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Reflective Journeys Toward Culturally Relevant Pedagogy


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COVER PAGE

Title: Reflective Journeys Toward Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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Abstract

In this qualitative case study we used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory methodologically and theoretically to investigate the reflections of three elementary pre-service teachers as they were learning about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Data sources included a questionnaire, interview transcripts, course documents, and individual written records. Cross and within case analyses were conducted using a priori and open coding for all data utilizing the analytic strategy of *relying on theoretical propositions*. Findings suggested that participants' reflected beyond the classroom on influences that impact the education of diverse students and there were program specific factors that encouraged critical reflectivity across systems of influence. This study offers insights about using critical reflectivity in developing pre-service teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy.

In this qualitative case study we used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory methodologically and theoretically to investigate the reflections of three elementary pre-service teachers as they were learning about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Data sources included a questionnaire, interview transcripts, course documents, and written records. Cross and within case analyses were conducted using a priori and open coding for all data utilizing the analytic strategy of relying on theoretical propositions. Findings suggested that participants' reflected beyond the classroom on influences that impact the education of diverse students and there were program specific factors that encouraged critical reflectivity across systems of influence. This study offers insights about using critical reflectivity in developing pre-service teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Introduction

Teaching in the 21st century requires a new way of thinking and calls for teacher education programs to develop new teachers who can teach children who may be culturally, linguistically and economically different from them. We know, for example, that 43% of the public school population includes children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds while 84% of the teacher workforce, existing and future, are females who are White, middle class (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008). Multicultural scholars argue that this cultural mismatch could be problematic if preservice teachers bring with them limited cross cultural awareness and naïve, deficit and stereotypical beliefs about children from diverse backgrounds (Larke, 1990; McIntyre, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). Even when teacher education programs introduce through coursework introduces issues of racism, discrimination and inequality in schooling, preservice teachers often struggle with these concepts and instead embrace the act of colorblindness as a means of affirming diversity among children (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; McIntyre, 2002; Valli, 1992). An ‘I-don’t-see-color’ view of the children, while made with the best intentions by preservice teachers, can influence whether they capitalize on the cultural and linguistic tools children bring with them to the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Hilliard, 1997, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). Teacher education programs are thereby challenged to help preservice teachers examine the ways in which they think about diversity in order to foster affirming understandings of how to create a culturally relevant educational environment for children (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Sleeter, 2001).

Doing so, asks teachers to teach “against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p.3) by being an advocate for student rights and responding considerately to new challenges such as scripted curriculum and standardized testing. Preparing a new generation of teachers who can teach in this

manner involves a careful cultivation of educators who reflect about their practices in relation to the immediate world of learners and the worlds that influence that learning. To date, teacher education programs have not figured out how to do this.

In addition, to the connection between the importance of reflectivity and practice in teacher development has been discussed extensively in teacher education literature but recent studies are beginning to examine how they connect. Understanding how reflections influence the development of teachers is important, but understanding how reflectivity influences the development of culturally responsive educators is critical. In this study, researchers examined the reflective practices of three elementary preservice teachers as they journey towards culturally relevant pedagogy and become teachers for the 21st century.

Teacher Preparation for the 21st Century

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

How can teacher education programs prepare our recruit for teaching in the twenty first century? Cochran-Smith (2001) argues that it is the responsibility of teacher educators to “prepare teachers to challenge the inequities that are deeply embedded in systems of schooling and in society” by intentionally and positively impacting the lives and educational experiences of children (p. 3). Preparing teachers who will positively impact the lives of children from diverse backgrounds requires a focus on **teaching** that is culturally relevant to children and a preparation that involves **critical reflective thinking** on how to create responsive environments for children. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) can serve as one way to examine and understand how teachers create such an environment. Enactment of CRP enables the teacher to, “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p.18). Gay (2000) and Howard (2003) argue that CRP

