



SELECTED SCHOLARSHIP ON TEACHING AND LEARNING at ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
Volume 2 • 2014

Engaging Critical Race Theory and Culturally Relevant Teaching: Preparing White Teacher Candidates to Teach in Urban Environments

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the Club's multipurpose room. BGCFAE is in its fifth year of existence. Dr. Briggs serves on the Bloomington-Normal Boys and Girls Club Board of Directors and assists in developing programming for the Club.

Within a one-year mixed method action research study, White senior art education teacher candidates (TCs) in an Art for Diverse Populations class reflected on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and culturally relevant teaching, taught culturally relevant lessons at a local Boys and Girls Club, and attended field experiences in urban schools. All TCs but one previously took classes that addressed CRT and previously attended one or more urban field experiences. Most TCs intellectually understood the effects of racism and white privilege and were not afraid to reflect on these subjects. TCs recognized and valued culturally relevant teaching. TCs indicated that urban field experiences and course materials helped them to think in a new way. Discussion of CRT, introduction to culturally relevant teaching, and an urban field experience may be linked to this positive change in results.

Keywords: Student engagement, student resistance, immediacy, empathy

The Center for American Progress reports students of color make up 40% of our public school population; this number will increase to over 50% in the next ten years. Teachers of color make up 17% of the teaching force (Boser, 2011). Research states that students of color do better on a variety of academic outcomes when taught by teachers of color who act as role models and who understand matters of diversity (Berlack, 2009; Boser, 2011). Yet, White teachers with a healthy sense of White identity who abandon individual racism and recognize and oppose institutional and cultural racism may be equally effective (Banks, 1995; Helms, 1990; McIntyre, 1997; Sampson & Wade, 2011; Tatum, 1997; Ullucci, 2011). Engaging Critical Race Theory (CRT), participating in self-reflection and dialogue, embracing culturally

relevant teaching, and encountering people different from themselves may enable this White transformation (Helms, 1990).

Critical Race Theory regards race as a social construction and analyzes the connections between race, racism, privilege, and power (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1995). According to Solórzano (1997), CRT's basic perspective includes a "premise that race and racism are endemic, permanent" (p. 6) in both small and large ways within individuals as well as institutions. CRT is conscious and unconscious, has a cumulative impact, and intersects with both gender and class discrimination. Further, CRT challenges the dominate power structure, is committed to social justice, values experiential knowledge, and uses interdisciplinary practices to put knowledge into critical historical context (Lynn, 2004; Solózano, 1997).

Culturally relevant teaching values and uses the characteristics, experience, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to frame pedagogy and attitudes. It values students' lived experiences, learning styles, ethnic history, and accomplishments (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is community-oriented both inside and outside the classroom, is grounded in caring, values personal narrative and group efforts, encourages varying perspectives, and expects achievement. Culturally relevant curriculum reflects the images and concerns of children whom it teaches, promotes critical questioning, and is committed to social justice. Finally, culturally relevant teaching is grounded in CRT (Gay, 2002). Students' academic achievement and engagement increases when they are taught in a culturally relevant manner (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sampson and Garrison-Wade, 2011).

