

(Re)Framing Diverse Pre-service Classrooms as Spaces for Culturally Relevant Teaching

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Our field is ushering in a new generation of teachers who need experiences that will prepare them to acknowledge the multiple worldviews of the diverse student population they will teach. For pre-service teachers working in urban under-resourced classrooms, constructing alternative practices rooted in critical ideology that honors their students' inquiry is a difficult task. To examine the complexities of this process, this article presents findings from a case study designed to understand how one pre-service teacher navigated the sociopolitical terrain of her middle school curricula and the pedagogical choices she made to create an engaging learning environment. Findings indicate that she fostered pedagogical third spaces to mediate conversations about diversity, equity, and social change with her middle school students.

Keywords: *middle school education, multicultural education, teacher education*

I was only in the room for five minutes and sweat was dripping down my back. I looked around the room and noticed that most of the students were slumped over their desks with their heads down. At that moment I stopped thinking about the research project and questioned the conditions in which the students I had been observing for the past few weeks were asked to learn in. This pushed me to think about the analogy Alice Walker made to orchids. (Excerpt from Price-Dennis's Reflective Journal, May, 2007)

Walker (2006) highlights the ability of life to sustain itself regardless of the impoverished conditions that surround it on a daily basis. She presents a story about orchids and the tenacity they display by thriving, even blossoming in rotting logs or ordinary trees without being cared for by anyone. During the 2006-2007 school year, Price-Dennis worked with Jill (pseudonym), a White pre-service teacher, to document how Jill engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy with her urban middle school students—which were experiencing conditions akin to those described by Walker (2006). Price-Dennis wanted to know what could be done as more and more African American students were being failed by the system. As the authors (henceforth we) now reflect on Jill's experience with the students—mostly African American—who walked into their semi-lit, hot and humid classroom each day, we wonder if school functioned as their rotting log.

For pre-service teachers working in urban under-resourced and over scrutinized middle school classrooms, acknowledging the politics of teaching in their field placements and actively working to construct alternatives rooted in critical ideology is a difficult task to accomplish in a short period of time. To shed light on the complexities of this process, this article presents findings from a case study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1994) designed to understand how one pre-service teacher navigated the sociopolitical terrain of the middle school curricula and the pedagogical choices she made to create an engaging learning environment for all students. In so doing, we trace her ideological commitments from the university to the middle school classroom. Our goal is to understand how these factors influenced her work with a diverse student population.

SOCIOHISTORICIZING RACIALIZED FAILURE IN U.S. SCHOOLS

It has been more than 50 years since schools were racially integrated in the United States. Yet, its public schools are still not successfully educating a diverse society. While American public schools have a diverse body of students, those succeeding academically are mostly White, from economically advantaged backgrounds (Goodwin, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). In 1992, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 40% of the nation's school-aged population was made up of students of color, whereas 90% of the teachers were White (NCES, 1992). The percentage of students of color has only risen since then. This statistic is cited here to provide context for the cultural discontinuity that exists in the field of teaching and teacher education.

The majority of pre-service teachers entering the profession do not share the same cultural, linguistic, or racial background with the majority of the students with whom they will work on a daily basis (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Consequently, their ability to navigate multiple worldviews may be hampered because they are largely unaware of the ways their identities as White middle class individuals have been associated with unnamed privileges (McIntosh, 1988; Sleeter, 2001; Thompson, 2003). As a result, the field of teacher education is riddled with stories of White pre-service teachers resisting experiences that require them to seriously critique their White identity and the privileges associated with that status—e.g., conducting home visits in economically fragile areas of town; discussing the benefits of Whiteness. Through the literature we learn that many consider knowledge to be culture-free (Grant & Sleeter, 1996) and thus embrace a norm based on the “dominant” culture and discourse. Ethnocentrically, they may make

judgments that another cultural community's ways are immoral, unwise, or inappropriate based on . . . [their] own cultural background Another community's practices and beliefs are evaluated as inferior without considering their origins, meanings, and functions from the perspective of that community. It is a question of prejudging without appropriate knowledge. (Rogoff, 2003, p. 15)

This establishes a dichotomy where the values teachers most commonly associate with success and hard work are those colored through a White supremacy perspective (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Ironically, the power of changing what counts as desirable or successful and embracing teaching for social justice in schools today is in the hands of teachers who often succeeded in status quo pedagogies and have positive memories of their own schooling (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008). Many teachers entered the profession because they did well as students in schools, thus thinking that they already knew exactly how to teach before entering teacher education programs (Haddix, 2008). The reality is that they do know how to teach—just like they learned—in unjust systems that continue to perpetuate inequities and segregate academic success (Delpit, 1988). If left unchallenged, such beliefs will continue to enact savage inequalities in our schools (Kozol, 1991).