involves teachers connecting classroom experiences and learning to children's home experiences and native language. To effectively do this Ladson-Billings (1994) reports that schools and teachers must first believe that all students can succeed and maintain an affirming student-teacher relationship. Hilliard (2000, 2006) further argues that schools should abandon the use of terms such as 'at risk' and 'disadvantage' when describing diverse students and instead adopt beliefs that speak to the brilliance and cultural tools that children from diverse backgrounds bring with them to the classroom. In addition, culturally relevant pedagogy sees excellence as a complex standard that takes student diversity and individual differences into account. Therefore teachers and instructional programs that implement culturally relevant pedagogy help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities. It also encourages students to work collaboratively and expects them to take responsibility for each other (Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995). Without a doubt, developing teachers who are responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students maximizes the opportunities for equitable and high quality learning experiences for these students. However we argue that in order for teachers to effectively engage in such teaching practices they must be conscious of the multiple influences within and beyond the classroom that challenge and support the success of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Thus, our research explored the relationship between preservice teachers reflectivity on such influences to their understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy. Indicators of one's 'understanding' culturally relevant pedagogy includes one 'thinking' in a culturally responsive manner which then becomes the basis for effectively implementing such practices. We therefore sought to explore our proposition that teachers who critically reflected on issues within the classroom, community and society have more developed understandings of CRP than those who do not. Focusing on preservice teachers' reflectivity became a pathway to providing insights on how

we can develop teachers who are prepared for teaching in the 21st century.

Reflection as a Mechanism for Change

In a similar regard, teacher education programs are attempting to develop more culturally relevant teachers by providing opportunities for them to develop as reflective practitioners who think on how their beliefs and practices influence teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The focus on developing teachers who are reflective is nostalgic of the educational aims as far back as the early 1900s (Dewey, 1903, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987; Valli, 1992). In its simplest form, to reflect is to think back on or about a phenomena, event, or experience (Valli, 1997). However, noted as the early proponent of developing teachers' reflective practice, John Dewey asserts that it consists of "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (1903, p.9).

Since Dewey's era, inexorably as classrooms have become more diverse, the focus of teachers' reflection has evolved over the years. Multicultural scholars argue that when preparing teachers for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, teacher development programs must allow elementary preservice teachers to move beyond Dewey's call for reflective action to more critical examinations of one's ideology as it specifically relates to diverse students and its influence on pedagogy (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Johnson, 2001). In practice, critical reflectivity requires teachers to closely question routine and habitual classroom practices by analyzing teaching as a highly contextual and complex act (Schwartz, 1996; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) influenced by an ecology of complex interplay among personal, professional, and systemic realms (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

We believe that in order for preservice teachers to develop as culturally responsive educators they must be reflective about teaching and learning both in the classroom and beyond. In order to explore this theoretical proposition, we adapted an Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to examine preservice teachers' reflections when learning to teach children who are culturally and linguistically different.

Teacher Reflectivity in an Ecological System

Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualizes 'environments' in relation to individual development. A person's development is not only influenced by immediate surroundings (i.e., a teacher education program and/or field experience) but also by settings or environments in which they are not actively engaged (i.e., educational policy and school reforms). Bronfenbrenner identified these as 'systems' that influence the development of the individual and labeled them as: micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono. In this study we applied this theory to consider both the influences that impact preservice teachers' development of culturally relevant pedagogy **and** their proclivity to reflect on how these settings influence the teaching and learning of culturally and linguistically students.

For example, reflectivity on micro systems of influences would include the preservice teachers critically considering how their personal beliefs positively and/or negatively impact their interactions with diverse students. Likewise, reflection on a meso system of influence would move beyond the personal level by thinking about the relationship and connection between their biases and the choices and actions they take as teachers because of it (Thomas, 1996). For example, a preservice teacher may believe that since this is America, English Language Learners need to speak English only in their classroom and at home. This belief conflicts with multicultural literature that suggests how using children's native language supports

their language acquisition (Flores, Cousin, Diaz, 1991; Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2003). In this example, the preservice teacher is challenged with negotiating her personal beliefs and professional responsibility with providing the most culturally and linguistically affirming practice to her students. Such challenges may be helpful in creating the cognitive dissonance necessary to help new educators think differently.

