

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue with Socially Diverse Undergraduate Teacher Candidates at a California State University

By Christina Chávez-Reyes

Introduction

Teachers' inability to address social difference perpetuates inequality and inequity in schools, given the link between teachers' effectiveness and their ability to recognize and adjust instruction to the diverse needs of students (Bergerson, 2008; Everhart & Vaughn, 2005; Song, 2006). According to Grant and Gillette (2006), "regardless of the geographic area where candidates end up teaching,¹ there is a moral mandate to prepare a diverse teaching corps of culturally relevant teachers"

Christina Chávez-Reyes is an associate professor of education and associate chair of the Liberal Studies Department in the College of Education and Integrative Studies at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

that will serve the purposes of public education and social justice (p. 293). Teacher education programs play a crucial role in these aims by providing "an intellectual framework for organizing their observations" that will provide "support to interpret what they see in schools in philosophical terms (Grant & Gillette, 2006, p. 295)...[as well as] build commitment and understanding across lines of ethnicity, gender, ability, socioeconomic status, language, and sexual orientation." (p. 297).

Post-baccalaureate credential and teacher education masters programs offer this intellectual framework

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

through multicultural education courses and social justice pedagogies and techniques that develop preservice candidates' awareness of one's social positions, others' social groups, and the relation between the two. These courses have had mixed success, as beginning teachers demonstrate unpreparedness to address the student diversity in the classroom (Amobi, 2007; Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002). Discussions and self-reflection about social difference in response to relevant scholarship and reflection on service-learning or community experience are the current trend (Chizhik, 2003; Farnsworth, 2010; Lake & Jones, 2008; Milner, 2006; Ryan & Callahan, 2002; Sleeter, 2004; Whitaker, McDonald & Markowitz, 2005). Few pedagogies or techniques, however, exist for the effective facilitation of these discussions (Briscoe, Arriazza, & Henze, 2009; Garcia & Hoelscher, 2008; Harris, 2003; Jakubowski, 2001; Okum, 2006; Singleton & Linton, 2006), and less is said about the process and expected outcomes of these discussions.

As a teacher educator of candidates in a liberal arts department, few resources exist that pedagogically direct how one develops teacher persona in light of the undergraduate intellectual and ethical development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Likewise, I had to manage these dialogues within a socially diverse student population (40% Latino, 35% White, 14% Asian American), contrary to the predominantly White classrooms that are studied. Faced with this educational context, I framed my facilitation using Critical Liberal Education (CLE) (Chávez-Reyes, 2010), which uses "the humanizing factor of both liberal education and critical pedagogy to create an environment where students can encounter, question, evaluate and reconsider the nature of our society...[by] teach[ing] about human societies and humanity (liberal education) to position the need for social justice as an ethical and socially responsible approach in an inclusive democracy (critical pedagogy)" (p. 302). The facilitation of discussions of difference grounded in CLE, what I call *critical social dialogue* (CSD), is the process of problem posing, facilitating personal stories through silence and multimodal assignments, and positioning them for students to re-examine and re-evaluate their understanding of systems of social difference, the beginnings of a multicultural and social justice intellectual frame for pre-service teachers.

Using data from an evaluation of an interdisciplinary educational foundations course, this article focuses on the process of CSD in a mixed race and ethnicity sample of undergraduate teacher candidates at a California state university. First, I discuss the literature on race talk in the college classroom, as the predominant social issue discussed and studied, interspersing relevant literature from teacher education research. Next, I describe the features and process of CSD followed by examples of CSD through teacher reflections on class activity and students' work. Finally, the implications for facilitating CSD in teacher education courses will be discussed.

Literature Review

Talk about Social Difference in the College Classroom: The Treacherous Ground of Race Talk

Intuitively, Americans know how treacherous it is to talk about social difference, especially around the topic of race. Discussing social difference contradicts our ideologies of meritocracy and democracy (Milner, 2010), and leaves us with the discomfort of contemplating and imagining the inequality and inequity that exists in our midst. Often with a primary focus on racial or ethnic difference, teaching and learning about race have been met with student resistance, guilt/shame, silence/silencing and backlash (Delpit, 1995; Heinze, 2008; LaDuke, 2009; Ochoa & Pineda, 2008) given the American cultural norm of colormutedness, "the purposeful silencing of race words" (Pollock, 2004).

Pollock (2004) claims we, culturally, have created discourse patterns that evade or deflect the discussion of race and racism, through the use of vocabulary or euphemisms to code racial meaning for ease of discussion, evasion or avoidance of race talk, silencing of others through pointing out the impropriety of race as a topic, and conflating terms of inequality with race. By extension, in my classroom, students have demonstrated what I call *socialmutedness*, silence about and evasion of social differences in general. When we talk about social class, immigrant status, or gender issues, students respond with silence and euphemisms to evade or soften the impact of the discussion, perhaps substantiating Davis (2006)'s claim that the lack of discussion and deliberation about the meaning and purpose of service, or social difference, in this case, is that we may "[secretly] cherish inequality" (p. 153).

Although college campuses have become more racially and ethnically diverse, and mission statements and learning goals stipulate intercultural or multicultural awareness, no university guidelines nor pedagogic resources exist for how to engage members of various social groups in learning about one another. Research in the college classrooms tend to identify types, strategies and features of talk (Glazier, 2003; Martin 2010; Sleeter, 2004; Wahl, Perez, Deegan, Sanchez & Applegate, 2000), approaches to instructor's facilitation of student talk (Briscoe, Arriazza, & Henze, 2009, Garcia & Hoelscher, 2008; Singleton & Linton 2006), with emphasis on how White students respond (Cardozo, 2006; Castagno, 2008) and with little attention to intercultural dynamics (Harris, 2003). Teacher education has lead the way on the teaching of multicultural and socially just education, utilizing open and deliberate dialogue on racial, ethnic, and social class difference as a major technique. While much of this research notes the challenges of and possible strategies for such dialogues, no specific pedagogy exists for how to design, facilitate and assess the process and/or outcomes of these dialogues (Wright & Tolan, 2009).