ADDRESSING DIVERSITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

While seeking to recruit more teachers of color, teacher educators must also work to prepare mostly White female teachers to teach multiculturally (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; Haddix, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2008). Carter and Goodwin (2004) documented the low expectations of many White teachers towards children of color—framing them as biologically and culturally inferior. While well-meaning, such teachers still perceive cultural and linguistic diversities as deviant, as needing to be fixed, or alternatively they believe that certain students cannot be fixed and take a “helping the disadvantaged” teaching approach (Lawrence, 1997). This limited understanding of anti-bias approaches to teaching and lack of recognition of privilege is detrimental to educating diverse students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2000) and creates a mandate for documenting practices that work against this mindset.

The field of teaching and teacher education is ushering in a new generation of teachers who need experiences that will prepare them to acknowledge and engage multiple worldviews. This generation of teachers will have the privilege of working with an increasingly diverse population of students encompassing a range of racial, cultural, linguistic, sexual, and economic locations/positions/realities (Blackburn, 2003; Dyson, 2008). Therefore, a goal of teacher education is to prepare students to teach and learn in a way that respects and honors these divergent perspectives (Kinloch, 2005). The data from this study suggest that a critical approach to teacher education, grounded in sustained conversations on equity, diversity, and successful teaching and learning in a range of environments is needed. Such a perspective can generate sophisticated understandings of what it means to contribute to innovative and engaging practices that support diverse learners whose racial identities are often different from their teachers'.

To truly appreciate diversities and challenge color-blind attitudes perpetuated by institutional discourses (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) that have traditionally and historically failed students of color, pre-service teachers need to understand how their racial, cultural, socioeconomic, sexual, and linguistic backgrounds and identities continue to provide institutional privileges (Banks, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Haddix, 2008; Sleeter, 2008). Across time and space, studies (Galman et al., 2010; Sleeter, 2001; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005) have authored a meta-narrative of White teachers as unwilling and/or unknowledgeable in regard to educating children of color. Galman, Pica-Smith, and Rosenberger (2010) suggested that White pre-service teachers do not have the desire to interrogate connections among power, privilege, and student achievement. Sleeter (2001) and Williams and Evans-Winters (2005) suggested that White pre-service teachers often do not have the skills to negotiate daily interactions with students and families who do not share similar backgrounds. Seeking to flip the script authored by multiple studies on Whiteness and/in teacher education (e.g., Galman et al., 2010; Sleeter, 2001; Souto-Manning, 2011; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005); this study highlights the work of one White pre-service teacher who counters this narrative. This is not an attempt to re-center Whiteness or support meta-narratives that position White teachers as saviors (i.e., *Freedom Writers*; *Dangerous Minds*), but rather to document and learn from a situated representation of the pedagogical possibilities that lay ahead.

ON SOCIAL JUSTICE AND/IN EDUCATION

The phrase teaching for social justice has proliferated in educational scholarship and settings, generating a variety of discourses about what it means to engage in social justice teaching (Jones & Enriquez, 2010; North, 2008). We draw on the framework of social justice education as we address the potential for working with pre-service teachers to create transformative experiences for themselves and the students with whom they work in middle school classrooms. These experiences reflect the desire of all parties involved to counter debilitating educational practices that result in many students of color failing their courses; being tracked in lower ability classes; being perceived as lazy and incapable of learning; being suspended and removed from class at higher rates than White students; being required to speak and learn in a second language (mainstream American English) without the support of their home language (e.g., African American language; Spanish). Lipman's framework for social justice (2004) is a useful heuristic to frame this pre-service teacher's decisions within the field of social justice education—and has three broad objectives for pre-service teachers' practices: (1) Reflect on ideologies that undergird the school curriculum; (2) Question how decisions are made and who benefits; and (3) Attend to factors that lead to systemic inequities in schools.