In contrast to the micro- and meso-systems, reflectivity at the exo-system level is not based on direct experience (e.g., local, state and national mandates, reforms and policies) but is one that is conscious and strategic—the reflection is purposefully directed toward an issue not just the result of experience. Similarly, critical reflection at the macro system entails a preservice teacher consciously questioning not only their personal and professional beliefs about teaching and learning but also how societal beliefs and practices could be oppressive to others. Scholars argue that preparing teachers for teaching diverse student populations demands opportunities for critical reflection on how macro-systems of influences such as wider cultural, social, and political constructs impact teaching, learning and student achievement (Banks, 1993; Freire, 1993, 1998; Hilliard, 1997; King 2004). And while fostering reflectivity in teacher education programs is difficult, scaffolding reflectivity that is *critical* in nature is very challenging and absent from traditional teacher preparation programs. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner (1979) characterizes the entire process through the concept of a chrono-system which moves through time and includes the impact of historical events on the individual. Preservice teacher's reflections would include reference to and understanding of the change in teaching and learning.

In this paper, we examine whether pre service teachers who reflect critically on the multiple systems of influences that impact the teaching and learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students begin to see themselves as a culturally relevant teacher. In other

words, if we can get preservice teachers to think outside of their inner classroom-centric worlds, we may be able to propel them closer to the role of culturally responsive educator. Figure 1 provides a model of the relations between where reflections can occur for preservice teachers and the impact that these reflections can have on the development of preservice teachers' understanding of CRP.

One Study of Reflectivity and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Using a case study design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), we examined three preservice teachers' reflections as they navigated through teacher education courses and fieldwork to gain insights into how reflectivity can be used as a mechanism towards developing culturally affirming and relevant future teachers. We asked 1) how do elementary preservice teachers reflect when learning about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students? and 2) what do these reflections reveal about participants' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy? Using models drawn from Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), we examined the written and verbal reflections of three elementary preservice teachers' who were in their third semester of completing initial teaching certification in a southeastern urban university's elementary teacher education program. The three preservice teachers were purposefully sampled from among twenty-two of their peers who were originally part of an earlier study of preservice teachers in a cultural diversity course. The sampling procedures included using pilot study data and a culturally relevant beliefs questionnaire to select three participants based on differences in their understandings of CRP. The three preservice teachers selected as case study participants were Carla, Jody and Ronald (pseudonym used).

At the time of the study Carla was a twenty-nine year old African American female born in a working class family in the South who had served in the United State Navy and traveled internationally prior to entering the elementary teacher education program. Jody was a thirty nine year old European American female born in a working class family in the Midwest who worked in business administration before deciding upon a career in education. Lastly, as a traditional college student, Ronald, a twenty one year old African American male was born in a working class family in the South, and after graduating from high school pursued his interest in elementary education.

Four data sources informed the study (1) a pre/post Love & Kruger Beliefs Questionnaire (2005), (2) three individual semi-structured interviews, (3) eight course documents and (4) two member checking written records. Descriptive memos for document and interview data were written to summarize the findings, researchers' comments and initial hunches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Initially, the Love and Kruger Beliefs Questionnaire (2005) was administered to identify participants' culturally relevant beliefs. The questionnaire contains forty eight culturally relevant and assimilationist statements presented on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. An individual semi-structured interview (approximately an hour per participant) was then conducted providing an opportunity for each participant to expand and clarify responses from the questionnaire and provide insights on participants' beliefs and experiences teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children. A second interview was conducted eight weeks later asking participants to identify and discuss a lesson they had implemented in their field classroom that they felt best represented culturally relevant pedagogy. The final interview was a last attempt to capture the participant's understandings of teaching culturally and linguistically children. Eight course documents that

required written reflectivity were also collected and analyzed across four different teacher education courses that the participants were taking at the time (assessment, literacy, classroom management, social studies). Two member checks were conducted throughout the study and allowed participants to respond to interpretations of the data and emergent themes thus guiding future analysis and finally expanding, clarifying and confirming findings from the final data analysis. As in multiple case study research, the culmination of these data collection procedures provided a holistic portrait of not only ways each individual participant critically reflected but also how these reflections connected to their understandings of CRP.