In conjunction with color-and socialmutedness, stifled discussions of race in college classrooms derive from at least two environmental conditions. Racial microaggressions and the notion of whiteness have had a debilitating effect on

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

race talk. Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera (2009a) explicate how racial microaggressions, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2009a, p. 273), caused students of color to withdraw from discussion. Racial microaggressions consisted of euphemisms (colormutedness) for negative stereotypes about “ascription of intelligence, ascription of foreign status, denial of racial reality, and assumption of criminality,” which caused strong feelings of anxiety and anger for participants (Sue et al., 2009a, p. 188). Further, socialmutedness creates the possibility for microaggressions of other social identities, such as class microaggressions (i.e., “The poor just don’t want to work.”), ethnic microaggressions (“That’s the way Hispanic culture is.”), and gender microaggressions (“Women really just want someone to take care of them.”).

Whiteness, the ascribed privilege that exempts Whites from discussion on race, creates the possibility for White professors and students to circumvent the deep effects of race on others and themselves. In two eight-grade classrooms over a year, Haviland (2008) claims in the classroom White educational discourse, “a constellation of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking in which White teachers gloss over issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo,” obfuscate deep deliberations on race despite participants’ strong intention to be critical (p. 41). By the same token, the political backlash to multicultural education and socially just education has raised the issue of the silencing of students with conservative perspectives, often associated with White Americans, who feel that the expression of meritocratic and conservative points of view would engender persecution from professors and students in the “liberal”² environment of university campuses (Issac, 2006; Wills, 2005). Microaggressions and Whiteness then make speaking openly and honestly about social differences in the classroom a deleterious endeavor for all.

The presence of color- and socialmutedness, microaggressions, White educational discourse, and the silencing of dominant and conservative perspectives in the college classroom characterize the treacherous ground discussions on social difference traverses. Under the objective of intellectual, moral and ethical development of undergraduate students, undertaking discussion of social difference in the classroom, a public space, has unrecognized personal and social consequences for students and professors. The norms of color and socialmutedness makes CSD a vulnerable act for students who are asked to disclose their personal lives and thinking about a topic never meant for discussion.

From this perspective, students who openly participate are, in so many words, “coming out,” similar to the “coming out” process of gays and lesbians, who assume a highly vulnerable position when they declare their homosexual identity publically to others. Coleman (1982) recommends gays and lesbians first tell those that will respond positively “because of the vulnerability of the self-concept...it is impor-

tant that positive responses be gained during the coming-out stage....Calculated risks should be taken” (Coleman, p. 474). Once enough positive responses are experienced “it makes it much easier to withstand a negative response or even the indirect negative responses from society” (p. 474). Since students have little or no knowledge as to whether the instructor or classmates’ responses will be positive or negative, speaking out can be perceived as a threat to students’ self-concepts.³ While the social and political consequences of coming out in dialogues about social difference are in no way equal to that of gays and lesbians, the threat to students’ self concept is very real.

How well trained are faculty to facilitate these difficult but important dialogues to develop students into effective workers and citizens in a socially diverse society? Research, primarily based on race talk, offers effective facilitation techniques. First and foremost, professors should prepare to deal with discussions directly to “legitimize” and normalize “the discussion on race” [and other social factors], “to validate participants’ feelings, [and] to accept a different racial reality from students” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 188). Faculty members need to be prepared for discussions by developing comfort in addressing race/racism (Singleton & Linton, 2006), developing strong introspection and awareness of one’s own social attitudes, increasing knowledge of literature on social factors, including whiteness, and preparing for interrogation of one’s own social identities (Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006). It is clear, then, that the responsibility to create effective dialogue falls squarely on the professor’s shoulders.

In the implementation of discussions on difference, professors should first create and maintain a safe classroom space (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera & Lin, 2009b), “[where] students are able to openly express their individuality, even if it differs dramatically from the norms set by the instructor, the profession, or other students” (Holley & Steiner, 2006), which can be done by establishing ground rules for discussion and interaction based on respect, courtesy and intellectual curiosity (Harris, 2003; Jakubowski, 2001). Instructors should use a direct method of managing discussion, which is critical and dialogic in nature, and engender a facilitation style that invites students as co-teachers (Friedman & Rosenberg, 2007; Jakubowski, 2001; Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006). Facilitation should utilize instructor and student personal experience (Bell, 2006; Friedman & Rosenberg, 2007) and professors should develop an individuated teaching persona (acting and interacting as a person and not an expert or superior) that is non-judgmental, encouraging, respectful, caring, and honest (Holley & Steiner, 2006; Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006).

While universities ask faculty to teach intercultural competence and civic engagement for a multicultural society and hold no specific expectations for the outcome, teacher education departments expect students and professors to engage in CSD but provide no training. The results of discussions on social difference in teacher education classes gravitate toward the same behavioral responses as race talk in college classrooms—avoidance, denial, silencing, chastisement, anxiety, anger,

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

and de-legitimization (Adair, 2008; Buchtel & Spies, 2001; Johnson, 2002). With only research-oriented training in doctoral preparation, many teacher educators are products of the same color- and socialmuted culture from which students come (Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010), thus lacking practical and cultivated experience to execute CSD safely and effectively.

