

Raising Awareness Among Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

A fundamental goal of our teacher education program is to support the development of critical teachers who are passionate and effective educators for all students in a multicultural society. We believe that promoting the development of critical multicultural consciousness and the ability to pose critical questions among candidates are two ways to reach this goal. We are concerned that the majority of our candidates continue to be from the dominant cultural group, defined by white privilege. We are also concerned that candidates are not conscious of their position and what it means to transform education from one that is monoculture to education that is multicultural. The purpose of this curriculum and instruction project, within a teacher preparation program, is to explore the effectiveness of race dialogues to raise consciousness within a course, Learning Communities I: Personal Awareness.

CRITICAL QUESTION

How do teacher educators effectively engage teaching candidates in race dialogues?

CRITICAL RACE ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

This is a critical race activity study that is designed to engage teaching candidates and their university instructors in an examination of the construction of race in the United States and the way it has socially and economically advantaged white people and disadvantaged people of color. All teacher candidates participate in the critical race activity and reflect on the experience irrespective of whether or not they choose to participate in this study. We only include analysis of reflections of candidates who give consent. The critical race activity involves viewing three films within the PBS series, RACE: The Power of an Illusion.

The data set for this project is embedded within a larger program evaluation project. The overall goal is to assess the impact of learning activities, across a variety of required courses, on the development of MAT candidates' ability to pose critical questions within the final work sample. Teacher educators scaffold candidates through an introductory action research course and methods courses connected to field experiences, where students are expected to critically inquire into the social context of the classroom, school, and community.

In this study, we modeled for our candidates how educators can introduce critical questions that have the potential for deconstructing white privilege established through institutional racism.

PROCEDURES & DATA COLLECTION

The Learning Communities I course is part of the MAT cohort program. It takes place during the first semester over four 7-hour sessions on Saturdays. On the second Saturday, the candidates participate in a full day race workshop and pot-luck lunch at the associate dean's house. Beginning at 9:00 a.m., candidates are asked to share their cultural/ethnic identity. Since most students are white, this initial activity engages candidates to consider the cultural characteristics of being white. A number mention their European heritage, middle class status, heterosexual identity and marital status, and Christian perspective. We then watch three films in the series, The Power of an Illusion. Each 60-minute film is followed by 45-minutes of race dialogue where candidates are invited to reflect on and share their immediate feelings, prior experiences with race, and current thinking. They are encouraged to suspend their opinions to understand diverse views and to participate in dialogue without judging. Candidates are also required to complete an assignment – involving readings & website review – and post workshop response paper.

KEY LITERATURE FRAMING THE PROJECT

Critical Race Theory

CRT in education was first theorized by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Illuminating and challenging the perpetuation of racism that privileges whiteness as a property right is a complex issue for 21st Century teachers to address (Bergerson, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2005; LeCompte & McGray, 2002; McCarthy, 2003; Milner, 2003).

"Tracking can be viewed as one of the current means through which the property right of whiteness is asserted in education" (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, p.8)

Critical Multicultural Education

Both monoculturalism, that leads to assimilation, and multiculturalism, that leads to pluralism based on commonality, have been brought under the critical multicultural lens (Banks, 1991; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Nieto, 1998).

Critical multiculturalism "is dedicated to the notion of egalitarianism and the elimination of human suffering" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 24). Critical multiculturalism "is concerned with the contextualization of what gives rise to race, class and gender inequalities" (p. 25).

KEY LITERATURE FRAMING THE PROJECT CONT' D

Action Research

- AR focuses on the effects of the researchers' direct actions of practice within a participatory community with the goal of improving the performance quality of the community around an area of concern. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006)
- AR is an iterative practice of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that is rooted in social research for social change, empowerment, and continual learning. (Greenwood & Levin, 2007)
- "When constant, high-quality collaborative inquiry becomes the norm in a professional learning community students prosper, the school culture becomes enriched, and teachers enjoy greater professional satisfaction and team members are bound by a commitment to shared norms, values, and behaviors that become habit and nurture the functional culture." (Sagor, 2009)

SOME PRELIMINARY THEMES

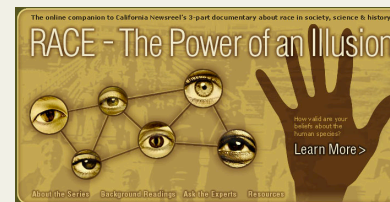
"A surprise for me was discovering how privileged I have been because of my skin color."

"It was long taught to me that although in yesteryears many minorities suffered in our country, today we all have equal opportunities. That just isn't so. I didn't really have any understanding of the ripple effect, all the way up to the present, that deeply seeded and carried out discrimination has, and how it still does effect minority populations."

"The most salient thought that I bring away from this is that awareness is key."

"During the session about "race" I was fascinated, moved, frustrated, hopeful, and enlightened. Having class at Glenda's house was a really neat way for us to get to know each other a little better and really get into some great discussions over a very powerful topic."

"Being a white person is definitely a privilege in our society and I have reaped those benefits unconsciously. Now that I am aware of it, it makes me ashamed and sad. In my classes I want to present this historical example of bad science to my students so they can be aware of the possibility of these types of mistakes happening even today."



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