Across the literature there are examples of teacher educators (Damico & Riddle, 2006; Irizarry, 2009; Kinloch, 2005) and classroom teachers (Bomer, 2005; Vasquez et al., 2003) working to illustrate and enact a humanizing pedagogy intended to dismantle structural inequities that impact access to quality education for all students. Although there is much debate about what social justice education is, there is a growing consensus that supports why it is needed. Influenced by the work of bell hooks (1994) and her call to accept the political nature of education by viewing the classroom as a "space for the development of critical consciousness, where there would be dialogue and mutual growth of both

students and professor" (p. 101), Price-Dennis engaged in critical inquiry with three pre-service teachers—one of whom is the focus of this article—to demonstrate the possibilities of this model. Taking this position assumes that students are not passive recipients of knowledge or information, but active learners constructing knowledge (Freire, 1970). Therefore, to educate becomes a verb full of transformative action and experiences that collectively disrupt oppressive teaching, learning, and living conditions.

Literature on social justice education advocates for:

- reflecting on and revising pedagogical practices across time and space;
- working in "real-time" without the aid of a blueprint or script;
- re-imagining classroom practices to take into account, build upon, and extend students' "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005); and
- establishing a learning environment where students are seen as active participants who construct knowledge, negotiate meaning, and use their agency to challenge oppressive practices that marginalize certain groups in our society (Souto-Maning, 2010c).

The analysis is supported by Lipman's (2004) model, which frames social justice as the pursuit of equity, agency, cultural relevance, and critical literacy.

METHODS

Contexts and Participants

During the 2006-2007 school year, Price-Dennis worked with Jill—the focal pre-service teacher in this study—to document the pedagogical choices Jill made to create an engaging learning environment for a diverse group of students—mostly African American—that bridged her emerging theory of social justice education with her daily practice. To investigate this issue, a case study was conducted within the largest urban school district of a large Midwestern city. During the months of January through June 2007, Jill was assigned to an urban middle school and worked with students in grades 6–8, spending the last eight weeks as a full-time student teacher in charge of curriculum and teaching.

The initial questions used to shape this study were organized around the assumption that Jill would have particular ways of planning and enacting principles of social justice education:

- How would Jill—a White pre-service teacher—embody being an agent of change in the racially and linguistically diverse setting in which she was working?
- In what ways would she advocate for a critical approach to planning and teaching with peers and mentor teachers?
- What pedagogical practices would she rely on to implement her vision?

Together, findings from these questions provide us with insight into how one White pre-service teacher built an understanding of what it means to teach children from under-resourced schools who did not share many racial, cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic similarities with her.

At the time of selecting participants for the study, Price-Dennis knew that Jill grew up in an urban environment and wanted to understand how to plan and teach lessons from a culturally relevant perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1999). She took part in an enrichment program available at the University for pre-service teachers who expressed interest in urban education. As a member of this program, Jill spent part of her first summer in the Masters in Education (M.Ed.) program working with urban teachers and students in a math and science summer camp. Jill entered the program living out her commitment to equitable education, with a specific interest in working with African American middle school students.

Jill is a White female student from a working class family. She grew up in a large urban city in the northern region of a large Midwestern state. Her early school years were spent in what she calls a "poor urban school district." During this period of her life, most of her friends were African Americans and she immersed herself in African American cultural practices. Her family moved to the suburbs when

she was getting ready to enter high school and she found herself in a culture shock. She did not fit in with her peer group in the new school and had a hard time adjusting her clothes, mannerisms, and tastes in music to fit into the so-called norm in her new environment. Jill considered herself to be an outsider and struggled adjusting there. After Jill graduated from high school, she attended college and decided to work with children before applying to the Middle Childhood M.Ed. program at a large Midwestern university. She wanted to become a teacher to make a difference in the lives of all children, particularly African American students in low-performing urban schools. Jill found it difficult to navigate the racial politics in this university setting and, in an interview during her student teaching semester, shared that she still found it difficult to fit in this environment.