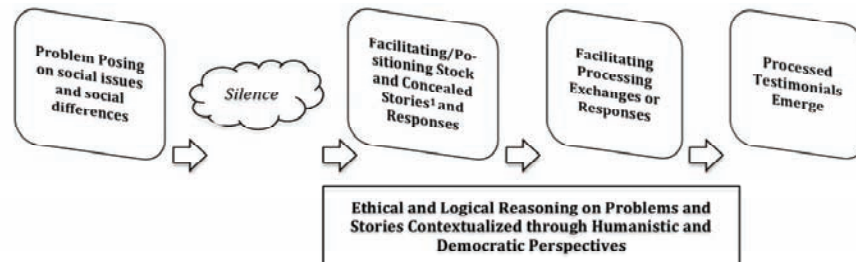
Critical Social Dialogue: Definition and Process

Critical social dialogue, then, is the name of deliberate engagement in public discourse about social difference to develop intercultural awareness, social understanding and ethical reasoning in a democracy. CSD makes the following assumptions: (1) most students will be unskilled about how to talk about social difference due to color- and socialmutedness; (2) students will be evasive, resistant, silent and silencing as reasonable reactions; (3) the instructor should have a reasonable amount of experience, introspection and skill at CSD to model and facilitate it; (4) the goal of the discussion is the development of awareness of students' own attitudes about social difference and the experiences of others, like and unlike them, to ethically reason about life in a socially diverse society. Figure 1 demonstrates how CSD is structured and implemented. The dialogue begins with the instructor posing a problem about social difference. Not surprisingly, the invitation to engage in CSD many times results in silence.

My journals noted three types of silence in CSD. The first type was accompanied by listlessness and blank stares, perhaps related to fatigue from hectic schedules or night classes. The second elicited downward gazes, averted eyes, furrowed brows, grimaces and wincing of discomfort, as if attempting to reconcile the real and the philosophical. The third generated confused looks, sometimes followed by requests for repeating or re-phrasing the question. The second and third types were predominant in CSD.

How then do instructors' move students past silence to enter the discussion? Schultz's (2009) notion of silence as a participation structure frames silence in

Figure 1
The Process of Critical Social Dialogue



Note: Story types adopted from Bell (2009).

CSD as a verbal request for information or participation and not solely as a lack of information or disengagement. According to Schultz, silence can signify resistance and power, avoidance, protection, a response to trauma and time for creativity and/or learning. Thus, teacher educators need to envision multiple meanings to silence in CSD. If CSD potentially threatens one's self-concept, silence protects the self. Having experienced mismanaged CSD, silence is a response to prevent further trauma. If confused by the request or uncertain as to how to reply, silence creates time (for creativity and learning) to generate a bearable and acceptable response in light of possible opposing forces. According to Schultz (2009), silence has sociocultural meaning, is a choice, is spatially and temporally situated, and has multiple forms and functions—not merely an act of resistance.

To deal with various silences in the classroom, Schultz recommends using multimodal pedagogy to allow students alternative ways to participate so that they may stay engaged in the learning process. In her work, multimodality storytelling was used—students told stories verbally, in writing, through photographs, and through music and sounds—to allow potentially silent students to participate. Multimodalities, according to Schultz, can give students a participatory presence, “ways that students become engaged with their peers and the content of school learning so that their ideas enter the public domain, giving them a presence in the classroom community” (p. 85). Using multimodal assignments extends CSD for students who choose silence so that they can develop a participatory presence in the discussion and stimulate their learning. Thus, one final feature of CSD is to provide alternative modes of expression (writing and other types of assignments) for students to negotiate an entry point into dialogues.

In class discussions, one brave student or I broke the silence⁴ by sharing our stories or thinking as others listened. These stories resembled the two types characterized by Bell (2009). Stock stories are “those told by the dominant [social] group to rationalize the status quo” and concealed stories are “hidden stories told from the perspective of [socially] dominated group” (pp. 33-34). In addition to these types of stories, students might also express points of view or positions that represent the same tone or intention as stock or concealed stories, which I called stock and concealed responses. Following students' responses, I used course terms and concepts to position them in relation to one another to illuminate the ethical concerns and complexities and logical inconsistencies, which was the core of the humanizing element of CSD. Discussions proceeded in this manner for several weeks, while students worked on CSD issues in other modalities (assignments and activities) in and outside classroom.

Eventually more students openly participated in discussion toward the middle of the term and processing exchanges emerged. Processing exchanges—verbal exchanges between students or between student(s) and me—resulted in new considerations, insights or positions on social differences. Later in the term, processed testimonials appeared in discussion and writing, the culmination of thinking and

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

deliberating on issues experienced through the term. Processed testimonials resemble Bell's (2006) emerging/transforming stories in that they were "new stories deliberately constructed...that offer ways to interrupt the status quo to work for change" (p. 37). While Bell's emerging/transforming stories are based on the deliberation of stock, concealed, and resistance stories, students engaged in CDS deliberated over discussions, course material, assignments, and service-learning experiences, which brought new insights about past experiences and beliefs that directed future intentions. Processed testimonials were the primary evidence that students had moved toward critical citizenship,⁵ an emerging intellectual frame for understanding the significance and ramifications of social difference in a democratic society.

Methods

Data

The data derive from an action research study that used mixed methods to evaluate three sections of *Foundations 2*, an upper division course which presents an overview of the purposes of schools in light of the multiple levels (national, state, local) of influence and of the interests of various parties (students, community teachers, politicians, private sector) to civically assess the effectiveness of public education. Over two consecutive 10-week quarters, two sections in spring 2008 and one in fall 2008, three forms of data were collected: pre- and post-surveys, teachers' journals, and students' written assignments. During the first week, the pre-survey asked students for demographic data (i.e., parents' level of education and occupation, high school, birthplace, social contacts) and assessed candidates' knowledge of course content. In the tenth week students completed the post-survey, which consisted of the same items to assess course content in addition to questions to evaluate course activities and material. The data used for this study includes only the demographic information for participants. Teacher journals were audio-recorded within 24 hours of each class session to record the verbal interaction, topics of discussions, and instructor's reaction to class activity and effectiveness of pedagogy. Digital files were stored and entries were transcribed by a research assistant during the summer of 2009, and reviewed by me for accuracy. Thematic analysis of journal entries was used to determine the patterns of students' and instructors' verbal responses in discussions.