Data Analysis

Data was read and reread to identify individual meaning units (word, phrase, sentence) for each case. A two tier coding scheme was applied to analyze the eight course documents, three semi-structured interviews, and two member checking written records. First each meaning unit was coded using the five systems of influences: micro, meso, exo, macro, or chrono and then recoded using open coding methods based on patterns in order to provide descriptions of the nature of these reflections at various levels. For example, a meaning unit might be coded initially as representing the micro level and then further analyzed to reveal the nature of the reflection itself and coded accordingly (e.g., coded: micro, then recoded: micro-personal bias). To explore participants' understandings of CRP a similar two tier coding process was applied beginning with open coding for evidence of culturally relevant pedagogy followed by a priori coding identifying the systems of influences reflected upon. Descriptive memos that were written for each data set were not analyzed themselves but rather used as references to inform the content of member checking conversations and to track emergent themes and findings. Similarly,

information from the questionnaire data was not analyzed but rather used descriptively to inform questions for the first interview and used during sampling procedures.

Within case and cross case analysis was ongoing throughout data collection procedures and directed toward proving the theoretical proposition that participants who critically reflected across systems of influences have more developed understandings of CRP than those who do not reflect outside the micro levels. The within case analysis was conducted during all phases of the study whereas cross case analysis occurred during the final phase of data analysis utilizing the results of the within case analysis. In this paper we concentrate primarily on some of the main findings from the cross case analysis in order to provide insights into how the teacher education programs can help to facilitate the development of preservice teachers' understandings of CRP through an examination of reflectivity. Some within case analyses are shared to help illustrate major patterns across cases.

Trustworthiness

In this study, data collection and analysis occurred over a ten month period. This allowed us to holistically understand the complexities of the participants' experiences from a triangulation of multiple data sources (questionnaire, course documents, member checking written records and interview transcripts) for a prolonged period of time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, to authentically capture the voices of participants, we continuously reflected on how biases and beliefs influenced interpretation of data and the meaning making that occurred during data collection through personal and descriptive reflective memoing and analysis meetings (Creswell, 2003). Two member-checking conversations were conducted for each participant to share and confirm tentative interpretations (Merriam, 1998) and a peer debriefer

trained in qualitative analysis was used to confirm and refine coding during the within case and cross case analysis (Yin, 2003).

Findings

Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on personal biases (micro) and influences in society (macro) are important in developing their understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy (Howard, 2003; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In this study, we found that all three case participants were able to make reflections beyond a micro level and move beyond classroom boundaries and one's role in it. While participants' were able to think about influences beyond the classroom that impact the teaching and learning of diverse students, the *critical element* of these reflections determined whether their reflections were culturally relevant or not. Lastly, we found that some program specific factors impacted whether reflections moved in and out of the model and the degree to which they were critical in nature. Using these findings, we present how the teacher education program helped facilitate such critical reflectivity in the classroom and beyond.

Reflecting Outside the Classroom

According to Feiman-Nesmer (2008), learning to teach involves preservice teachers' engaging in reflective considerations of the multiple roles of 'thinking', 'feeling' 'knowing', and 'acting'. An important finding from the cross case analysis was that Ronald, Jody and Carla all reflected both within and beyond the classroom as they considered factors that influenced the teaching and learning of diverse students. They did not just reflect upon classroom factors and pragmatics of instruction nor confined their reflections to personal and professional issues. Instead, we noted reflections about various aspects of teaching and learning across the different levels at different times. When examining the pedagogies our participants reflected upon we

began to see that there was actually a direct link between the criticality essence of their reflectivity inside and outside the classroom and evidence of CRP. For example, all three participants' reflected on issues in the classroom such as a teacher's pedagogy, parents, and students. When reflecting on the teacher, all participants' argued that it is imperative that teachers hold the belief that children are capable learners regardless of their cultural and linguistic identity and implement a pedagogy that is interactive, challenging and connects to students' reality. Likewise, they all viewed students in primarily affirming regards and championed for student voice in the classroom. They also reflected on the importance of forging authentic relationships with parents. However, such relationships included traditional forms of parental involvement that the families themselves may or may not value such as "if I send home homework I expect for it to be sent back" (Ronald); or parents to "go to PTA" (Jody) and "showing up to parent teacher conferences" (Carla).

