangerous elements of community? I conclude with a discussion of implications for better understanding the black box of translating critical pedagogy into practice.

Context

The seminar was a capstone experience for a graduate Masters in Education Program administered summer semester 2008 in an American Midwestern metropolitan area. Participants were from different program areas within the College of Education, including early childhood, literacy, and curriculum and instruction. Graduate students have a variety of options for completing a capstone experience. Students may write a thesis, complete an individual practicum or action research project, or they may enroll in an inquiry seminar designed by the instructor around a specific topic of inquiry. Six to 10 inquiry seminars may be offered per semester for student choice. The title of the seminar discussed here was "Creativity, Collaboration, and Community," but the principal focus was exploring how community is defined, understood, and experienced. Questioning our assumptions about community meant examining how difference, diversity, and voice operate within a community.

In the seminar I used art, photography, and digital images to facilitate experiential learning and inspire reflection and discussion and as a way to use fresh eyes to think about classrooms and the communities found within and around them. Through the readings we explored theories of difference, community, and voice, along with examples of arts or community-based curricular projects with

social advocacy objectives. We visited art exhibits in which the artists disrupted sexuality, race, gender, class, and community memberships. Schools, as the unit of analysis, are *normal* frames of reference for seminar participants to think about and (re)imagine learning. Yet schools are profoundly contradictory spaces with contesting practices, beliefs, and values (Fine & Weiss, 2008), so instead of focusing our lens on the classroom/curriculum as the unit of analysis I experimented with the impact of using visual images to explore critical questions on community membership, race, and difference. I hoped that discussion and analysis grounded in the experiential nature of art and community visits would encourage the use of "fresh eyes" to consider everyday classroom practices while serving as touchstones for translating the seminar's critical themes into practice.

During the seminar I encountered little in the way of the tensions, silences, or incidences of resistance to critical questions of difference that are commonly reported in the multicultural education literature (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Kumashiro, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Whithead & Wittig, 2004). The teachers did not resist the readings. Indeed, they were energized by the seminar's critical readings, especially readings with specific examples of art or performance-based school projects that critically engaged with difference and equity in the classroom and/or that cultivated student voice. However, as will be discussed, the results of the participants' extensions of the course themes into their own classrooms were disappointing in that the critical themes explored in the readings, art walks and discussions, and classroom discussions were largely not extended into the participants' final projects.

What Exactly Is Community?

The Capstone seminar was entitled "Creativity, Collaboration, and Community," but a major emphasis was exploring how community is defined, understood, and experienced given the term's function as a guiding metaphor in education. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit that metaphors are not simply conceptual entities. Instead, metaphors shape our perceptions, actions, experiences, and our interactions with others. Community is widely embraced as a metaphor, for example, to shape instruction, classroom relations, school climate, teachers' professional interactions, and the relationships among different stakeholders in education. Community is a powerful metaphor in education. But what exactly is community? Can unexamined definitions of community somehow limit the very processes that educators seek to encourage?

The term, "community," may not be subjected to critical examination precisely because of its frequent usage. As such, community has acquired a set of commonsense definitions that are rarely explored because educators may presume that its definition is clear and shared. In addition, the appeal, or the promise, of community is so great that educators may be less likely to seriously examine the ways the term operates in every-day arenas, such as classrooms. Yet community

has been described as an "invention" (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983), "imagined" (Anderson, 1991), "elusive" (Magolda & Knight-Abowitz, 1997), and a "dilemma [relying] on value and romantic" language (Merz & Furman, 1997).

Definitions of community are hard to settle on within everyday conversations, as well as the social sciences literature base. An oft-cited study of the term yielded 94 different definitions sharing only the loose descriptor, "they all deal with people" (Hillery, 1955). Nisbet's (1962) influential scholarship argued that communities require a function, thrive on problem solving, and grant status, security, membership, and a moral certainty. Thomas Bender's (1978) review of the sociological literature included the traditional definition rooted in locality, the experiential nature of community, and the emotional connection many people experience in respect to community. Other themes documented by Bender included the difficulty of distinguishing between a sense of self and of community and the sharing of an all-encompassing set of interests. Both Bender and Nisbet were critical of the tendency within sociology to ignore evidence of conflict within community. Similar reviews of the educational literature have also found vague definitions of community along with overly positive, optimistic, and naïve accounts of lived experiences of community in schools (Achinstein, 2002).