Three reflective written assignments were collected during approximately the third, sixth, and ninth week, copied, and stored until the end of the term to prevent influence on students' grades. All three assignments were analyzed using thematic analysis to determine the patterns of responses for each assignment, then between assignments. The first assignment, a reflection of high school student poetry performances in *Echoes of Brown* (Fine, Roberts, & Torre, 2004), yielded considerably more disclosure than the other two. In combination with the multimedia stimulus, the prompt for this two-three page essay directly elicited participants' experience

(Can you identify with any of their experiences? Why or why not? Which of the descriptions surprised you?) and targeted a variety of social differences exemplified in the poems (inequality, Whiteness, racism, classism, ablism). In the same format as the previous, the second assignment (“What did you learn from the poverty/power module?”) elicited the fewest disclosures as most participants’ interpreted the prompt as a call for summarizing information—a more academic than personal response. The third assignment, a group of participants individually responding to a set of prompts as a closure to the course, had personally directed prompts also (Something I learned in more depth in the class that I already knew was...; One lesson I will carry with me beyond the class is...) which asked participants to expound on their entire learning experience, and amounted to an average of one paragraph for each participant.

Participants

In the spring, data were collected from a total of 48 students from two sections, and in fall, from 28 students in a single section. After the elimination of participants for missing data and non-teaching career path, the final sample was 43—41 females and two males. The sample consisted of 47% (21) seniors and 51% (23) juniors. There was also one student who was a sophomore. Racially and ethnically, 45% (19) of the students identified as Hispanic, 30% (13) as White, 14% (6) as biracial,⁶ 2% (1) as Asian American, and 7% (3) as African American. Students between the ages of 22 to 25 comprised 53% (23) of the sample, 18-to-21-year-olds comprised 40% (17), and 31+ comprised 7% (3).

Missing from studies on teacher candidates is a description of their social networks and contact with members of various social groups as a backdrop to their social attitudes. The pre-survey included this question to measure self-reported social affiliations: “Which social groups have you had considerable contact with (saw or interacted on a daily basis)?” In the overall sample, participants rated the most contact with Hispanics (84%) and Asians (63%), and moderate contact with African Americans (51%) and European Americans (42%). The lowest amount of contact occurred with Native Americans (12%). Forty percent (17) of participants claimed they had daily contact or interaction with immigrants, while 56% (24) had daily contact and interaction with low-income individuals. These assessments suggest that participants perceived having multicultural and socially diverse interactions, a point corroborated by students’ comments in class.⁷ However, the low percentages of contact with immigrants, low-income individuals, and Whites suggest a limitation to a cross section of social contact.

To determine contact within and between social groups, Table 1 shows the disaggregation of social contact by racial group to depict if there were group differences. In the table all groups acknowledged the most contact with the largest racial/ethnic groups in California, Hispanics and Whites, and little to no contact with the smallest, Native Americans. One interesting finding is the amount of contact

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

with one's own racial/ethnic group. All groups of color (Hispanics 95%, African Americans 66%, Asian Americans, 100%) and biracial individuals (50%-66%) had moderate to high contact with their own groups. Whites, on the other hand, have the lowest contact (46%) with other Whites, indicated in Table 1.

This circumstance might be related to White privilege: Whites, who do not identify as a racial group, underestimate contact with other Whites, the unmarked social group. Other racial/ethnic groups' contact with Whites (50% or more) attests to the presence of Whites in the everyday lives of participants. It is not clear why this level of contact is not represented in White participants reported daily contact. Another interesting pattern is that Hispanic (68%) and African American (100%) participants have the highest contact with low-income individuals, which correlates with the high rates of poverty for these groups. Finally, Hispanic (37%), African American (66%), and bi-racial (50%) participants have the highest contact with immigrants, supported by the finding that immigrants tend to settle in ethnic enclaves. Participants' reports of daily social contact with varying groups implies that they have at least exposure to socially diverse populations but less is known about the depth of that contact and whether it has prepared them for CSD.

Research Questions

Given the expectation for teacher educators and teacher candidates to engage in CSD, I wanted to know about three aspects of the discussions on social differ-

Table 1
Participants' Self-reported Contact with Social Groups by Racial/Ethnic Group

<i>Race/ Ethnicity of Participants</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Euro- American</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Asian American</i>	<i>Native American</i>	<i>Low- income</i>	<i>Immigrants</i>
Hispanic (n = 19)	18	10	9	11	3	13	7
Euro- Americans (n = 13)	11	6	4	7	0	3	4
African Americans (n = 3)	2	2	2	2	0	3	2
Asian Americans (n = 2)	1	1	0	2	0	0	1
Bi-racial (n = 6)	4	3	0	4	0	2	1

ence in *Foundations 2*: (1) How did students respond to the invitation to engage in CSD? (2) What was the process of CSD? (3) What was the student outcome of CSD?

Results

After the Silence: Sharing Concealed and Stock Stories

As indicated in Figure 1, the initial stages of CSD were problem posing of social difference issues followed by silence. When a student or I broke the silence, our stories tended to focus predominantly on race (students = 20; professor = 4), social class (students = 18; professor = 6), or, in smaller numbers, immigrant status (students = 3; professor = 1) and English language learner status (students = 5). The majority of these stories were concealed stories as members disclosed their individual or familial experiences that presented new information for others.

Concealed stories combined with the ethical and logical positioning of stories and responses humanized the social positions of dominant and dominated group experiences on various social issues. One example of a concealed racial story happened in the spring term on the day of the Whiteness guest speaker. I said the word “Whiteness” to introduce the topic and a White female student, Lina, appeared shocked. I playfully acknowledged her reaction, when she said:

Well yeah...because you're talking about something that I don't like to talk about, that brings me shame, because I know I have people in my family who are like that, who come up to me, and when I'm dating someone who isn't White, they will give me a lecture about how maybe “that's not the thing you want to do.”