Institutions that train teacher candidates (TCs) to teach in urban areas have used several models of instruction to prepare White TCs to critically and reflectively deal with race and class within the classroom. Davis (2009) performed a study that examined the experiences of eight White student teachers within a large New England school district. Her findings revealed that a learned "critical consultative interaction model" (p. 5) that valued asking Black and Latino schoolchildren for feedback in order to improve TCs' teaching proved to be an invaluable learning experience for the TCs and dispelled the notion of a homogenous sense of Whiteness. Likewise, Ullucci's (2011) investigation of three White teachers' identity development disclosed that their low-income backgrounds and degree of empathy and understanding of children who came from the same enabled them to become exceptional teachers in urban schools. Conner's (2010) review of 21 Villanova University's TCs' semester-long service-learning project with inner-city Philadelphia high school students revealed that interviewing the students and spending time with the students to assist them with their high school capstone projects helped to challenge and dispel White TCs' misconceptions of urban youth. This stance was reiterated by Castro (2010), who reviewed TCs' changing views of cultural diversity. His research revealed that field-based experience, combined with reflection tied to anti-racist theory within a university multicultural course enabled TCs to shift racist beliefs and attitudes. Sleeter (2001) and Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill (2007) agreed that urban immersion experiences combined with critical reflection and social justice coursework within teacher education programs held the most promise in preparing White TCs to teach in urban settings. ISU's Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline™ (2012) data also concurred with these conclusions, as TCs who combined urban clinical observations along with anti-racist course material showed greater urban teaching intentions. Moreover, they also indicated more confidence in engaging urban students and their families than TCs who did not participate in an urban experience. However, urban experiences must be mutually beneficial to the schools and their students, as well as to the TCs and must involve candidate reflection. By encountering and forming relationships with people of color in order to see things from their point of view, White TCs began to move through psychologist Janet Helm's (1990) stages of anti-racist development and were more inclined to engage in future anti-racist behavior.

According to Helms (1990), to abandon individual racism, recognize institutional racism, and work to oppose it, Whites move through stages of awareness and action. Initially unaware of White privilege (Contact Stage), Whites may see firsthand, through the eyes of a friend who is of color, how racism affects everyone (Disintegration Stage). It can then be common for Whites to feel anger about racism and direct this anger towards minorities (Reintegration Stage). If Whites can intellectually recognize racism, they often do not know what to do about it (Pseudo-Independent Stage) and begin to look for White anti-racist role models (Immersion/Emersion Stage). It is only when Whites actively engage in anti-racist behavior (Autonomy Stage) that they assume the newly-defined view of Whiteness as an identity, albeit an evolving one. Development through the stages is not necessarily linear and is a lifetime process.

Methods

In Spring of 2012, I received ISU Institutional Review Board permission to engage TCs in my Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations class in an action research study that asked the following research question: “What helped you as art TCs to think about urban education issues in a new way, if at all?” Action research is participatory as the researcher evaluates whether what he or she is doing is influencing his or her own or other people’s learning (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). All TCs elected to be a part of the study.

I collected written assignments on color stereotyping and White privilege, weekly reflective journals, and clinical reflections from a Chicago Public Schools trip and Boys and Girls Club Friday Art Experiences. At the end of the semester, I administered a questionnaire that asked TCs what other classes they had taken in which they had discussed issues of race, class, and privilege; in what other urban field experiences or activities they had engaged; what had they gained from these other urban experiences; and lastly, what had helped them to think about urban education issues in a new way, if at all. I noted when students indicated a new awareness in their writings and triangulated the data to derive meaning (Cresswell, 1994). This paper examines TCs’ voices and makes recommendations for the implementation of CRT and culturally relevant teaching instruction within teacher training programs.

Participants

Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations, a required senior art education course that I taught, met once a week on campus for three hours. All twelve TCs within the course self-identified as being White, middle class undergraduates in their early twenties. They reflected the university’s demographic: 61% of the undergraduates were from the Chicago area and 21% were from the counties surrounding the university. The university’s undergraduate population was 84% White (Illinois State University, 2012). I am also White and middle class.

Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline™ (CTEP)

Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations was a CTEP redesigned course. The university established CTEP, using federal Teacher Quality Enhancement and Teacher Quality Partnership grants, to prepare and recruit teacher candidates for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) (Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline™, 2010). The university partnered with three Chicago neighborhoods: Little Village, a predominately Mexican American working class community on Chicago’s West Side; Auburn Gresham, an African American working class community on Chicago’s South Side; and Albany Park, a multi-ethnic working class community on Chicago’s Northwest Side. Between 2006 and 2011, CTEP enabled 48 university faculty members to redesign courses to contain an urban component (Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline™, 2012), which included urban field experiences and CRT. CTEP maintained an office in Little Village that serviced both the

university and the community by sponsoring college preparatory clubs within its partner schools, managing clinical observations and student teachers, running a middle school mentoring program, and facilitating university summer internships in which university TCs lived with community members, taught in CPS summer schools, and worked with community organizations.