Community holds such appeal that its more dangerous meanings may be less visible. Yet for all the term's positive connotations, one etymological interpretation offers a darker view; *Communio* means military formation and is related to the word "munitions." Thus, *cummunio* means to be fortified from within, "to build a 'common' (*com)* 'defense' (*munis),* as when a wall is put up around the city to keep the stranger or the foreigner out" (Caputo, 1997, p. 108). By its very nature a community must exclude in its efforts to form a common life and protect itself by fortifying itself against outsiders/others. Along similar lines, feminist theorists Iris Young (1992) and Shane Phelan (1994) argue that commonsense definitions of community are dangerous because they rely on an idealized narrative of unity that denies difference within community. A narrative of unity homogenizes and must necessarily exclude potential members. In addition, transparency as a defining component of community (Sandel, 1982) is a simplistic, impossible idea. Our words and interactions have multiple layers and interpretations, thus, how can we know others as we know ourselves (Young, 1992). Unexamined definitions of community reduce the ability to understand and effect social change because an imagined-community is constructed in its ideal form as opposed to its existing form, thereby providing no understanding for building communities of difference (Young, 1992, p. 302).

Calls for community within education are too prominent for the term to be abandoned (Knight Abowitz, 1999). Yet educators can be mindful of the dangers of simplistic calls for community. For example, one such call comes from prominent promoter of professional learning communities Sergiovanni, who posits that "once community is offered, we willingly accept it" (1994, p. xvii). A professional

community is offered to educators in its ideal form, and Sergiovanni's assertion argues that community is widely, uncritically embraced. Yet little evidence exists to suggest professional learning communities are alive and thriving in schools (Achinstein, 2002). That community springs up from mere desire is unlikely, and idealized calls for community do not prepare educators for the difficult labor of building communities within contexts of difference.

Community is a powerful metaphor in education. The power of dialogue and sharing one's stories may be a way to bridge understandings and create community (e.g., Finley, 2008a). However, in order for elements of this rosier view of community to take root, educators must critically examine its definition to explore how communities both include and exclude, how difference operates within processes of inclusion/exclusion, and in particular to classroom teachers, explore the roles of students within community-building and the degree to which their voices are engaged and cultivated. Dialogue, sharing stories, giving voice to experience within a context of difference are challenging tasks. Emphasizing the potential benefits of dialogue to create community, while downplaying the difficulties will likely not allow us to reach even that of a tenuously shared common understanding.

Community, Critical Pedagogy, and Voice

The seminar's focus on community was clearly tied to critical pedagogy with its explicit focus on bringing change by critically exploring and questioning the roles of difference, diversity, and equity within commonsense definitions of community. Exploring how communities exclude and the extent to which communities enforce homogeneity in beliefs and experiences necessarily entails a focus on issues of equity, access, and learning from and about the Other. A critical examination of community calls for wrestling with difficult histories of racism, sexism, and other structural forces that oppress.

My definition of critical pedagogy is very similar to this definition offered by a classroom teacher: critical pedagogy is

> . . . a process of learning and relearning… a sometime painful reexamination of old practices and established beliefs…. to make inquiries about equality and justice. Sometimes these inequalities are subtle and covert. The process requires courage and patience. (Wink, 2005, p. 61)

Henry Giroux (1988) identified the discourse of lived cultures as an integral component of critical pedagogy. Examining the discourses of lived cultures entails a focus on how teachers and students "create stories, memories, and narratives that posit a sense of determination and agency" (p. 105). Yet Ellsworth offers a cautionary tale of the difficulty in engaging in critical emancipatory practices in that an individual/community's understanding of another's experiences and beliefs is always partial at best. Her description of the difficulties in understanding across differences through a series of performance-based disruptive political practices

reinforces Young's (1992) and Phelan's (1994) assertions of the limits of unrealistic definitions of community based on transparency, commonality, and the ability to know others as one knows oneself. I was, and am, mindful of the limits to the understanding of difference.

Questions of *voice* are important to explore in the classroom. Who has found theirs? Who is still searching? Whose is the loudest and most powerful and how was that status accorded? Is the loudest or the softest voice the most valued? Who's still finding their voice? Whose voice is so quiet that it is barely heard or even silenced under the din of other voices? Whose voice is regularly dismissed? What patterns are present that might explain whose voice is privileged and whose voices are not? Voice, and the answers to these and similar questions, are connected to power, relationships, and social interactions (Boler, 2004). The questions must be applied to thinking about classrooms.

Voice is a concept well-explored in anthropology and qualitative research. Many qualitative researchers place primary importance on listening to the stories and voices of others and paying attention to language and how it is used. For example, Britzman (1991) describes the role of voice in her ethnography of student teachers. Attention to voice

> . . . allows us entry into their practical world. Language shapes and is shaped by meaning. Voice, in this context, suggests the individual's struggle to create and fashion meaning, assert standpoints, and negotiate with others. Voice permits participation in the social world. (p. 12)

There is a rich body of work on the power of voice and the importance of finding one's voice in teacher education (e.g., Britzman , 1991) and gender studies (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). There is also a rich theoretical critique of voice (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992; Mazzei & Youngblood, 2008). However, as Rogers and Scott (2008) point out, while there are many calls for teachers to find their voice and to assert their authority in educational discourses, there is limited articulation of the black box of *how* teachers might find or develop their voices or what this process might look like in teacher preparation programs. In practical terms what does it look like when teachers explore the nuances of voice and compare and contrast the power of their voice against that of their students?