Lina's story revealed to others that Whiteness is a hidden part of her everyday life, too. Sharing her concealed story revealed that Whites are aware of Whiteness, even if they choose not to acknowledge it, and that there are some Whites that do acknowledge their privilege. Contrary to Bell's definition of concealed stories happening with only dominated individuals, concealed stories told by dominant group members, such as Lina's, allowed insight into their racial identity in relation to others and provided counterexamples to classmates of color that the behavior of Whites is not uniform.

When I told concealed stories, I tended to punctuate definitions or explanations of concepts, which exposed the hidden life of a professor. In spring 2008, at the beginning of the term, an incident arose questioning the legitimacy of talking about race and ethnicity. After I explained the difference between the terms, a student expressed that she still did not see the difference between the two and felt that focusing on them was a reason why Americans cannot have pride in their nationality. I shared my own experience as an American person of color:

Race matters in my life, because when I go abroad, people don't think I'm an American. When I lived in Japan, the Japanese I met thought I was any other

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

nationality besides American. Whereas, my friend who was White, immediately got recognized as American, and was attended to in ways that I never received.

Although met with silence, my example revealed how racial classification has wider repercussions that extend beyond our borders. My stories made me human, an individual with unique, and sometimes similar, experiences, open to inquiry and evaluation.

On the topic of social class, participants shared both privileged and disadvantaged concealed stories, which reified the possibility of “others” as human. During the discussion of social and cultural capital in parent participation, some students revealed their class privilege, sharing stories of private schools or high achieving public schools “with everything [they] needed” to succeed. They talked of active, sometimes overly active parents, who made sure they “did well in school.” They told these stories as inquiries into the differences between their experiences and those characterized by social research and those of teen parents. Only a small group of students shared concealed stories about economic disadvantage, in writing only. Betsy claimed that she “got put in the sorting machine because [she] was part of a working poor family.” Nicole Trudeau, a non-traditional student, wrote: “When I think of poverty, I think of my family. My mom still does not own [her] home. She is back in school and her husband works at a factory job.” Finally, Elena Soto wrote: “I remember my childhood school, when the teacher was absent we had to stand outside the classroom and do nothing but wait till the bell rang...The school did not have money to pay for a substitute.”

In regards to immigrant status and English language learner (ELL) experience, silence prevailed from dominant groups, but some former English language learners braved the possible criticism and spoke about their experience. On the topic of tracking, sorting, and testing as contributing factors to inequality of opportunity, in discussion, two students raised that tests sorted ELLs unfairly, insisting that taking tests in students’ native language would give a “clearer picture of their ‘intelligence.’” Katherine Gonzalez declared her support for the position by sharing her personal story in class:

I speak English. My Spanish doesn’t necessarily interfere with how well I understand English. But somehow I was tracked into the sort of ESL program, and that it took a teacher to sort of say, to target me and say, “Hey, you’re kind of smart,” and sort of handpicked me and put me into another track, and that teacher kind of saved me.

Her account incited another male former ELL student to share his tale with being placed in a higher track by teacher selection, which put him “on the road to college.” Katherine’s story legitimized and illuminated the discussion of ELL experience, which is often referred to and discussed without direct experience. Her revelation helped monolingual English-speaking students, who remained largely silent, understand the connection between language, public education and equality of opportunity.

Stock stories, the second story type that emerged in discussion and writing, were the least expressed and revolved around the issues of meritocracy—every individual has equal chances to succeed by their own merits. Although Bell (2006) dichotomizes stock stories and concealed stories, the former told by dominant group members and the latter by dominated group members, stock stories were expressed by dominant and dominated group members. In the spring section, two White women expressed meritocratic perspectives sparsely throughout the quarter, neither of which chose to participate in the study. One woman maintained these perspectives through the term, while the other expressed a realization that the “system was not fair.” These few examples suggest that dominant or conservative members during this study may not have felt comfortable or safe juxtaposing their stock stories with the concealed stories of others.

The meritocratic stock stories by dominated students occurred in the fall on the topic of equality of opportunity. A Vietnamese non-traditional student, who chose not to participate in the study, spoke for several minutes telling her family’s story about how coming to the U.S. as political refugees elevated their social status. Another stock story, told by one of two African American women in the study, claimed that urban families “do not care about their kids,” which will be discussed in detail in the next section. In a socially diverse classroom, stories and perspectives that emerged in CSD reflected the actual range of individual differences and social experience, neither monolithic nor dichotomous, but most certainly complex.

The Next Stage of CSD: Processing Exchanges and Responses

Effective CSD, dialectal dialogue about social difference, positions stock and concealed stories/perspectives in relation one another to raise ethical consideration about life in a socially diverse democratic society. The end goal is individual—intercultural awareness, awareness of social perspectives and attitudes of self and other, and a notion of how these types of awareness inform one’s civic engagement. Through deliberation and reflection on personal experience, classmates’ and teen parents’ stories, and course materials, activities and discussions, students examined their understanding of equity and equality in public education and society.

Processing exchanges emerged in the next stage of CSD. One example of a processing exchange, which also included a stock story, occurred between a student and me in the fall. One session we discussed family involvement and schooling and differences by race/ethnicity and social class. I asked what resources middle-class families have to help children, and one student replied, “Credit.” Citing academic research, I gave examples of how middle-class educational capital privileges those families over others without such resources. I stated that the lack of resources often tends to be viewed as a lack of parent concern for children’s education. Then, Zora Benoit, a female African American, replied,

I live in Los Angeles. And I know that people there don’t care about their kids. They send them to school and then to an early-morning activity and then after-

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

school activity so that they don't have to take care of them. Their welfare moms and they just don't want to take care of their children.

