



9-2003

Autobiography in Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education: Three Case Studies

Anita E. Fernandez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal>



Part of the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fernandez, Anita E. (2003) "Autobiography in Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education: Three Case Studies," *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 1. Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal/vol18/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice by an authorized editor of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact und.common@library.und.edu.

Autobiography in Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education: Three Case Studies

Anita E. Fernandez

In this qualitative study, case study methodology was used to demonstrate the promise of autobiography as a tool for unpacking preservice teachers' racial identities so that they might become better teachers for an increasingly diverse student population. This study took place over the course of an eight-week seminar, which I conducted with three white, female preservice teachers. The setting for this seminar was a small, liberal arts college in a large Southwestern city. Multiple data sources were collected using class discussions, field notes, analytic memos, written documents, and artifacts to better understand these three preservice teachers' expressed beliefs of multicultural education and how these beliefs might be influenced by this seminar. All three participants were required to complete this seminar as it is a mandatory course for their program. The constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and analytic induction (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) were used to analyze the data. Three major themes emerged from the data which were: what we learned; race, power, and privilege; and narrative and autobiography as learning tools. Implications for teacher education from these cases include implications for curriculum and pedagogy, considerations for white preservice teachers, and the need for honesty and engagement in multicultural education courses.

Introduction: An English Teacher's Multicultural Intentions

The week prior to my first day as a high school English teacher, I searched all over town for posters, wall hangings, and assorted decorations with which to cover the walls of my windowless, cinder block classroom. My intention was to create a comfortable space that represented all my students' backgrounds. I came across posters, tapestries, and postcards celebrating multicultural literature and diversity. I added a bumper sticker professing to *teach peace* and pictures of my family on my desk. All of this was my way of creating a multicultural classroom environment; after all, I had represented most cultures through these decorations as well as created a space that represented who I was and what I cared about.

My multicultural intentions continued into my curriculum choices as I chose literature from around the world, creation

stories from many religions, and topics to write about that I felt would touch on the experiences of all my students. I felt good about what I was doing and confident that I was about to teach these students the *right* way. I would listen to their voices, encourage a community of trust in the classroom, and "do" multiculturalism the way it should be done.

The first day of classes I was met by 145 different students, 45% of whom were Latino, 10% who were Native American and were bused an hour and half each morning to come to our high school, and 90% overall of whom were living a standard of living that I had never experienced. The majority of my students lived in trailers, many of them had full time jobs outside of school, many were in gangs, and some were even homeless. These statistics slammed into my reality on the first day of classes and made my attempts at creating a multicultural environment seem ridiculous and shallow.

How could I expect these students to listen to cultural stories from around the world and to be enthusiastic about Latino literature when they were waking up at 5 a.m. to ride a bus for an hour and a half to school, going to school all day, riding home for another hour and a half, and then going to work for eight hours? What did I really know about the experiences of these students? Why were some of my white¹ students so hostile toward me, yet the Latino students who were in gangs kept coming to me for advice and just to talk? How did these students view me, and where did they view the teacher in terms of their cultural identity? Had I known the answers to even some of these questions when I began teaching, I probably would have been a more effective and influential teacher that first year. Had I looked at my own racial identity and cultural background first and then tried to learn about teaching methods for diverse populations, I probably would have understood my students' experiences better as well as how my own experiences would affect my teaching them.

During my teacher preparation program, issues of multicultural education were discussed briefly, but the issues of race, culture, and power were not. I was not asked to think about my own race and culture during my coursework, nor was I expected to. It was not until much later, during my doctoral program, that I began to explore the connection between my own story and what kind of teacher I had developed into. By analyzing my own

cultural and racial identity, I have become increasingly committed to issues of race and culture, thus driving me to include that knowledge in my teaching. When I first faced a classroom full of students from different backgrounds and races, I had no idea that their experiences in schools, at home, and in society deeply affected the way they learned. I didn't realize that some students had been given privileges that others had not and that this was a key aspect of their educational history. I do not think that I was alone in this naiveté; most preservice teachers did, and still do, lack the knowledge needed to teach students who are from different backgrounds than their own.