I sought to contribute to this black box of *how* with this seminar. Again, Britzman's (1991) discussion of (re)presenting the voices of others is helpful here to elucidate the framework of the seminar. Britzman defines a "critical voice" as follows:

> . . . to assume a critical voice does not mean to destroy or devalue the struggles of others. Instead, a critical voice attempts the delicate and discursive work of reart-iculating the tensions between and within words and practices, or constraints and possibilities, as it questions the consequences of the taken-for-granted knowledge shaping responses to everyday life and the meanings fashioned from them. (p. 13)

Although she is writing about a slightly different context, her assertions can be

applied to the seminar's objective of focusing on community and voice. Having a voice means refusing to be silenced. Having a voice means possessing the power and authority to speak for oneself. When I use my voice, or my "critical voice" as defined by Britzman (1991), I articulate my experiences, share through dialogue, and co-create a community or communities. Giving voice to one's experience, sharing through dialogue, is a component of bridging cultural differences (Finley, 2008b).

Giroux (1983, 1988) makes a distinction between a "language of critique" and "language of possibility." A rich critique of the oppressive, reproductive nature of schooling has been developed, but a corresponding language of possibility failed to be developed. My intent for the seminar was to critique community, exploring its potentially dangerous side, including how it excludes and Others, and (re)examine every-day practices of community-building in the classroom, but to do so in a manner which left open our ability to draw sustenance from the affirming aspects of community. A necessary focus within this framework would be an exploration of the dynamics of voice and authority within the community-building process. The themes discussed in this literature review were also discussed in the seminar.

Research Design

Final student outcomes were analyzed in light of how they incorporated the key themes and objectives of seminar's focus on diversity, difference, and voice within community. In other words, how did the seminar participants, teachers in k-12 classrooms, translate critical pedagogy into practice?

The Setting

Data collected were final projects from a Capstone Inquiry Seminar. The inquiry seminar was designed for participants to question their assumptions about the nature of community. This process, then, necessarily entailed an examination of the ways that difference, diversity, and voice operate within community. The classroom activities, readings, and gallery walks reveled in the complexities of community (Florio-Ruane, 2002). The seminar began with a series of critical visual literacy activities to engage each participant on a personal level. For example, we used provocative photographic images to ground discussions of equity and access and explore the intersection of art, image, and dialogue. We teased out the nuances of community and considered ways that community both includes and excludes (Phelan, 1994; Young, 1992). We visited three art exhibits that challenged viewers to re-consider community membership and categories of difference, such as race, sexuality, and gender identity. Teachers critically engaged with questions of voice and self/Other. Our exhibit visits were contextualized in the notion that art is participatory. These art works and exhibits were produced (by the artists, by the curators) to be interactive, to evoke a response, to engage in critical dialogue with the viewer. In the classroom we discussed, processed, and analyzed our gallery

visits. Interacting with art was a means to make our discussions and questioning more experiential.

Seminar readings were a mix of theoretical and practical discussions on the nature of community, difference and diversity within community, and the role of student voice in learning communities. We read case studies of what can be generally described as "artistic interventions" to create more inclusive environments. Cultivating student voice in the process of creating more inclusive environments was a focal point of the articles, and voice as it relates to authority was a prominent theme. A common thread throughout was to consider the ways that art challenges unexamined definitions of community, in particular, and more broadly, that art and the image provide a participatory method for finding and using one's voice within community. In sum, the semester-long seminar was experiential and designed to wrestle with research and theory and explore their productive possibilities for engaging in critical curriculum work in K-12 classrooms.