Class Structure

Art 307 included readings, discussions, and projects involving CRT as well as materials and experiences that enabled TCs to understand and to meet the needs of students with disabilities. All TCs took part in a one-day field experience within two Chicago public high schools' art classrooms in Little Village. Both school's populations were comprised of 84% Hispanic and 15% African American students, 96% of whom were from families of low income (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012). This one-day urban field experience enabled TCs to speak with high school students and teachers, show their college artwork, visit the Museum of Mexican Art, go on a neighborhood scavenger hunt, and eat with the high school students in a local restaurant. During the scavenger hunt, TCs interacted with community businesses, spoke Spanish, and became more immersed within the community. TCs also wrote clinical reflections that tied their experiences to course materials.

I have been teaching Art 307 since 2010, altering it each year to enhance candidate learning. I changed the 2012 course to introduce culturally relevant teaching. TCs taught one or more culturally relevant art lessons through the Boys and Girls Club Friday Arts Experience (BGCFAE), an afterschool art program I have been running since I created it in 2009. To attend BGCFAE, TCs traveled away from campus to a less-advantaged part of town that they normally did not frequent. BGCFAE presented standards-based, open-ended art lessons to Club members seven times a semester. TC volunteers worked with up to 40 members each session in either one-to-one or small group formats. Many of the study's TCs attended numerous BGCFAE sessions and built relationships with members.

Assignments

Four out of 16 classes within the course focused on CRT, culturally relevant teaching, and English Language Learner instruction to provide context for the CPS visits. The remainder of the semester focused on students with disabilities and gender. Course materials presented the voices of people of color and White allies. I introduced TCs to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* and Sleeter and Grant's (2007) levels of multicultural awareness. TCs viewed *The Doll Test* from MSNBC's *Conversation about Race* (2008). They also attended the university gallery's *Borderlands Collective* exhibition, a social art photography and storytelling collaboration between teachers, youth, and family (Reed, Spratt, & Eigner, n.d.), and questioned how knowledge is created, stored, and disseminated. Moreover, TCs listened to a Kerry James Marshall (2006) podcast about racial exclusivity in the art world. They reflected on Tim Wise's (2008, 2010) *White Like Me* and *Pathology of Privilege*, in which he explains White privilege's historical and systemic disenfranchisement of people of color. Candidates read Peggy McIntosh's (1989) "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Further, TCs found examples of color stereotypes and counter stereotypes within popular media in response to Olivia Gude's (n.d.) "Drawing Color Lines." Finally, they watched *Meeting David Wilson* (2008), which argued for teaching children about their ancestors' accomplishments.

Findings

TCs' responses to the final questionnaire indicated that Art 307 was not their first experience with urban education; all but one TC had taken multiple redesigned courses. All TCs but one had participated in one or more other field experiences in CPS. Additionally, all candidates but one had participated multiple times at BGCFAE over the past two years. When asked what had helped them to think in a new way about urban education if they were at all, three TCs noted the readings and the class discussions. Three other TCs indicated the readings, the discussions, and the field experiences. Finally, the remaining six TCs noted that the field experiences had helped them to think in a new way. When asked what they gained from the urban experiences, TCs revealed a developing awareness of urban issues. For example, one student stated, "I have gained a better understanding of the urban school system and the issues these students face on a day-to-day basis" while another wrote, "I've learned that urban schools are not scary and the students are no different than myself." Finally, a third student explained, "Being introduced to urban students made me much more comfortable and helped extinguish previous stereotypes I had."