In a time when preservice teacher demographics are becoming culturally insular (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996) and student demographics are becoming increasingly diverse, there is an urgent need to understand the beliefs of preservice teachers in the area of multicultural education. Deborah Britzman (1986) believes that "critical consideration must be given to what happens when the student teacher's biography or cumulative social experience becomes part of the implicit context of teacher education" (p. 483). One way to address this is with the use of autobiography/life histories and narrative in teacher preparation courses; another is with discussions of race, white privilege, and social justice issues. These discussions can be helpful if preservice teachers take them into account when rewriting their autobiographies (Cochran-Smith, 1995). It is this process that I hope to demonstrate as effective through this study.

The Study

The present study seeks to investigate three preservice teachers' expressed beliefs about multicultural, anti-racist education and how their life histories influence those beliefs, as well as how the use of autobiography/life histories and

1. I use the lower case "w" for white and upper case "B" for Black in reference to racial identity just as Alice McIntyre (1997, p. 171) does, reasoning that, "Harris (1993) argues, 'both have a particular history. Although 'white' and 'Black' have been defined oppositionally, they are not functional opposites. 'White' has incorporated Black subordination; Black is not based on domination ... 'Black' is naming that is part of counter hegemonic practice' (p. 1710)."

narratives, when used in a seminar on diversity, influence preservice teachers' beliefs of multicultural education. The context for this research was a seminar I conducted in which these three preservice teachers enrolled as a required course.

The emphasis of this seminar was on the use of narratives, our own and those of others, to explore issues of multicultural, anti-racist education as well as white racial identity, white privilege, and racism. A key part of the course was for the students to write their own autobiographies and then rewrite them at the end of the seminar, taking into account what they may have overlooked previously as white women.

The process of rewriting autobiographies was an opportunity to demonstrate growth in one's racial identity and did, in fact, demonstrate these women's growth in understanding institutional racism in our society. The rewriting of their own autobiographies provided a place for what I have labeled "breakthroughs" in their understanding of who they are as white women and how that impacts who they will be as teachers.

I chose to work only with white women because they represent the majority of our teachers today, and more importantly, because I feel that white women, *and* men, don't generally think about their own race, as it has usually not been an obstacle for them to have to face. With the increase in diversity of students, it seems crucial for white teachers to think about their own racial identity in order to then be aware of their prejudices or privileges and how they come into play while teaching these students.

Research Questions

This study addresses three questions: (a) What are these preservice teachers' expressed beliefs about multicultural education?; (b) How do these preservice teachers' life histories influence their expressed beliefs about multicultural, anti-racist education?; and (c) In the context of

an eight week seminar, how does the use of autobiographies/life histories and narratives influence preservice teachers' expressed beliefs of multicultural, anti-racist education?

Significance of the Study

When discussing the topic of empowerment through multicultural education, Sleeter (1991) emphasizes the need for teacher preparation programs to acknowledge what students bring with them into these programs. She claims, "Empowering education programs work with students and their home communities to build on what they bring; disabling programs ignore and attempt to eradicate knowledge and strengths students bring, and replace them with those of the dominant society" (p. 5). In order to have an empowering education program, the use of autobiography, life history, or teaching story seems imperative to including students' experiences in learning to teach. We need to celebrate, interrogate, and critically examine the stories teachers and students bring to their classroom rather than try to wipe them out and replace them with someone else's story.

Tatum (1992) and Sleeter (1992) have both shown that undergraduate and professional development classes on racism and multicultural education can, in fact, have a significant impact on students' and teachers' racial identities. Although these are tiny steps toward eliminating individuals' "color-blind orientation" (Frankenberg, 1993), they are indeed steps in the right direction. An eight-week seminar cannot measure up to Tatum's one-semester course or Sleeter's two-year professional development study, but it can help determine the influence and effect that the use of autobiography has in relation to learning about multicultural education and beginning to understand one's own racial identity.