The seminar's two final assessment activities were to write a synthesis of seminar readings, and to design a curriculum project fed by our gallery visits, readings, and discussions. Desired outcomes of the curriculum assignment were classroom or school projects that translated conceptual and theoretical discussions of equity, community, and voice to K-12 classrooms populated with actual student bodies. While I never limited the parameters of my students' work to conform to my own vision, I strongly recommended curriculum projects similar in nature to our case study readings. In discussing the seminar readings we identified and discussed in great detail many, many ideas for applying and extending these projects into the classrooms of the seminar participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data throughout the seminar, including documenting student work and taking copious field notes from a participant observer standpoint (Merriam, 1998) of the gallery walks/talks and seminar meetings. The analysis in this paper focuses on content analysis of students' final curriculum products. While it may have been instructive to include the literature reviews in the data analysis, I limited the focus to the curriculum projects because I was most interested to examine how teachers translated the course experiences into practice. In addition, the literature reviews varied in style, approach, and writing ability, whereas the curriculum projects were documented in similar formats. Components of the curriculum projects contained the standard features of a curriculum unit, such as learner objectives, lesson plans, assessment information, and materials. The curriculum materials were supplemented by several required narrative pieces, including a narrative introduction, discussion of the project's broad objectives and a rationale for their selection, outline of the design process connecting it to seminar content, and a discussion of anticipated implementation supports and challenges. The narrative components were designed to serve as opportunities for participants to bridge the seminar content and the curriculum project.

The curriculum products were analyzed using a grounded theory approach of constant comparison within and across data sets (Huberman & Miles, 1994). I identified patterns in an initial coding which I then refined into the following analytical questions that incorporated my broader research questions. The data was then subjected to another round of coding around these four analytical questions:

- How are K-12 learners positioned in the curriculum projects?
- How do K-12 learners engage with/in their communities through the projects?
- How do the projects ask K-12 learners to engage in critical reflection on community, difference, and equity.
- How is "student voice" in the K-12 classroom conceptualized and cultivated though the projects?

Findings

Notwithstanding that my capacity to facilitate the activities and the identified objectives merit careful consideration and critique, I was largely disappointed in the outcomes. In this section I discuss the findings around the above-identified four analytical questions. When the data are viewed together to speak to the questions, they suggest that the teachers were unable to, unconvinced about the need for, or uninterested in translating the seminar's critical themes into the classroom curriculum. The discussion of the data that speak to each question is not seamless as there is overlap across the questions.

How Are the K-12 Learners Positioned within the Curriculum Documents?

Without exception the teachers designed their projects informed by constructivist learning theories. Learners were positioned firmly in the center of the curriculum in the sense that they would be asked to engage in self-directed and individually meaningful activities. The curriculum projects would ask students to create, share, and to self-assess their own progress. Students would be asked to make meaningful connections between the curricular content and their own lives. For example, students in a middle school social studies class would discuss key topics in a series of guided, threaded, web-based discussion boards. A fifth grade class would use primary source documents and photographs to compare and contrast their lives with children of the depression area. All teachers positioned learners as capable and thoughtful, and they designed a set of activities to support learners and to allow for incremental growth in knowledge and skills, as well as to account for varied learning needs. Activities across the final projects invited learners to create, to share of themselves, and to connect their work with others.

The curriculum projects were firmly rooted in constructivist learning philosophies and practices while also demonstrating clear, coherent learning objectives connected to state content standards. The need for coherent, purposeful ties to state content standards is an educational reality in the state. New assessment practices, such as the use of value-added measures to gauge student growth, have recently been made part of the statewide school accountability system. Teachers in this seminar demonstrated a relatively seamless integration allowing for teacher and learner creativity while addressing state content standards. This fact alone is encouraging in the face of teacher protests that testing and content standards narrow the curriculum (e.g., Wiles & Bondi, 2010) and relegate creative, student-centered schoolwork to the sidelines of teacher practices. Sherman (2009) highlights the past and current progressive trends in education and notes that they are often cast aside in favor of what historians of education (e.g., Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 85) call the "grammar of schooling." While teacher education programs may promote progressive pedagogical practices, the professional acculturation process tends to reinforce traditional, teacher-centric approaches to practice. In this case, the seminar participants did not design traditional, teacher-centric projects. The curriculum projects in this seminar are promising in their indication that strong state content standards, more focused assessment practices, and creative constructivist learning practices are not mutually exclusive.

How Will K-12 Learners Engage with/in Their Surrounding Communities?

The findings in respect to this question are less heartening, not only in terms of the extent to which learners would be asked to engage with/in their surrounding communities, but also the degree to which the complexities of community were incorporated in the products' designs. In addition, the findings suggest, not unsurprisingly, that I need to define "community" as an analytical code for exploring how the projects engaged questions of community. As would be expected, "community" appeared as a theme in all curriculum projects. Surprisingly, however, just six of 14 projects included community as a/the central theme in the project's design.

We may be able to glean some insight into the surprising results that just six of 14 projects revolved around community by considering the relatively simple question of whether the K-12 learners would engage with external communities. Of the six projects with community as a central theme just three projects invited students to learn from and with other communities. The remaining three projects with community as a central theme limited community engagement to the classroom community. However, little exploration of the nature of the classroom community was conducted. Attention to "community" in the remaining eight projects was limited to what I might characterize as a footnote, teacher desires for the project to build and sustain a cohesive classroom community. Expectations that this would take place were relegated to a minor objective that was expressed in the project

rationales, but that were supported by no specific attention to "community" or "classroom community" within the curriculum projects themselves.