Reoccurring themes within TC writing included TCs' awareness of their misconceptions about urban schools and urban school students, TCs' identification of their own White privilege; and TCs' awareness and acknowledgement of alternative histories of people of color. Although I was the only one who had access to TCs' written journal reflections or clinical observations, TCs felt comfortable openly sharing their insights and concerns with one another in both whole class and small group formats.

The following candidate valued Wise's (2008) work in thinking in a new way about racism:

I think that this is probably one of the most powerful texts that we have been assigned to read. It explains why racism and white privilege exist in a straightforward way. There are real life examples and fully thought reasoning behind what is happening and why it is hurting all of us. This is the first text that really shows me where my place is in this issue, not just that it's my fault and I need to fix it because it's my fault.

Another candidate reflected on Wise's (2010) comments and identified herself as privileged:

From my own experience as a White person of European decent, I feel as though I do tend to forget these ideas of race and I tend to justify this by concluding that it is because I view all people the same. I think reading what Wise had to say made me think that it may also be largely in part because I just don't really have to think about it very often. Apart from being a future teacher, these issues of race do not affect my daily life as much as it would to be someone of color because I am privileged.

A candidate aligned McIntosh's work (1989) with her own struggles as a gay woman:

What is most interesting to me about this list is that if you substitute "race" for "sexual orientation," at least half of those items extend to me as a gay woman. I'm not sure I ever really made that sort of connection between racial oppression and oppression of homosexuals. I know that the current gay rights movement is, in many ways, mirroring the Black Civil Rights Movement but I never thought about it that specifically.

Meeting David Wilson (2008) enabled the following student to have a deeper appreciation of history and its implications:

I think what I can use from the video is that I've gained more awareness about the implications slavery had outside of holding African Americans and the brutal treatment imposed on them – slavery brought about a deeper racial segregation that I never will have to experience, simply because I'm White. I think that being aware of the implications of Whiteness will benefit me in the classroom to be aware of my students' experiences and how they and others view them.

Other candidates acknowledged their discomfort at being a minority for the first time in Little Village. For example, one TC stated:

As I was in the classes I became aware that the 307 students and the teachers were the only White people in the classrooms I guess that was strange to me, and I guess I felt a little out of place. We talked about this in class, being the “Other.”

The CPS visit annulled another TC’s assumptions about an urban school:

I wasn’t sure what to expect as we sped down 55 in the early hours of the morning. Would I be observing a run down art program with unruly students, would they be doing boring projects because of poor art teachers? To my surprise, none of this was true when we arrived at the Academy, which proved all my preconceived notions wrong. I wasn’t expecting a thriving art department with five art teachers, super well-thought-out lessons, and well-behaved students who were working hard on their projects.

TCs used the trip to inform themselves about life in Little Village, reflecting Helms’ Disintegration Stage (1990), as shown by this example:

So often we hear about how nicer weather can lead to more neighborhood shootings, and gang violence on TV, but it wasn’t until the art teachers at the Academy told us about the real dangers of the neighborhood-that I actually felt the impact. They said that when the weather gets nicer, violence truly increases. Gangs start recruiting, and some students’ families do not even let them leave the house to even walk to school, because there could be trouble on the way to or from school for them to deal with. That really impacted me. I could never imagine being that afraid (or having my parents be so afraid for my life and safety) to even leave my house to walk to my own school. That is something that does not happen very often in White middle class suburbia. That moment of the Chicago trip truly affected me, and since then I can’t really stop thinking about how life is for those kids. However, having dinner later on with two students from Little Village High School showed me that these students are still inspired to achieve their goals and make a difference in the world like many teenagers. They have not all been oppressed by the violence and problems that invade their neighborhoods – they rise above it.