My Story

As a researcher who was also a participant and observer in this study, all the data I collected and analyzed were sorted through my own lens. I acknowledged this from the beginning and tried to remain aware of the impact my own perceptions of the world had on the data. My ideas evolved throughout the study as to how I was impacting the data—how I was continually learning and developing from what I discovered from my participants. During this study I filled the role of researcher, teacher, student, and observer, all roles that were influenced in different ways by the participants.

My own life history played a major role in this study. From the initial conception of this study, my background and beliefs guided my research; thus, it is imperative to share my story as an important part of this study. After conducting two previous case studies (Fernandez 1999a, 1999b) which also investigated the connection between preservice teachers' life histories and their expressed beliefs about multicultural education, I began to research more deeply the concept of whiteness and white privilege. Along with this research came more questions about my own racial identity and how it has influenced me as a teacher and a researcher.

As a 35-year-old mother, educator, researcher, and feminist, I have only begun to address the issues of my own racial identity. I am the daughter of a Canadian mother and an Argentine father who are upper-middle class and have afforded me many privileges in life. With my two older brothers, I traveled extensively while growing up, living in five countries by the age of twelve. My parents always made an effort to expose us to as much of the language and culture of each country as possible as we traveled widely throughout each area. I learned Spanish from my father at a very early age and was filled with Argentine pride coming from him.

Today, I ask myself why my Argentine father tells me I'm not Hispanic. I have come to appreciate the mixed backgrounds from which I was born and am confused by his denial of what I see as something to be proud of. I now think that I understand much better why my father does not consider himself Hispanic, and it stems from labels and perspectives. As an educator immersed in literature about racism and multicultural perspectives, I am saturated with American labels that non-Americans often don't subscribe to.

The term "Hispanic" is a good example. If a Latin American individual is asked what race she is, she will not respond "Hispanic" but will say, "soy Argentina," "soy Peruana," or "soy Mexicana"; she will not say, "soy Hispana." The term "Hispanic" has negative connotations to Latin Americans, insinuating that they are somehow all of a single "breed." Mexicans are proud of their own individual heritage and do not want to be mistaken as Argentines or Peruvians, etc. "Hispanic" is also a label that many, such as my father, feel will hold them back in a society that is racist and unjust.

I have also come to understand that from an Argentine perspective, specifically a middle and upper class Argentine perspective, many of my ancestors are from Europe, giving them the sense that they are not part of the same category as "Hispanics." This is tied to a racist ideology with which I do not agree, but out of respect for my father I have not directly confronted him about it. So what is my racial identity? I have always been considered white because of my skin color, but "Hispanic" by virtue of my name. I have been a recipient of white privilege all of my life. I do, however, embrace my Latina roots. This affiliation has been heightened by my growing awareness of those roots as I have explored the field of multicultural education. I see myself as both insider and outsider—as having both an emic and an etic personality and I seek to become an

advocate for Latino/a preservice teachers who can identify with a teacher who is a little bit like them.

As a high school teacher, I was often a confidant for Mexican students who spoke to me in Spanish about academic and social concerns. I believe that the reason students seemed to trust me was because I spoke Spanish. The relationship between language and identity is important for teachers to be aware of, especially in a time when language rights are being threatened for people of color and "the displacement of other mother tongues by English has become a popular expectation" (Fishman, 1991, p. 187). It is for that very reason that I want to continue to represent some aspect of the Latina culture if it makes me more accessible to students who otherwise might not feel they have someone to talk to.

Participants and Methodology

The three participants for this study were all white women and were an opportunistic sample as they all volunteered for this seminar. The participants included: Amy, a 32-year-old woman majoring in early childhood education; Michelle, a 28-year-old woman majoring in secondary English education; and Barbara, a 49-year-old woman majoring in secondary math education. With the data collected, I created three qualitative case studies, looking at major themes that emerged from each case as well as across cases. Data sources for this study included small group discussions, field notes and analytic memos, written documents, and artifacts. To analyze this data, I used the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and analytic induction (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), which guided me through four stages of analysis: active participant analysis, "diving in" analysis, "seeing the light" analysis, and grounded analysis.