Jill was assigned to complete her winter field experience and student teaching at Shady Lane Middle School (pseudonym), in a large urban school district that serves approximately 55,000 students. As part of a district with the largest student population, Shady Lane is not immune from issues that affect most urban districts. As a former elementary teacher in this school district Price-Dennis was aware of the revolving door that ushered in new administrative regimes every 3-4 years; excessive movement among effective administrators; and constant changes in the approved curriculum guides. During Price-Dennis's tenure in this district, she received a new curriculum guide each year, witnessed the purchase of \$15,000 worth of materials and texts for her building's book room only to see it replaced with anthologies two years later; and administered countless bubble tests to students whose scores were used to "measure" progress toward the district's benchmarks created for the state's proficiency tests. Price-Dennis understood the context Jill had to navigate and used her insider knowledge to assist Jill in working around potential roadblocks.

At the time of this study, 506 students were enrolled at Shady Lane and 54.9% of them were classified as economically disadvantaged (Ohio State Department of Education, 2007). Although the school received an "Effective" rating on the state-issued report card and met the AYP goals outlined by the school district, Jill documented a disproportionate number of students of color failing more than one course and in jeopardy of repeating seventh grade. The majority of students failing one or more courses did not live in the middle-class neighborhood surrounding the school. They were bused in from less affluent areas and were initially zoned to attend less desirable schools in the district. Many people who live and worked in the city, recognize Shady Lane as a choice school and applied for in-district transfers to provide their children with the opportunity to attend this school. However, being in a more desirable school did not guarantee academic success as reported by Jill.

Jill noted that her mentor teacher had twice mentioned differences he observed between the neighborhood kids and the other students who attended Shady Lane. He specifically made note of issues related to their behavior and scholastic aptitude. Jill also shared with Price-Dennis that she overheard a group of students discussing their perception of the school, and found that the students of color (primarily African American males) did not feel as if they belonged in the environment. This information becomes invaluable when comparing the segregation that occurred and the literacy practices and pedagogy provided for students in the lower tracked classes which were predominately made up of African American students who were bused in from other areas of town.

Study

In February 2007, Price-Dennis selected three pre-service teachers to be part of a larger study (Price Dennis, 2009)—Jill was one of them. Collectively the group was committed to their students and to the tenets of critical pedagogy (Souto-Manning, 2010a). Price-Dennis's selection criteria were based on demonstrated understandings of race, equity, and social change; connection to critical literacy and teacher inquiry projects; commitment to advocacy; interest in developing plans addressing race, equity, and social change; and a willingness to reflect on their practice. Class assignments, individual interviews, survey results, and discussions were used to gauge understandings of key concepts. To gain deeper insights into their practices, Price-Dennis limited the number of focal pre-service teachers to three. For the purpose of this article, we present data from Jill's individual case to highlight the complexities of learning to teach in an urban school.

Over the course of ten months, Price-Dennis worked with Jill in varying supportive roles. She was the instructor for Jill's Middle Childhood Reflective Seminar course; she conducted observations at Jill's field placement for three months during student teaching, and she was the program manager for Jill's graduate teacher licensure program. In February 2007, Price-Dennis collected an outline of Jill's unit plan for student teaching. Before Jill began her student teaching, Price-Dennis asked for an updated version of the outline, along with copies of lessons plans, unit goals, and additional planning resources related to Jill's planning for student teaching. These artifacts were used to gain a deeper understanding of conceptual issues Jill hoped to address during her student teaching and the level of commitment she had to addressing diversity, equity, and social change with students.

The primary sources of data for this study were field notes and transcripts of audio recordings from classroom observations; university coursework that addressed diversity, equity, and social change; participant planning artifacts; semi-structured interviews; student artifacts; and photographs of classroom lessons. Beginning in March 2007, Price-Dennis observed Jill teach lessons at her student teaching site on eight different occasions. Each observation lasted about one hour with 10-15 minutes of discussion and reflection before or after the lesson. Price-Dennis audio recorded each observation and took detailed field notes. Conducting observations in the classroom as well as audio recording literacy events allowed Price-Dennis to document the ways Jill's plans converged with or diverged from the original intent of her plans for that setting. Observations also highlighted Jill's ways of grappling with and managing the complexities and realities of working in "real-time" within a classroom setting. During the same period of time, Price-Dennis also worked with Jill for eight weeks in her reflective seminar course for which Price-Dennis was instructor. Price-Dennis paid specific attention to class interactions where discussions pertaining to diversity, equity, and social change were the topic of discussion and took anecdotal records based on class interactions. Of the eight observations, Price-Dennis chose to focus on three that centered on social justice; teaching for equity; and engaging students in meaningful lessons. Price-Dennis also recorded field notes after each session.