We also found that when provided the opportunities to do so, the participants did actually extend beyond the classroom to consider influences across Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems. For example, Carla, Ronald and Jody reflected on issues such as biases in the media, equity in standardized testing practices, the concept of an American identity that counters the reality and experiences of diverse students and student access to resources and knowledge. It is important to note that as participants were reflecting on issues outside of the classroom, they were responding to many of the discussions taking place in their coursework as well as observations made in the schools and communities they were completing their fieldwork in. For example, participants often reflected upon the pressures their cooperating teachers experienced in balancing mandated test preparation activities with more meaningful instructional experiences for students; reflections at the exo-system level. Jody exclaimed that she didn't think she could "teach fifth

grade until No Child Left Behind is repelled” because she would like to “feel like I can let go of the [local standardized measure] review sheets” and replace them with more “cool and interesting” activities that are relevant to children’s experiences and captures their attention.

Carla agreed that teachers are under so much pressure to push the testing agenda they tend to look beyond children’s actual abilities and year long performance to “[local standardized measure] scores, school and county statistics”. As a result, Carla questioned “How do you know if a child is disadvantaged by just looking at their scores which may be less than perfect?”

Ronald further explained that one way of moving towards accuracy in testing is for educators to “understand the whole child and use collected data to provide suitable educational programs” and “try to think of better policies in assessing all students”. We found that as participants were making connections to how such influences outside the classroom impact teaching inside the classroom, they began to take on a professional responsibility by proposing what they felt was more responsive pedagogy and ideology for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Therefore, an important finding from this study was that the preservice teachers *did reflect beyond the classroom* to consider how influences in the community, society, and educational policy impact the work we do at the classroom level in making education equitable and responsive for students.

Critical Reflectivity and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Cochran-Smith (2001) argues that it is the responsibility of teacher educators to “prepare teachers to challenge the inequities that are deeply embedded in systems of schooling and in society” (p. 3). It was our position that developing preservice understandings of CRP required an *element of consciousness* on how such school, community and societal influences and identities shape the teaching and learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Therefore, we

went into the study specifically exploring the theoretical proposition that preservice teachers who critically reflect on influences in the classroom and beyond have more developed understandings of CRP. It is important to clarify that CRP was determined by whether participants' reflections revealed an understanding of **and** belief in culturally relevant ideology and teaching.

Nevertheless, what we found was that the criticality of participants' reflections **and** their abilities to reflect within and across systems was more representative of their understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy. For example, the participants who were able to critically reflect on how a micro system setting (students) was influenced by a macro systematic phenomenon (societal oppression) and **then** reflect back on how this macro setting (societal oppression) can be influenced by a micro influence (teacher) displayed more understandings of culturally relevant beliefs and practices. Because developing understandings of CRP is not static but dynamic and complex the findings suggested that all participants at some point did not reflect critically within or across levels but *only those who had more developed understandings of CRP showed evidence of critical reflectivity.*

Take for example two participants' reflectivity on the influences of media in the teaching and learning of linguistically and diverse children. Jody often argued that a major influence on children was the media and therefore expressed how popular TV shows and commercials contributed to their low attention spans and lack of interest in education and schooling. She therefore proposed to introduce students to the ways media and advertisement can shape one's opinion about a product, image or perspective. Here Jody has taken an exosystematic influence (media) and applied it to a micro setting (the classroom). While she has demonstrated her ability to reflect across systems, this reflection is not critical because it doesn't include how the media can be used as a vehicle to perpetuate deficit beliefs about children and encourage cultural

assimilation. In turn the pedagogy presented is not representative of CRP because it lacks a direct connection between recognizing how the media could serve as a determinant to the identity development of young children and ways to use media criticism instead to affirm the images and diversity of children. On the other hand, while Jody focused on media from the perspective of teaching all children about media biases in advertisement, Carla described the media's influence using a socio-cultural context. For example she argued that the media contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypical images of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Carla shared "an example of an assumption and stereotype that I heard from the news, jokes on TV shows like Hispanic men as being landscapers and having odd jobs." Here she has critically reflected on how the media can project stereotypical images of certain groups in our society. She then situates such media stereotypes back to the classroom by sharing an experience in which she made efforts to get to know the familial background of her Hispanic students during one of her lunch chat sessions:

"The school that I was at for my third grade placement had mostly Hispanic students and so when I ate lunch with them and talked with them I found that none of their parents were landscapers, cleaning people...they worked in factories, day care centers, restaurant cooks, had their own businesses. And as far as being a maid, it wasn't true at all."