From this analysis, three major themes emerged, each containing sub-

themes within them. The first theme was "What We Learned," and within that theme I found that the participants felt multicultural education is a political and risky agenda. Also within that theme came the subtheme of resistance to multicultural education because of its "risky" nature. The second theme which emerged was "Race, Power and Privilege." Within this theme the subthemes of white racial identity, racism, and white privilege emerged. Finally, the third theme I discovered was "Narrative and Autobiography as a Learning Tool." Within this third theme was the impact of our eight-week seminar, breakthroughs that the participants made over the course of the seminar, and the rewriting of their own autobiographies.

The three themes mentioned above revealed the importance of pedagogy that includes the use of autobiography and narrative. Resistance and nonengagement seem to be common reactions of preservice teachers when the topics of multicultural education and race are introduced. From this study, I have learned that the use of autobiography and narrative can help alleviate some of this resistance and begin to engage students in discussions that are so crucial for preservice teachers. White preservice teachers in particular, like the participants of this study, need to also understand the issues of privilege and whiteness, which are often ignored in courses on multicultural education.

Findings

The Case of Amy: I should treat others the way I want to be treated

Coming from the perspective of a preschool teacher, much of Amy's concern about multicultural education was about teaching children respect. Over the course of our seminar, Amy continued to claim that if we teach children to respect each

other at a young age this will help greatly to fight racism and discrimination. Amy's mantra seemed to be a version of the golden rule that "we need to treat others the way we want to be treated."

At one point in our discussions, Amy made a statement about never having heard racist comments before. This again seemed to emphasize her sheltered personal background as well as her privilege as a white person. The notion of white privilege seemed clear to her, yet every time she admitted that it was, in fact, there she would distance herself from it, stating that she was not part of the problem:

While the article [about white privilege] is disturbing in many ways, I cannot deny its truth. Being white has afforded me certain advantages that I did nothing to earn. On the other hand though, being who I am has also provided me with disadvantages that I did nothing to deserve. I'd like to think that there is a neutral ground somewhere where advantage and disadvantage are meaningless, but I'm not sure there is or ever could be such a place. ... It's very hard for me to accept that white privilege is something that I have to be ashamed of. White privilege is a concept that takes time and effort to incorporate into my daily life and thoughts. It is something that I am currently struggling with and I will continue to struggle with because, though I realize it's the truth, I want to think I'm not part of the racism simply because I'm white. ... White privilege is an extra burden of guilt that I simply cannot carry around right now.

After reading this journal entry, I wrote back to Amy that she indeed should not feel guilty for being white, especially if she is an advocate of anti-racism. White guilt seems to be a hurdle for individuals

to get over before they can, in fact, embrace the concept of white privilege. In her statement, Amy claimed that she did not have the strength to deal with this issue at that moment and she clearly felt burdened by the idea of white privilege.

The Case of Michelle: I am painfully aware of how many issues I have around the "isms"

Michelle came to our seminar with a firm understanding of the injustices in a lot of curriculum materials which do not embrace a multicultural perspective. In our first session she claimed, "To be truly multicultural it has to be authentic in some way. It can't be like the old history books, where the white man tells about slavery in two paragraphs. It has to be like a complete, authentic, telling."

Although her understanding of multicultural curriculum seemed strong, Michelle sometimes felt "attacked" by the political nature of multicultural education and often felt that it was "risky." This riskiness was magnified during our session surrounding gay/lesbian issues in the classroom for all of the participants, but was even more so for Michelle. In the second session of the seminar, Michelle came out as a lesbian to the class, which made our session on gay/lesbian issues very powerful for her. She wrote in her journal:

I don't know if I've ever attended a class in my life that spent more than 5 minutes talking about homosexuality. It is really painful for me to realize that. I mean, I'm 28 years old and I've been in school for almost twenty years, and I've never had a class where homosexuality was mentioned. Even in literature courses when talking about writers' biographical information. Come to think of it, I can't remember talking about it in Psychology 101, which was taught by

a lesbian. No wonder I took so long to figure out I was gay. Thanks for doing this class on gay issues.