Throughout the study, Price-Dennis examined Jill's understandings of diversity, equity, and social change by attending to her questions, goals, and classroom practices in the specific setting where she completed her student teaching. Price-Dennis facilitated two semi-structured interviews with Jill, both of which were audio recorded and transcribed. The first interview took place in February 2007. The purpose of this interview was to explain the research project; find out what Jill's understandings, goals, and commitments were with regards to teaching for diversity, equity, and social change; and to generate ideas for collaborating on the documentation of this research study. Price-Dennis explained to Jill that she was interested in her performance of critical pedagogy, in her engaged and sustained effort to create a space for students to voice their perspectives about diversity and equity, challenge dominant ideologies, and work toward social change. Price-Dennis felt this goal could only be accomplished by partnering with Jill to document her evolving pedagogy. The second interview took place in March, prior to Jill's full-time student teaching. The purpose of this interview was to document any shifts in conceptions about working in a diverse setting, equitable learning conditions, or social change. Price-Dennis wanted to clarify what she thought Jill's understandings about race, equity, and social change were based on the survey, previous interview, and past coursework. Price-Dennis also wanted to gain more information about if and how Jill's understandings were expanded during the year in the M.Ed. program, and how those conceptions influenced her planning for and during student teaching. Price-Dennis began each interview with a list of questions to ask and concepts to talk about but followed the lead of Jill's responses when necessary. As a result, new questions were generated that were specific to Jill's experiences.

Each thematically driven interview provided insights into philosophical beliefs concerning planning, implementation, and student participation in critical teaching events. The following themes emerged from on-going observations and review of data:

- Definition of race and social justice;
- Meeting the needs of a middle childhood student;
- Critical perspectives on literature;
- Identity construction;

- Classroom literacy practices;
- Merging local and academic knowledge; and
- Equitable learning environments.

DATA ANALYSIS

Adhering to a framework of qualitative case study research, the data for this research were inductively analyzed (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994). The premise of case studies is that:

Any detailed "case" (e.g. a studied teacher's pedagogy . . .) is just that—a case. It is not the phenomenon itself (e.g. effective teaching . . .). That phenomenon may look and sound different in different social and cultural circumstances, that is, in different cases. This relationship between a grand phenomenon and mundane particulars suggests key theoretical assumptions of qualitative case studies. (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 4)

With this in mind, we sought to understand how Jill interpreted tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy in her teaching to address issues of diversity, equity, and social change with middle school students.

The focal questions for this study required an analysis of data through multiple iterations with different purposes. In addition to examining the data for patterns of Jill's concerns, actions, and conceptions of critical work in classrooms, we needed to understand the data in light of the existent research and theory related to social justice teacher education, critical pedagogy, and critical literacy. Data were analyzed using the principles of grounded theory, involving repeated reading of multiple data sources to identify significant themes. Upon identifying key themes, data were further analyzed through the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach involved four phases: comparing observed outcomes to emerging data themes, testing and redefining themes as needed, reducing the original number of themes, and constructing a theoretical position to explain data. Price-Dennis read the collected data and used open coding to identify themes and patterns. She also created analytic memos along with field notes to keep track of ideas and concepts she wanted to address in subsequent observations or conversations with Jill. Then, she compared codes across Jill's philosophy statement, reflective journal, university coursework, interview transcripts, classroom artifacts, and transcripts of classroom literacy events. Categories were reduced by focusing on key literacy events in the classroom involving diversity, equity, or social justice. Data were then sorted, coded, compared and contrasted data, and reduced.