In these two examples, both Jody and Carla reflected on the influence of the media in the teaching and learning of diverse children, however, the criticality of their reflections represented whether the pedagogy and ideology proposed was culturally relevant or not. In another example, Ronald's understanding of CRP was revealed when he too considered how stereotypical labeling impacts children from diverse backgrounds. For example, Ronald reflected throughout the study

his dislike for the term ‘urban’ to describe and label children from marginalized populations. He expressed that labeling children from certain populations inevitably impacted their opportunity for quality educational experiences. He charged,

“I think it [urban] came from our government’s need to label our children. And I don’t like that because it separates you know, I guess you could see, this is quality education then you have urban education and I don’t like how people like to separate the two.”

Ronald extended this macro level influence to connect back to how instruction and assessment was therefore impacted by societal views and labeling of diverse students. For example, when responding to an article that promoted policy for implementing culturally relevant assessment practices (Salend & Salinas, 2003), Ronald reflected

“As an intern in mostly urban schools, I have experienced students in the classroom whose primary language was not English and were mostly labeled as ESOL students. After reading this article, I think back to those students and wonder if they had been evaluated by a multidisciplinary team which used the recommendation of Salend and Salinas, would the results be different?”

Here Ronald situated a macro systematic influence within the classroom to demonstrate his understanding of how labeling students based on deficit beliefs about their cultural and linguistic diversity inevitably impacted the assessment procedures implemented and therefore influences access to quality and equitable educational experiences.

We have presented three examples of reflectivity across systems to demonstrate how as participants **critically** considered influences outside of the classroom that impact the work done within the classroom, the pedagogies and ideologies proposed were culturally relevant. These findings demonstrate how providing opportunities for preservice teachers to critically reflect across systems of influences captures what Ladson-Billings (1999) considers to be the foundational framework of CRP. She argues how preservice teachers need both an understanding of culturally relevant ideology **and** understanding of how to implement culturally relevant teaching in the classroom. Therefore, as the findings from this study suggest, by reflecting critically on influences that exist outside of the classroom, preservice teachers can begin to move beyond the practicality of teaching to considering how the “**why**” better informs practices that are responsive and affirming to children.

Encouraging Critical Reflectivity in Teacher Education Programs

Because we found that there is a link between preservice teachers’ critical reflectivity and their understandings of CRP we also considered how teacher education programs facilitated such critical reflectivity. An important finding from the cross case analysis was that the course and field experiences in the teacher education program both challenged and facilitated critical reflectivity. For example, we found that there were course assignments that encouraged Jody, Ronald and Carla to reflect across all systems. These assignments (a) used specific written prompts that required participants to reflect on the teaching and learning of diverse students (b) prompted participants to consider influences in the classroom and/or beyond (c) required them to refer to course experiences that promoted culturally relevant pedagogy and (d) the instructor provided multiple opportunities throughout the semester for participants to explore and examine CRP. One possibility as to why some course assignments did not encourage reflections beyond

the classroom level was due to the fact that few other experiences in the course focused on the teaching and learning of diverse students. As a result, when completing the assignments preservice teachers did not have many references or funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1993) to apply to and associate with the assignment. If the preservice teacher came to the program with limited personal experiences with diverse populations and the field experience did not provide access to prompt reflectivity, the assignment alone was not enough. Take for example, the Assessment Policy Paper assignment in which participants reflected across all systems of influences (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono). The focus of this assignment was for preservice teachers to read, summarize, critique and reflect on an article related to issues of assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students. The course instructor asked preservice teachers to consider the teaching and learning of diverse students and provided a selection of articles that specifically dealt with issues of teaching diverse students while also challenging readers to consider influences beyond the classroom that negatively and inequitably impact these students' educational experiences. Furthermore, by using the article as a reference and drawing upon what they learned throughout the course about culturally relevant assessment practices, participants' reflections extended across systems of influences.