During this session, Michelle also began to question the riskiness of being a gay teacher in a time when most teachers are not out to their students. She worried about being “found out” and how that might affect her career, as well as how being a lesbian would affect her teaching.

One way of dealing with the questions of identity that the participants came up with was through the exercise of rewriting their autobiographies. An example of how Michelle “rewrote” her autobiography was with the elaboration or rewriting of certain events in her life. In her first autobiography she wrote, “At the age of twelve, I was beaten and grounded an entire summer for having a crush on a Black guy.” I marked this passage as one to reconsider at the end of our seminar. She expanded this excerpt in her rewritten autobiography to say:

I always thought it was ironic that the only reason I even liked him was because he was the only boy in the entire school that was taller than me. The way I remember the story was I gave him a bracelet with my name on it and my sister told on me . . . My mother came to the library and dragged me out in the middle of everything. She took me home, threw me on my bed, slammed the door, and started screaming about niggers ... she said I was grounded all summer. I wasn't allowed to see anyone, but I talked to a few friends through my window and I was too afraid to tell them why I was grounded—I worried they'd beat me up because my mom was racist. They were all Mexican and Black. I can't believe now that she would react like that to something so simple. A 12-year-old giving a bracelet to a boy the same age is not very serious ... and I'm sure the

incident has something to do with why I'm just never attracted to Black people as partners. ... I also wonder if that incident has anything to do with my sister's obsession with Black guys, music, television shows, etc.

By rewriting and delving deeper into this painful incident, Michelle developed some important realizations about her feelings toward African-Americans. She went on to use this information to try and uncover how this had affected her feelings as a white woman and as a teacher of students who might not be white. She went on to question these ideas:

Not everybody is aware of racism and how it works. Then there's those people that know about racism and don't care. How do you make that line? And then is that making excuses for that person? I mean, should they still be held responsible if they've never had any education; they've just grown up in the hills, you know, with their parents on the farm and they've been taught racism and they don't know it's racism?

These questions Michelle came up with were, in essence, her breakthrough during the seminar. She began to question how to be a white anti-racist ally and how all of this would affect her as a teacher. I was inspired by the way Michelle delved so deeply into her personal feelings during our seminar. She engaged in the use of autobiographies and narratives, even after doubting their intellectual value. Of all three participants, I saw Michelle make the most dramatic leaps in connecting with the issues we discussed.

When I asked the participants to discuss how they felt our seminar may have helped them with the understanding of multicultural perspectives, Michelle told us:

It [our discussions] just feels so powerful to me. It's hard to find a place to share, to talk about this stuff. ... I mean, to give ourselves some credit. I mean, because we talked about the time constraints and stuff but, I mean, most of us are 20, 30, 40. I have no idea how old everybody is, but that's a long time to not have talked about this or not have spent two hours a week for how many weeks, so I think we've done a lot.

This statement by Michelle assured me that a seminar of this nature really did make a difference in these future teachers' perceptions of multicultural education, regardless of its length.

The Case of Barbara: "I never thought this much; I'm exhausted"

As a 49-year-old woman, Barbara's perspectives on multicultural education took on a different angle and shape than Amy or Michelle's. Barbara grew up in a generation that she claims focused on "sexism rather than racism." This perception may be interpreted as a white woman's perspective because she did not have to face racism, but Barbara did feel the effects of sexism as a female mathematician. Because of this generational difference between her and the other participants, it may have been more difficult for Barbara to expand her beliefs of multicultural education. Yet she was more committed to doing so because of her maturity and her desire to instill positive values in her children.

During our discussions of white privilege, Barbara made connections to her own life history with regards to racism. Here I saw Barbara begin the pattern of engaging and then resisting theories of racism and white privilege. Oftentimes, Barbara's comments were not meant to be intentionally resistant, but within them I heard denial about being privileged and being white. One example of this denial

was during a conversation about what it means to be white. Barbara stated:

In California, not by design, but we lived in a neighborhood that was extremely diverse. We were obviously white and we had neighbors that were Hispanic, Black, Indian from India, Native American, Filipino, but we were all the same class and there was no issue about race. You know, we all went to a block party, our kids all went to the same school. So, if you can break the cycle, then race ceases to be an issue.