In sum, just three projects incorporated a design corresponding with the course emphasis that asked students to engage with/in a larger community. Capsule descriptions of the three projects that engaged students with a broader or external community include:

> Project 1: Students explore definitions of "culture" in a multi-cultural, urban high school by conducting an inquiry project across the school, seeking out the perspectives and experiences from a broad spectrum of student sub-communities. An organizing concept of the project was that multiple communities exist within a broader school community.
>
> Project 2: High School students critically explore difference, community, and stereotypes through a photography project conducted at sites across the metropolitan community.
>
> Project 3: Middle school social studies students participate in a threaded web-based discussion to explore citizenship-related concepts and to dialogue with external "community experts."

Yet just Project 1 and 2, as will be explored in the following section, asked K-12 learners to explore the more complex nature and components of community and to consider the differences within community.

How are K-12 Learners Asked to Engage in Critical Reflection on Community, Difference, and Equity?

The data speaking to this question are the most disappointing given my pedagogical objectives of working with teachers to translate critical theory and research into praxis. The majority of projects, 12 of 14, asked K-12 students to engage in activities requiring reflection and analysis and to share their thoughts through discussion, writing, storytelling, or media formats. The role of critique, the critical edge of the seminar's meetings, experiences, and readings, and the connections across voice, reflection and dialogue, and action were included in only Projects 1 and 2.

In Project 1 small groups of high school students, members of the school's Cultural Diversity Club, would co-design an inquiry project exploring the question "What is culture?" at a diverse urban high school. The inquiry project, tied to the group's mission, would be a strength-based needs assessment to explore the diversity of cultures at the high school. In other words, students would focus on learning what their peers perceived to be the strengths of the school and its diversity. This orientation would impact how the teacher worked with students to develop interview questions and analyze the data. A focus on strengths would be a start point and frame subsequent identification and discussion of what the school and its students might be lacking or what actions they might take to address perceived

needs and enhance existing strengths. The teacher wanted to engage her high school students in a collaborative research project in which they would interact with, learn from, and share stories across the high school's diverse student body. Unique to the final curriculum projects was that Project 1's goals were informed by the principles of participatory action research, a "radical commitment to inquiry-inspired action" (Fine, 2009, p. 2) co-conducted by groups that are usually the *subjects* of research (e.g., McTaggart, 1991). The data collected would be put to use—exactly how would emerge from the students' experiences and data. The teacher anticipated that the experience would allow students a platform, a position of authority to articulate their understandings of the school's diverse student cultures and to contribute to the wellbeing of the school community. The project's rationale and the accompanying reflection included a brief discussion of the inherent difficulties of this task, including one of the prominent themes of the course, that at best, transparency is difficult within community and that such inquiries will uncover only partial understandings of the experiences of other cultures and communities (Ellsworth, 1988)

In Project 2 small groups of high school art students would document points or places of strength in different neighborhoods in a metropolitan area through photographs and story-gathering explorations. The teacher, as evidenced in her discussion of anticipated strengths and challenges, was mindful of the dangers of suburban students being too quick to assume and judge "Others." She witnessed this in action while piloting activities in her art classes before developing her capstone project, and she included discussion of its possible reoccurrence and how she might address this dynamic. For example, she planned to pilot whether she would lead students though an example at the start of the curriculum unit in which they explored cultural assumptions they may be making about the images vs. monitoring student progress and using real examples as they developed. She also planned to begin the curriculum unit with an activity asking students to unpack their own cultural histories and racial identities.

The teachers designing Project 1 and 2 reflected on the standpoint of their students, or the social, cultural, and ethnic positions students occupy. For example, both Project 1 and 2 included a view of students as diverse and demonstrated an awareness that different cultural groups, i.e., affluent, urban, rural, Black, North African, are not monolithic. Working with students to explore dynamics of difference within community were key ingredients. In addition, the designer of Project 2 included a focus on social class and the impact of students' relatively privileged background on the interpretations they might draw from their experiences. In sum, Project 1 and 2 incorporated a definition of community that reflected the course emphases. Attention was paid to difference within community and to the need for actively working out what it means to be a member/outsider of a community and the degree to which community membership is fluid. While Project 3 entailed engagement with an external community, the definition of "external community"

or "community expert" was not provided, nor explored in either the curriculum project rationale or in the activities that students would complete.