On the contrary course assignments that did not use an explicit prompt for participants' to reflect beyond the classroom and/or on diverse students and whose instructor did not provide resources throughout the semester on CRP did not reflect critically beyond the classroom and sometimes its absence from the mediated learning resulted in unintended negative effects for preservice teachers. One example comes from Carla who reflected on ways instructors inadvertently supported deficit beliefs about culturally and linguistically students when

attempting to promote CRP. She reflected on how the instructors' use of statistical data that demonstrated the low achievement of diverse students challenged her affirming beliefs about the academic abilities of diverse students. The research shared in class made her question, reject and challenge the use of statistics in establishing a rationale for CRP. She went on to argue that the presentation of such deficit and negative statistics further perpetuated the 'myth' that children of color are incapable of reaching academic excellence rather than presenting how these children's performance is the result of a lack of access to more affirming and high quality educational experiences. Carla argued:

“in my class we do have people who have not gone to school with Black students. They went to all White elementary schools, all White middle schools, and all White high schools. All they know about Black people is what they see here at Crescent State University and what they hear and what people tell them and what they see on TV and all that which is most of the time not good. So why put that out, so you know if they get a little Black kid in the classroom what are they going to refer back to? The statistics, and the stereotypes and all that.”

In this case as the instructors in the teacher education program introduced an outside classroom influence such as standardized testing to preservice teachers, their efforts actually worked against developing the preservice teachers' understandings of CRP and could have had disastrous results for a preservice teacher who was not at the level of understanding or commitment to CRP as Carla. This demonstrates the importance of scaffolding preservice teachers' understanding of the connection to influences outside of the classroom to creating more affirming and equitable educational experiences for students in the classroom.

Discussion and Recommendations

The research on using reflectivity in developing preservice teachers' understanding of CRP focuses on either helping them examine the influences of their personal biases (micro) on teaching diverse children or on reflecting on how societal influences (macro) such as racism and oppression influences educational experiences of these children (King, 1991; Sleeter, 2001). However, unique to the current multicultural literature this study situated critical reflectivity within an ecological framework to suggest that preservice teachers develop understandings of culturally relevant practices because they are conscious of the multiple influences in the classroom and beyond that impact the teaching and learning of diverse students. Two findings from this study suggest that when provided the opportunity to do so, preservice teachers will consider influences beyond the classroom that impact the teaching and learning of diverse students. As they are considering these factors however, the criticality of their reflections indicates their understandings of CRP. To facilitate critical reflectivity and therefore develop understandings of CRP, we found that the course assignments that challenged the preservice teachers to think beyond the classroom were those that used explicit prompting about diverse children and multiple influences as well as provided them with references from their coursework experiences to draw upon. However, although some courses provided multiple opportunities for reflectivity across systems on the teaching and learning of diverse students the fact that some information was presented in courses and field experiences without extended opportunities for discussion, connection, and application resulted in inhibiting one participant's developing understandings of CRP and yet for another strengthened her passion for more culturally affirming beliefs about diverse children in teacher education instructional experiences.

Considering our findings, there are important areas of future research to consider. Researchers could examine whether educational faculty, such as course instructors or university supervisors, critically reflect across systems themselves in order to provide such scaffolding experiences for preservice teachers who come to the program with multiple tools, references, prior knowledge and experiences in teaching and learning about children who are culturally and linguistically different from them. It also calls for research on how faculty's understandings and beliefs in CRP influence preservice teachers' understandings. Likewise, we have found that the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory to understand the complexities of reflectivity was a useful tool and encourage future investigations to explore adaptations in new venues.

Teacher education programs have a responsibility to ensure that preservice teachers are equipped with the experiences they need to develop as the culturally relevant teacher who provides affirming and equitable pedagogies for children. It begins with teacher educators' commitment toward developing teachers who are culturally relevant and are eager to transform the educational experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students using critical reflectivity as the compass in this reflective journey towards culturally relevant pedagogy.

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Figure 1

Reflectivity Across Ecological Systems of Influences