Barbara may not have believed that race was a concern in her diverse neighborhood, but again, she was coming from the perspective of the dominant culture. She did not feel the pressures of being a person of color; therefore, in her mind, there was no "issue" of race. Here Barbara ignores her privileged stance as representing the dominant culture in this neighborhood because *she* lived comfortably, never feeling any racism or discrimination. Barbara also makes the comment that "racism ceases to be an issue," which also demonstrates an ignorance of how embedded racism is in our society. Barbara has not given any thought here to how her position in society influences her perceptions of race and racism.

Yet Barbara continued to try to engage the notion of white privilege. At times, she seemed to recognize the fact that white privilege is very much a part of the power structure of every facet of American life. In response to McIntosh's (1989) article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Barbara wrote:

The single most significant complaint that I have about my own education is that I was led to believe that life was a meritocracy—that achievement was the foundation of success. So it

[McIntosh's article] helped me to get an understanding of what white privilege is when the author came at it from that direction. I also really liked her concrete list of examples. For one, it's easy to read as a reminder of the privileges we are so carefully ignoring. For another, there are several examples where I thought, "I can fight that."

Like Michelle and Amy, Barbara reacted more positively to narratives than to theory about multicultural education. Barbara struggled with many subjects during these eight weeks, but she ended up feeling that our seminar challenged her and made her grow as a future teacher. At the end of our last session, Barbara made the statement that, "I never thought this much . . . since before my kids were born. I'm exhausted." As we discussed how the use of narratives had helped the three women to analyze their beliefs of multicultural education, Barbara felt that "there's more still buried," leading me to believe she would continue to work on these issues well after our seminar ended.

Discussion

At the onset of this study, I attempted to address the importance of autobiography and narrative in a course on multicultural education to emphasize the connection between life histories and beliefs about multicultural education. I now realize that as important as the use of narrative and autobiography is the need to address the resistance and nonengagement experienced by the participants of this study, which is so common to students in courses on multicultural education. As teacher educators we need to understand where this resistance comes from and how to get around it. In the book *Speaking the Unpleasant: The Politics of (Non)engagement in the Multicultural Education Terrain* (1998), Diane Goodman tries to address these concerns:

Critical, transformative multicultural education threatens students' self-concepts and identities, ideologies and world views. When we talk about power and privilege, and systematic and structural change, there are good reasons why people, especially from advantaged groups, would resist these changes and become defensive. Social change threatens the privileges (often invisible) that have been taken for granted and changes the rules of the game. It raises the fear of the unknown and the concern for one's well being (p. 250).

It is this fear of the unknown that needs to be directly addressed in multicultural education courses. By making these topics known and bringing identities and self-concepts to the forefront, we can take the unknown out of critical, transformative multicultural education to help our students become engaged and empowered.

Our eight-week seminar was a starting point for the types of conversations needed to eliminate nonengagement in preservice teachers learning about multicultural education. For these three white women, analyzing their own racial identities through writing and rewriting their autobiographies was a way to begin to understand the power structure we live in and how their race has given them advantages which are unearned privileges. These women's expressed beliefs of multicultural education changed over our eight-week course as they sought to explore their own experiences as well as those of people of color to better understand issues of multicultural education and racism.

Another crucial point to address in relation to resistance and nonengagement of students is the student-teacher relationship that takes place during these multicultural education courses. It was very difficult for me to lead a class discussion, as a teacher embracing a

multicultural and social reconstructionist view, when some of the students embraced a conservative and sometimes passive perspective. I had to know when to pull back from an issue that was creating an uncomfortable environment in our seminar as well as when to forge ahead and challenge my students to experience varied viewpoints. As we see the conservative era grow today, these issues of nonengagement and of resistance will probably only increase. Because of the increase in conservatism, it's imperative that teacher educators form strong student-teacher relationships in these courses and also address issues that may make students uncomfortable in a comforting way. Having students analyze their own stories is a way to make this a reality in a non-threatening, self-examining fashion.