I paused to think about how to reply, perhaps momentarily shocked that it came from a person of color. I finally retorted: "As a social scientist, I cannot accept my personal observations as fully valid because I know scientifically that race and class correlate with poor academic performance." Zora continued to exclaim that poor urban families "had a choice... If they wanted, they could work at it." The class is listening intently to our conversation, waiting for my response. This exchange followed:

Chavez-Reyes: There are poor Whites in Appalachia that have similar levels of poverty.

Zora: But that's not the same. It is harder for a Black person.

I recalled that I initially wanted to address her logical inconsistencies—"either race matters or it doesn't; you can't have it both ways." Instead, I paused and constructed a response that focused on the broader issue of human experience and our shared sense of humanity to diffuse the need to argue that one factor, race or class, is more important than another. Coupled with my individuated self and exhibition of doubt in my own expertise, I replied:

But I do not know what it like to live in those communities and what the effect is on human beings, especially when I know that those parents, and their parents, and their parents' parents have lived in poverty over generations.

Zora looked at me, wide-eyed then nodded in agreement. Zora said little for the remainder of class. When she left, she said, "Thank you," in a curt, but amiable tone. This processing exchange with me helped Zora see past the stalemated cultural discourse of difference, where groups jockey for recognition of the hardships and discrimination they have suffered in social institutions. Instead, juxtaposing what seemed to her disparate populations (between herself and other inner city residents, then between poor Whites and Blacks) presented a more powerful perspective of the extreme human toll generations of poverty has had on communities—regardless of race—something Zora, who lived in one, could not deny.

A second processing exchange happened in the spring term when a few participants expressed skepticism that their service could counteract teen parents' low amounts of social, financial and cultural capital to elevate their lives and the lives of their children. I tried to quell students' worries by telling them that their service is no less valuable because they may not get their expected outcomes instantaneously; still, students remained silent, faces and body language expressing uncertainty and disbelief. Then, Kathy Hawkins, a White female, reveals her personal affiliation with teen mothers:

You know, I just wanted to say I know a number of girls like these girls, and from

my experience it seems...you don't know what can happen, you don't know that these girls aren't going home and talking about you and talking about this information, and that in a year's time, they can say to themselves and to others, I met someone who went to college once and gave me information.

There was silence after her comment; one of the skeptical students nodded her head and gazed at Kathy from across the room in confirmation.

The Outcome of CSD: Processed Testimonials

Processed testimonials were the learning outcome of CSD. When students articulated new considerations and understandings on social difference and linked them to future intentions involving fairer and more equal social interactions, the process of CSD had arrived at its intended purpose. In discussion and written assignments towards the end of term, students were better able to express the difference between their initial perceptions and beliefs about social difference compared to their new insights. Perhaps the most powerful example of the outcome of CSD was Thomas Driscoll's response in his group's silent dialogue at the end of the fall term. There, he shared his learning process with three other classmates in response to the prompt, "Something I learned that I did not already know is..."

A lesson I learned was that I need to understand that not everyone has the same opportunity as I do. From the class I realized I was the epitome of "whiteness." I figured that anyone who was struggling or didn't have what I had was just a slacker. I never realized all the issues those of color or those with low income have to deal with on a daily basis. I have a new understanding of those around me and possible reasons for them being behind or less fortunate.

The point to Thomas' responses is not that he came to a comprehensive reasoning for advocating for equal and socially-just education but instead took an authentic, reasonable, and meaningful step in that direction. Expecting students in a 10-week term to arrive at critical citizenship is unreasonable in that all undergraduates have different rates of intellectual, moral, and ethical development. For Thomas the realization of his White privilege and the way that it has blinded him to the circumstances of those "less fortunate" is a worthy first step toward critical citizenship. I only noted in my journals that Thomas spoke once in class. CSD, by encouraging one to be an active listener in dialogues and to partake in multimodal extensions, made it possible for him to reflect and process his experience to a more sophisticated understanding of social difference.

While participants continued to struggle with color- and socialmutedness, using euphemisms or neutral labels in place of racial or other specific terms of social difference still occurred frequently ("that's not the thing to do [date people who are not White]," "we had everything we needed," "the sort of ESL [program]," "people there [in Los Angeles]," "welfare moms," "girls like these girls," and "slackers"). It was evident that the course materials and activities and engaging in CSD led them

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

to reconsider the meaning of past experiences and current perceptions in light of the tensions between the ideal and realistic goals and outcomes of public education in a democratic society.

Discussion

Critical social dialogue in the undergraduate experience develops a knowledge and disposition on which multicultural and socially just pedagogy can be built. From a multicultural education perspective, CSD uses cross-cutting groups to improve intergroup relations, teaches students about stereotyping on racial and ethnic groups, teaches about the humanity that connects all social groups, teaches social skills to “interact effectively” with students from other groups, and creates opportunities to learn about social others in environments with reduced fear and anxiety (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, & Nieto, 2001). It also develops what Milner (2010) calls *conceptual repertoires of diversity*, such as the damaging effects of colorblindness, cultural/racial conflicts, the myth of meritocracy, deficit thinking, and holding low expectations. CSD, particularly in a socially diverse setting, is a powerful and potent technique to nurture positive learning and growth that develops undergraduate teacher candidates’ schema, or what Gillette and Grant (2006) call an intellectual framework for social understanding and communication as both citizens and educators in a multicultural democracy.