The remaining three of six projects that positioned community as a central theme limited its definition to the "classroom-as-a-community." Projects 4 and 5 engaged learners in visual literacy activities so that students might share their voices and themselves to contribute to a positive classroom community. Project 6 was a curriculum unit tied to the literacy goals of the start of the year that carried additional objectives of fostering a healthy classroom community. No significant links to external communities were included, nor would a thoughtful exploration of classroom/school communities take place. The remaining eight projects paid scant attention to any of the work we had done in respect to community or the critical themes developed during the course. Their connection to the seminar was through the application of some of the methods employed in the case study examples we had read, including digital storytelling, the use of images to provoke discussion and writing, performance, and storytelling. Whereas each example we had read and discussed entailed using art, media, and creativity to encourage critical thought and action, and disrupt categories of difference, none of these eight projects asked their intended learners to do the same. While the sample size is much too small to generalize, it may be important to further explore the possible connection between this outcome and the fact that each of these eight teachers taught 3rd through 6th grade in suburban or private schools.

How Is "Student Voice" in the K-12 Classroom Conceptualized and Cultivated though the Projects?

A definition of "voice" linked to agency was strongly articulated only in Project 1 and subtly included in Project 2. A more nuanced analysis of the data around this question yields similar findings as that of the previous question. The designers of Project 1 and 2 connected voice to difference in their emphasis on learning the thoughts, experiences, and stories of others. While Project 2 firmly incorporated activities in which students would be exercising and strengthening their voices, Project 2's focus was more closely akin to learning from the voices of others as opposed to learners also finding their own voices in the process. Student voice was somewhat of an important theme in the project of the middle school teacher. But student voice in Project 3 more closely matched the more traditional conceptualization of student voice, as in "listening to students," documented in the educational literature by Mitra (2004). Students would be asked to engage in dialogue with community representatives, and in this manner, hopefully, their voices would be heard by adults, by members of the broader community. Yet it is also possible that the adult "expert" would simply respond to posed questions rather than engage in dialogue.

Student voice was a component of the remaining projects, but in all cases the concept referred to a set of activities asking students to share their stories and interests related to the curricular content and articulate their learning process to

peers. This inclusion of student voice is consistent with constructivist learning theories. Yet this treatment of student voice was not consistent with the emphasis on "coming to voice" or developing a "critical voice" (Britzman, 1991) found in the seminar's readings, experiences, and discussions, and by this I mean a curriculum that scaffolds K-12 students' ability and authority to frame, construct, and articulate one's self through the process of exercising their voices.

Discussion

The seminar offered an opportunity to me as a teacher educator and researcher to better understand the black box of *how* to incorporate discourses of social justice into K-12 classrooms (Freedman, Bullock, & Duque, 2005). How, indeed, is theory translated into praxis? A seemingly positive outcome of the seminar is that all curriculum projects firmly positioned students in the center, i.e., learners (including the teacher) were conceptualized as active, collaborative, and creative. The K-12 students would be led through a process encouraging reflection, connections between the curriculum and their lives, and engagement in activities that spiraled application of knowledge and skills with greater levels of complexity. All projects positioned the learner within a community, albeit the articulation of ways the learner and community are connected was weak more than half the time.

If the answers to the first analytical question, "how are K-12 learners positioned in the curriculum project?" were the primary gauge of how well seminar objectives were achieved, I might conclude that the seminar was successful. However, I cannot attribute this outcome to the seminar as constructivist learning philosophies were present among all participants on day one. I might even surmise that the teacher-participants would not have sought out my seminar as their choice among many if constructive learning principles did not already undergird their teaching philosophies. While the data demonstrated that the teachers positioned their students as active, engaged, and thoughtful participants in their own learning process, three important points that speak to the seminar's pedagogical objectives can be pulled from the data analysis:

1. K-12 learners would have limited opportunities to engage with a community outside their classrooms.

2. K-12 learners would have very little opportunity to engage in critical reflection on issues related to community, difference, or equity. The projects demonstrated little impact of the attention paid to exploring nuanced definitions of "community" and benign definitions of community were pervasive in nearly all final curriculum products.

3. A refreshing view of, yet still simplistic in light of course content, "student voice" informed the curriculum projects.

The three themes from the analysis of data stand in contrast to the seminar experience.

First, only three of 14 projects asked learners to engage with or within external communities. While the implementation of community-based or community-involved projects is not without difficulties for teachers, community-based curriculum projects were the focus of the seminar. Our exploration of several models was accompanied by lively discussions on extensions into the participants' classrooms and possible strategies to resolve potential problems of location, transport or logistics, cost, time, etc. However, the course readings and experiences focusing on community-based curriculum projects did not translate into practice.