When thinking of the three participants of this study in relation to resistance and nonengagement, I feel proud of the strides all three of them made to become more informed and open to issues of whiteness, racism, gay/lesbian issues, and privilege. Although Barbara seemed to resist many of the topics we covered, she was never unengaged in our class. Interestingly enough, Barbara seemed to be the most engaged student and probably worked the hardest at really trying to understand who she is and how her identity will affect her as a teacher. Barbara was also the most classic example of a white student who is completely blinded by her own privilege and social status. Regardless, Barbara did remain determined to be engaged in our discussions. It was this engagement that eventually led her to many breakthroughs in her resistance and to becoming what I feel will be a teacher dedicated to issues of multicultural education, although her work with her own white privilege and race needs to be addressed much more intensely.

Michelle, like Barbara, seemed to also be committed to issues of multicultural education by the end of our

seminar. Her nonengagement came into play when analyzing her own life history which was often painful, leading to a resistance of that analysis. Amy, on the other hand, seemed only somewhat unengaged throughout the whole seminar. I do believe that Amy wanted to engage herself in the course, but because of personal circumstances, she just couldn't bring herself to do so at that very moment. This worries me as I think she will always have circumstances in her life which are difficult and may be used as excuses for avoiding deep self-analysis with regard to white privilege and racism.

The voices and stories of Barbara, Michelle, and Amy, although only truly representative of white, female preservice teachers, demonstrate the importance of analyzing one's own racial identity before becoming a teacher. These three women, all very different in their backgrounds, demonstrated that their expressed beliefs of multicultural education were certainly influenced by their life histories. Our eight-week seminar did help them to analyze this connection through the use of autobiography and narrative, although the seminar was a small stepping-stone.

Having analyzed their own life histories, Barbara, Michelle, and Amy will hopefully feel more prepared to teach diverse populations of students on *their* first days of teaching. Had I had this type of preparation and self-analysis as a preservice teacher, my multicultural intentions and practices may have been more authentic and successful. By understanding my own cultural identity, as Barbara, Michelle, and Amy came to understand, I would certainly have recognized how my own experiences influence the way in which I teach students, especially those whose backgrounds are different than my own.

References

- Britzman, D. P. (1986). Cultural myths in the making of a teacher: Biography and

- social structure in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 442-456.
- Britzman, D. P. (1991). *Practice makes practice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (1995). Uncertain allies: Understanding the boundaries of race and teaching. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(4), 541-570.
- Feiman-Nemser, S., & Remillard, J. (1996). Prospective on learning to teach. In F. B. Murray (Ed.), *The teacher educator's handbook: Building a knowledge base for the preparation of teachers* (pp. 63-91). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fernandez, A. E. (1999a). *One student teacher's perception of multicultural education and how her life story influences these perceptions: A case study*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Arizona.
- Fernandez, A. E. (1999b). *Preservice teachers' beliefs of multicultural education and how their life stories influence these beliefs: Two case studies*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Arizona.
- Fishman, J. (1991). *Reversing the language shift*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Frankenberg, R. (1993). *The social construction of whiteness: White women, race matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goodwin, A. L. (1994). Making the transition from self to other: What do preservice teachers really think about multicultural education? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(2), 119-131.
- Goodman, D. J. (1998). Lowering the shields: Reducing defensiveness in multicultural education. In R. C. Chavez and J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non)engagement in the multicultural education terrain* (pp. 247-264). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- LeCompte, M., & Preissle, J. (with R. Tesh). (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- McIntosh, P. (1989, July/August). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1991). *Empowerment through multicultural education*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1998). Preface. In R.C. Chavez and J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non)engagement in the multicultural education terrain* (pp. xi-xiv). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 1-24.

Dr. Fernandez is an assistant professor of Education at California State University, Chico. She teaches secondary credential candidates in the areas of multicultural education, curriculum and instruction, and English education. As a former high school English teacher, Dr. Fernandez devotes a lot of time to the use of narratives and story in teacher education as a way for preservice teachers to analyze their own backgrounds and how that may influence them as future educators.