Implementing CSD is not without its challenges. First, for teacher educators, particularly challenging is the capacity to create classrooms as “third spaces,” separate from the color- and socialmutedness of general society and modified from the traditional classroom. In these spaces, professors have to create an environment where students and professor can develop their ability at CSD in a safe, individuated, and intellectual learning community (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995) within the constraints of academic calendars and classroom formats. As has been noted elsewhere, there are institutional impediments to faculty doing CSD well. Institutional structures that impede the need and incentive for faculty development of these skills will have to be negotiated given the power differential between the university and departments in the creation and approval of courses, the potential tension-filled discussion on race relations or social differences with colleagues who devalue it over other curricular and academic charges (Wahl, Perez, Deegan, Sanchez & Applegate, 2000), and the ominous effect from negative “backlash” on student evaluations of faculty members’ retention and promotion (Cardozo, 2006, p. 170).

Nevertheless, to do CSD well, teacher educators need to have a strong foundation in the literature of various social groups, intense introspection about and awareness of one’s relation to those groups (Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; Gordon 2005), knowledge of intercultural and interracial communication, and modification to the traditional dynamics of teaching and learning. Educators

must use silence instead of avoiding it, de-privilege Whiteness instead of referring to it (Adair, 2008), legitimize “other” social realities instead of minimizing them, and allow students to teach instead of expecting them to solely learn. Effective CSD creates a complex, challenging, yet nurturing teaching and learning environment, where teacher and candidates invest in talking, listening and thinking to ensuring social justice in a democracy.

A second challenge is creating that safe space that allows dominant and dominated students to equally share their perspectives and experiences. While the lack of conservative perspectives in this sample of students might support the criticism that “liberal” (in the political sense) college classrooms suppress the expression of these perspectives, the fact that some White students, both those that chose not to participate in the study and those that did, expressed their stories of Whiteness and beliefs in meritocracy demonstrates that CSD does allow them to speak out. The issue is not necessarily that these perspectives are suppressed in CSD but rather whether students individually calculate speaking out as a risk worth taking. This decision is out of the control of the instructor but making sure that multiple perspectives are represented in the curriculum might encourage students to feel their perspectives are valued.

CSD, then, is no easy matter. Initiatives for teacher candidates to engage in such dialogue are insufficient without deliberate and careful attention to the real stakes and consequences of that engagement. However, beginning CSD in the undergraduate experience establishes the intellectual framework for multiculturalism, social justice, and democratic life that can be further developed in teacher preparation programs. The ethical and logical deliberations from a humanistic perspective about social difference nurture a deeper reasoning of the need to address social diversity issues in public education and society at large. As a beginning foundation to being a multicultural and socially-just educator, CSD organically facilitates teacher candidates’ reflections on their experience and recasts them into a broader sense of humanity to understand the differences between us to sustain democracy for all.

Notes

¹ The assumption often has been that only urban teachers, and not suburban teachers, need to develop culturally responsive teaching to contend with high concentrations of students of color and in poverty. However, Fry (2009) claims that 99% of the 3.4 million new students in suburban areas are Black, Latino, and Asian students, the former two groups having high percentages of low-income students.

² The use of the term liberal here is its political definition as opposition to the conservative political agenda, and not the historical definition from the liberal education tradition.

³ In this study, participants had a fair amount of familiarity with one another having taken classes together over a few years. Second, some had taken previous courses with me. Lastly, the service-learning component generated a degree of camaraderie among students that did not exist in other classes I taught without service learning, what one student called “a learning community.”

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

⁴ I often used long silences after posing a question to incite discussion and to give students the opportunity to “calculate the risks” of speaking out. Long silences often resulted in students, finding the silence uncomfortable, eventually speaking up or asking for a repetition of the question, recasting the problem for further processing.

⁵ Critical citizenship is the expected outcome for Critical Liberal Education, for citizens to have an analytical lens that understands issues and problems through power relations, political knowledge of social structures and systems, and achievement of democratic ideals which underline their civic and professional engagement.

⁶ The item for race/ethnicity was open ended. Responses were grouped by similarity of term: Mexican, Hispanic, Caucasian, White. When students identified by two racial/ethnic groups they were labeled as biracial.

⁷ Students often espoused no need to discuss racial and ethnic differences because “they had friends from other racial and ethnic groups” and/or “the classroom/campus student composition demonstrated the end of racism.”

References

- Adair, J. (2008). White pre-service teachers and “deprivileged spaces.” *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 189-206.
- Amobi, F.A. (2007). The message or the messenger: Reflection on the volatility of evoking novice teachers' courageous conversations on race. *Multicultural Education*, 14(3), 2-7.
- Banks, J. A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W. D., Irvine, J. J., & Nieto, S. (2001). Diversity within unity: Essential principles for teaching and learning in a multicultural society. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(3), 196-203.
- Bell, L. A. (2009). Learning through story types about race and racism. In K. Skubikowski, C. Wright, R. Graf, & J. Alvarez (Eds.), *Social justice education: Inviting faculty to transform their institutions* (pp. 26-41). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Bergerson, B. S. (2008). Enacting a culturally responsive curriculum in a novice teacher's classroom: Encountering disequilibrium. *Urban Education*, 43(1), 4-28.
- Briscoe, F., Arriaza, G., & Henze, R. C. (2009). *The power of talk: How words can change our lives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Buchtel, A., & Spies, P. (2001). The pain and lessons of constructing and becoming the “other.” *The Teacher Educator*, 37(2), 77-90.
- Cardozo, K. M. (2006). When history hurts: Racial identity development in an American Studies classroom. *American Studies*, 47(3/4), 167-192.
- Castagno, A. E. (2008). “I don't want to hear that!”: Legitimizing Whiteness through silence in schools. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 39(3), 314-333.
- Chávez-Reyes, C. (2010). Critical Liberal Education: An undergraduate pedagogy for teacher candidates in socially diverse university settings. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(3), 297-311.
- Chizhik, E. W. (2003). Reflecting on the challenges of preparing suburban teachers for urban schools. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(4), 443-461.
- Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 25, 469-482.
- Davis, A. (2006). What we don't talk about when we don't talk about service. In A. Davis & E. Lynn (Eds.), *The civically engaged reader: A diverse collection of short provocative readings for civic activity* (pp. 148-154). Chicago: The Great Books Foundation.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York:

- New Press.
- Everhart, B., & Vaughn, M. (2005). A comparison of teaching patterns of student teachers and experienced teachers in three distinct settings: Implications for preparing teachers for all settings. *Education Studies, 126*(2), 221-239.
- Farnsworth, V. (2010). Conceptualizing identity, learning and social justice in community based learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(7), 1481-1489.
- Fine, M., Roberts, R. A., & M. E. Torre. (2004). *Echoes of Brown: Youth documenting and performing the legacy of Brown V. Board of Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Friedman, K., & Rosenberg, K. (2007). Performing identities in the classroom: Teaching Jewish Women's Studies. *Teaching Sociology, 35*(4), 315-333.
- Galman, S., Pica-Smith, C., & Rosenberger, C. (2010). Aggressive and tender navigations: Teacher educators confront Whiteness in their practice. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(3), 225-236.
- Garcia, J. (2008). *Managing diversity flashpoints in higher education*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Glazier, J. A. (2003). Moving closer to speaking the unspeakable: White teachers talking about race. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 30*(1), 73-94.
- Gordon, J. (2005). Inadvertent complicity: Colorblindness in teacher education. *Education Studies, 38*(2), 135-153.
- Grant, C., & Gillette, M. (2006). A candid talk to teacher educators about effectively preparing teachers who can teach everyone's children. *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*(3), 292-299.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., & Tejeda, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space *Mind, Culture and Activity, 6*(4), 286-303.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Rymes, B., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript, and underlife in the classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*(3), 445-471.
- Harris, T. M. (2003). Impacting student perceptions of and attitudes toward race in the interracial communication course. *Communication Education, 52*(3/4), 311-317.
- Haviland, V. S. (2008). "Things get glossed over": Rearticulating the silencing power of Whiteness in education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 59*(1), 40-54.
- Heinze, P. (2008). Let's talk about race, baby: How a White professor teaches White students about White privilege & racism. *Multicultural Education, 16*(1), 2-11.
- Holley, L. C., & Steiner, S. (2005). Safe space: Student perspectives on classroom environment. *Journal of Social Work, 41*(1), 49-64.
- Issac, D. (2006). Brainwashing 101. *The American Enterprise, 17*(1), 8-9.
- Jakubowski, L. M. (2001). Teaching uncomfortable topics: An action-oriented strategy for addressing racism and related forms of difference. *Teaching Sociology, 29*(1), 62-79.
- Johnson, L. (2002). "My eyes have been opened": White teachers and racial awareness. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(2), 153-167.
- LaDuke, A. E. (2009). Resistant and renegotiation: Preservice teacher interactions with and reaction to multicultural education course content. *Multicultural Education, 16*(3), 37-44.
- Lake, V. E., & Jones, I. (2008). Service-learning in early childhood teacher education: Using service to put meaning back into learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(8), 21-46-2156.
- Martin, K. J. (2010). Student attitudes and the learning of race, culture and politics. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(3), 530-539.
- Mastrilli, T., & Sardo-Brown, B. (2002). Novice teachers' cases: A vehicle for reflective
-

Engaging in Critical Social Dialogue

- practice. *Education*, 123(1), 56-62.
- Mills, C., & Ballantyne, J. (2010). Pre-service teachers' dispositions towards diversity: Arguing for a developmental hierarchy of change. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(3), 447-454.
- Milner, H. R. (2006). Preservice teachers' learning about cultural and racial diversity: Implications for urban education. *Urban Education*, 41(4), 343-375.
- Mitchell, R., & Rosiek, J. (2006). Professor as embodied racial signifier: A case study of the significance of race in a university classroom. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 28(3/4), 396-409.
- Ochoa, G., & Pineda, D. (2008). Deconstructing power, privilege, and silence in the classroom. *Radical History Review*, 102, 45-62.
- Okun, T. (2010). *The emperor has no clothes: Teaching about race and racism to people who do not want to know*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pollock, M. (2004). *Colormute: Race talk dilemmas in an American school*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ryan, L. B., & Callahan, H. (2002). Making connections: Service learning competencies and beginning teachers standards. *The Teacher Educator*, 38(2), 126-140.
- Schultz, K. (2009). *Rethinking classroom participation: Listening to silent voices*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Sleeter, C., Torres, M. N., & Laughlin, P. (2004). Scaffolding conscientization through inquiry in teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(1), 81-96.
- Song, K. H. (2006). Urban teachers' beliefs on teaching, learning, and students: A pilot study in the United States of America. *Education and Urban Society*, 38(4), 481-499.
- Sue, D. W., Lin, A. I., Torino, G. C., Capodilupo, C. M., & Rivera, D. P. (2009a). Racial microaggressions and difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15(2), 183-190.
- Sue, D. W., Torino, G. C., Capodilupo, C., Rivera, D. P., & Lin, A. I. (2009b). How White faculty perceive and react to difficult dialogues on race. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37(8), 1090-1115.
- Wahl, A., Perez, E. T., Deegan, M. J., Sanchez, T. W., & Applegate, C. (2000). The controversial classroom: Institutional resources and pedagogical strategies for a race relations course. *Teaching Sociology*, 28(4), 316-332.
- Whittaker, A., McDonald, M., & Markowitz, N. (2005). Learning together what we do not know: The pedagogy of multicultural foundations. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(3), 123-138.
- Wills, G. F. (2005). Ed school vs. education. *Newsweek*, January 16.
- Wright, A. N., & Tolan, J. (2009). Prejudice reduction through shared adventure: A qualitative outcome assessment of multicultural education class. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 32(2), 137-154.