Second, a surprisingly low number of projects incorporated a treatment of community consistent with the seminar's emphasis on deconstructing community and examining the active role that learners can play in reading, naming, and changing a community (Freire, 1994). During the seminar the teacher-participants were intrigued and interested in our image-based activities and conversations. For many, critically exploring difference through race, gender, and sexuality was a very new experience. However, participants seemed receptive and dialogue flowed easily. Seminar conversations were generative in nature and yielded many ideas for practical applications. Yet, just two projects incorporated a treatment of community consistent with the seminar's focus on deconstructing community, including critical reflection on community, difference, and equity. The remaining 12 projects showed almost no evidence of the seminar's attention to problematizing commonsense definitions of community. In addition, the definition of "community" in the remaining 12 projects was the teacher's definition and students would not explore and articulate their own definitions of a classroom community or the communities to which they belong. In sum, participants ultimately extracted ideas from their seminar experiences to develop projects that fit their perceptions of a classroom-as-is (i.e., the classroom, its curriculum, processes, needs, and the (sub)communities contained within as perceived by the teachers) as opposed to conceptualizing a classroom-as-it-might-be. Importantly, the projects demonstrated little evidence of "translating" equity discourses into the school curriculum.

Finally, all projects asked learners to be creative, to express themselves, to make individual connections to the content and to articulate and share their thoughts. On some level we may be able to think of these conditions as "student voice" being welcomed in the classroom. I welcome the emphasis on making plenty of space within a classroom for students to talk about their learning, to give voice to their emergent understandings of the content, to share their experiences, etc. Indeed, student voices would be heard through the conduct of each of the 14 curriculum projects. However, there is an important distinction to be made here. It is tempting to presume that by virtue of students being able to use their voices they may "come to voice" (Britzman, 1991). However, this is unlikely. Indeed, this seminar provides an instructive example that speaks to this phenomenon—even with support

and careful design to emphasize developing student voice in the classroom, the concept of student voice was barely visible in the projects. I can see that I needed to provide even more support in this learning experience. Thus, it is unlikely to think that student voice would develop in the K-12 classrooms with no support as evidenced in the curriculum projects.

As a teacher educator I am torn in my reaction to this finding. On the one hand, I applaud the efforts to make more room for student voices to simply be heard. Perhaps this is the first step in the process by which diversity, difference, and indeed, dissension can be expressed within a community. A space in which voices are welcomed and cultivated is a pre-cursor for sharing tales of difference and ambiguity. Yet I am disappointed that the seminar attention to voice and power were largely not taken up in the final curriculum projects. This is surprising given that each and every reading, gallery walk and talk, and class discussion took up a critical exploration of difference, equity, and community in some way. Numerous examples of possible extensions were collectively explored in classroom discussions, yet nearly all of these connections disappeared from most of the final projects. Ideas for additional supports follow in the next section.

The seminar's disappointing results are surprising in that there was little incidence of the resistance to critical themes and questions to critical or multicultural themes that has been noted in the multi-cultural education literature (e.g., Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Whithead & Wittig, 2004). For example, in discussions and writings teachers engaged in critical questions about race, culture, and equity. In addition, silence was not a weapon used to resist or subvert dialogue as has been documented (e.g., Kumashiro, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996). Students were not silent in response to their own possible complicity in judging who might be a member of a community and who might be too different. Yet the reflection and dialogue did not translate into the curriculum projects.

While silence did not appear in the classroom, it may be useful to extend the concept of silence to consider that silences on critical questions of difference and equity appeared beyond the confines of pre-service and in-service university classrooms. We can consider the impact of silence to the very limited extent to which the projects allowed K-12 students to develop and use their own voices as an example of *silencing.* Wink (2005), describes the role of Silence, as a verb, in critical pedagogy as follows, "Silencing is usually a quiet and insidious process. Sometimes those who are being silenced know it, and sometimes they don't. Those who are doing the silencing rarely know it" (p. 58). Could the very limited attention paid to developing student voice be at least partially attributed to a limited understanding of the ways that teachers silence, intentionally or not, the voices of their students? Further study is needed to determine the extent to which teacher silence can be attributed to resistance to critical questions in the first place or to the difficulties or the limited support provided to teachers working to cultivate student voices.

It does not appear that I was able to successfully work with the teacher-partici-

pants to integrate critical questions of access and equity into their professional frames of references. Were such projects uncomfortable or too risky? Did a narrow, more literal view of the definition of "placing students at the center" prevail over a more critical conceptualization of developing student voice? Did teachers simply run out of time at the end of the course and follow the path of least resistance—designing a curriculum project that did not stray too far from their existing curriculum (Sherman, 2009)? Had I underestimated the very real effects of the day-to-day pressing needs of teachers, students, and schools, or what I refer to as the tyranny of the everyday? All of these questions are relevant. However, data analysis suggests at least two possible reasons for the disappointing results that warrant further consideration. First, while discussions and ideas were free-flowing in the shared space of the seminar meeting, it may have been difficult for the teacher-participants to reproduce the enthusiasm and energy of a collective conversation into the individual work completed by each teacher working alone. Second, relatedly, when students developed projects, away from collective space of seminar classroom, perhaps the pull of content standards and the weight of existing conceptualizations of the classroom community became too great in the power they exerted over the design of the curriculum project.