Another TC wrote what it was like to be a culturally relevant teacher to a BGCFAE member while creating a bottle figure based on the work of African American artist Joyce Scott:

After showing the group how to attach the head and arms, I spent most of my time with a little girl in kindergarten. For the first time I was told “no, don’t do this for me, I don’t need your help” and I was able to focus on helping her push her ideas and problem solve, rather than cutting or drawing everything for her. She seemed to enjoy my company and talking to me more than depending on me to do her work for her. For me, this is what it means to mentor someone. You help them through the project, you encourage them, and you find out their strengths and show them how to use their strengths.

Discussion

TCs’ written reflections, such as the ones above, indicated that Art 307 course material and urban clinical experiences enabled students to think in a new way about urban issues, identify White privilege, and reassess history. TCs showed a willingness to reflect upon systemic racism and White privilege. Experiencing multiple professors who reinforced anti-racist thinking and behavior may have made this reflective process seem more mainstream to the TCs. TCs’ journal and clinical reflections were rich with insights and revealed varying levels of White awareness. Some reflections linked CRT to personal experiences, indicating an intellectual understanding of racism that may have increased from an initial awareness and, further, may have become personalized since previous courses. Within the course’s urban field experience, TCs interacted with students and teachers, witnessed culturally relevant teaching, and uncomfortably

became the “Other.” CPS students became TCs’ teachers when they openly shared their experiences of living in the city. TCs stated that they appreciated seeing CPS teachers actively valuing their students, and that they gained an appreciation of the challenges that the students faced, enabling them to advance through Helms’ (1990) stages of anti-racist development. By linking CRT with face-to-face encounters with urban students, the effects of White privilege became real to the TCs. TCs also shared images of their artwork and answered CPS students’ questions about college. Finally, they brought “thank you” gifts of art materials that the art teachers would need for their classes, forming a reciprocal connection.

Learning about culturally relevant teaching and then teaching culturally relevant lessons at BGCFAE possessed an immediacy that helped TCs to understand the implications of this pedagogical approach. Within an end-of-year class reflection, TCs stated that they wanted even more time to discuss course material with each other, as they learned from the insights of one another, and also enjoyed group reflection. Specifically, TCs valued sharing stories of past experiences, BCGFAE, and CPS trips. One of the TCs had taken part in a CTEP summer internship the summer before and had brought peer credibility to this urban education process. Supporting each other in their understanding of their own Whiteness was a valuable part of the anti-racist process (Helms, 1990).

Although a TC who had taken several redesigned courses complained about “being beaten over the head with issues of race,” and another TC had difficulty acknowledging White privilege, the class overall was open to discussion about these issues. Only a further study would indicate if TCs acted on this knowledge to engage in anti-racist behavior or to become allies (Helms, 1990). Of this cohort of 12 TCs, five are actively teaching art in K-12 schools, three of which are in urban settings. By their own admission, their experiences with ISU urban courses and urban community engagement prepared them for their teaching careers.

Conclusion

Analyzing racism and White privilege enabled TCs to understand their negative economic and social impacts. Self-reflection and dialogue were part of this investigation. Teacher preparatory programs should enable TCs and faculty to explore the social effects of their own respective class and race identities within all of their courses. The Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline™ is a program that supports faculty endeavors to redesign urban courses, summer internships and mentoring programs for TCs, community involvement, and urban teaching student organizations. Further, it provides a supportive anti-racist community amongst faculty and students. As such, CTEP is a model to be emulated. A university-wide commitment to anti-racist teaching makes it easier for individual anti-racist educators to prepare TCs to meet future teaching needs of all students within the changing demographic of U.S. schools. White faculty can establish relationships with urban schools and community settings to bring university resources to wherever they may be needed and in the process, create opportunities to train TCs. Using knowledge of CRT and culturally relevant teaching, White faculty members can prepare White TCs to be allies, as well as successful and supportive educators. White transformation is an on-going process; therefore, providing TCs with multiple clinical experiences within urban schools and opportunities to serve and to teach within diverse community settings is crucial to the integration of TCs’ anti-racist knowledge, enabling them to know and to learn from their students.

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