Conclusions and Implications

This study holds several implications for studying teacher professional development broadly and ways teachers resist or incorporate critical themes into their practice more specifically. At the broadest level, the case study may contribute to further broadening spaces for self-exploration of instructional practices for teacher educators. The scholarship of teaching and learning contributes to the broader pedagogical knowledge base while also directly impacting and enhancing the instructional practices of the professoriate. In this case, I explored the processes of translating critical theory into praxis by analyzing student outcomes in light of the seminar's pedagogical objectives. While the results were discouraging, the process of analyzing them yields a better understanding of possible strengths and weaknesses of my approach. I hope this discussion of my experiences generates ideas among readers for examining their own professional practices as teacher educators.

More specifically this study examined my efforts to translate critical theory into praxis. The seminar meetings and discussions were characterized by honest, engaged discussion of difference, equity, and the nuances of community. If the content of, interest in, and level of engagement during seminar discussions were the principal measures of success, and I would submit that these outcomes may be too often the principal measures of success in such contexts, then it would appear that critical theory, practice, and application *can* be juxtaposed in a graduate education seminar. It is a wonderful thing to have rich, generative conversations in a teacher education classroom, and I draw strength from the fact that we were able

to accomplish this. However, my objective was to influence practice, and a critical examination of student outcomes suggests that I need to adjust my methods and that further research is needed to more fully appreciate the variables of what it means to work with pre- or in-service teachers to translate critical pedagogy into praxis.

Next, the case study holds specific implications for instructional strategies and approaches that may support teachers in their efforts to critically examine community, difference, and student voice. I would repeat several aspects of the seminar's design and further strengthen them, including:

- The use of a spiraled approach to "teaching" the curriculum that juxtaposed critical theory, issues of professional practice, and applications. For example, image-based activities were prompts to explore personal and individual experiences with community and preceded the "art gallery walks and talks" challenging viewer definitions and understandings of community.

- Exploring community, difference, and equity through experiential activities, including art, image, or performance-based, may be promising ways to think differently about how these issues manifest in the classroom, as well as a way to juxtapose a consideration of the abstract with the concrete.

- Classroom discussions and readings were supported by discussion guides I designed asking participants to summarize key themes, compose individual reflections, and brainstorm possible applications or extensions into the classrooms.

All of the above were successful ingredients that further pushed our collective thinking to be more specific in translating experiences and reflection into classroom practices.

Recommendations for change or adaptation include asking participants for feedback on the reading and discussion guides. I estimate them to have been successful, based on the quality of the discussions, however, it would be helpful to explore participant perceptions directly to better understand the impact of the guides as instructional tools and how they could be more effectively utilized. Indeed, while I viewed them as a tool for making sense of the readings and brainstorming possible extensions, they may have limited participant thinking or contributed to so many possibilities being outlined that when it came time for the final assignment, participants reverted back to the comfort of their usual professional practices. The perceived value or impact by learners of any significant teaching tool should be explored. A second recommendation would be to build more steps into the final assignment. While the seminar participants engaged in many collective experiences, each teacher designed his or her own project largely in isolation. It may have been helpful to pair students up as "feedback buddies" or to have scheduled a session near the end during which students would present

their project-in-progress for formative feedback to lessen the impact of isolation in teacher planning and reflection.

Finally, the findings suggest additional nuances to conceptualizing resistance and silence within multicultural education, including (1) whether critical questions of inclusion and exclusion within community are perceived as too difficult for individual teachers to tackle in relative isolation in their classrooms, (2) the extent to which cultivating student voice, and then actually attending to what students have to say, may be perceived as threatening, and (3) the unique contours of teaching context, e.g., suburban, urban, primary, etc. on the process of translating critical pedagogy into praxis. Processes of exclusion, marginalization, and access are ever more nuanced in today's social, economic, and knowledge economies. It is important for educators to broaden our lens when we think of a "learner-centered classroom" to include ways to help K-12 learners find their voices. Voice is an important feature of community because of its link to power and authority, and I hope to further develop my ability to support teachers' efforts to critically examine student voice in their classrooms and to more critically explore, define, and create communities in their classrooms. Communities require hard work, and their likelihood of thriving is diminished without exploring how difference, equity, and voice operate within them.

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