In each phase of data collection and analysis Price-Dennis's goal was to allow the data to present a grounded theory of critical pedagogy and literacy instruction that emerged from data sources and observations. During the first phase, Price-Dennis collected data to foreground students' understandings of how diversity and equity impacted student literacy achievement. During the second phase, Price-Dennis combined this information with a survey (administered to twenty-six people) and interview to narrow down a list of potential participants. During the third phase, Price-Dennis obtained coursework, interviewed Jill, and conducted eight weekly observations to gain deeper insight into how her coursework and prior comments and experience with diversity, equity, and social change influenced her curriculum development and teaching. As she collected data, Price-Dennis looked for themes that ran across Jill's coursework, classroom observations, and interviews. During the final phase of data collection, Price-Dennis relied on Jill's reflections and written descriptions of her student teaching experience along with additional coursework, and a final interview to provide more elaborated insight for analysis.

After data were collected, indexed, and coded, Price-Dennis created a data packet (Rogers & Mosley, 2006) based on classroom literacy events involving diversity, equity, or social change. Data packets included excerpts from interviews, coursework, reflective journals, field notes, photography, and student artifacts, capturing a lesson that engaged students in discussions or activities that addressed race, equity, or social change. Data were analyzed holistically and triangulated allowing connections across sources to generate themes for analysis.

FINDINGS

Findings indicate that Jill was able to account for developing conceptualizations of diversity, equity, and social change through her pedagogy during student teaching. Her professional stances involved expanding her knowledge base and working from theory to practice and back to theory. As a pre-service teacher, Jill envisioned literacy as a means to democratic education, embracing teaching and learning as political acts. The findings also suggest that Jill relied on various critical pedagogical strategies to mediate conversations about race, equity, and social change in her middle school setting. Literacy practices such as peer interviews, small group reading and open response to a variety of texts, and creating anchor charts to keep track of questions and ideas related to social issues created spaces for intensive dialogue about issues of race, equity, and social change. Collaborative work groups and arts-based responses also expanded how students interacted with text and demonstrated understandings of complex ideas. Jill designed her lesson plans generatively—based on ideas, interests, or questions that students raised regarding race, equity, or social change. She then codified such ideas and engaged in collective problem posing and problem solving (Souto-Manning, 2010a). Together, she and the middle school students envisioned spaces of possibility for action.

Jill incorporated her students' interests and inquiries into lesson plans, drawing from their cultural knowledge and lived experiences from home and school communities. By fusing these two worlds, Jill was better able to help students understand the systemic nature of oppression and discrimination as well as how it operated in a variety of places in their lives. She fostered pedagogical third spaces (Souto-Manning, 2010b). She examined how race, equity, and social change matter in teaching and learning by connecting these ideas to the everyday lives of the middle school students with whom she worked. Overall, Jill's pedagogical choices included the use of dialogue, personal relationships, and literacy practices.

On the Use of Dialogue

Jill regarded learning as a social practice. Thus, students were constantly participating in whole class discussions, being invited to work in small groups, or share ideas with partners. Jill kept charts of her students' ideas and asked them to be respectful of ideas or opinions shared by classmates. De-centering the teacher's voice as the dominant source of knowledge provided an opportunity for the students to demonstrate how they were making meaning of the curriculum. Their questions, concerns, ideas, and critiques became the source from which the curriculum was being navigated and debated. The dialogue took place in small groups, whole groups, with partners, or check-ins with Jill as she moved around the classroom to assess how students were making sense of daily assignments. Jill designed lessons that built on the social and physical nature of their interactions. For example, when posing a question to begin a lesson, Jill asked the students to move to the side of the room that reflected their opinion. Then, she asked them to discuss their opinion with the students in their newly formed group and collectively create a list of reasons to support their opinion. This allowed students to see divergent positionalities and points of view and to learn dialogically from each other.

On Establishing Personal Relationships

One of Jill's overarching goals was to personalize the role of teacher for her students. During each observation of her class, Price-Dennis noted how Jill would share what would appear to be extraneous information about her life, which she would later articulate to be a deliberate attempt at connecting with her students. For example, Jill would mention hip-hop songs she heard on the radio on a road trip with a family member and ask students about the artist. She would bring up her favorite candy and how she grabbed the wrong flavor of Jawbreakers and had to drink a lot of water to recover. To someone who is not part of a cultural group that spends a lot of time debating hip-hop music and artists, along with flavors of Jawbreakers and Chick-o-sticks, this information may seem trivial. But, to the students in Jill's class, this information was part of their daily

conversations. She knew this and made a point to share how she enjoyed some of these same experiences. Jill created spaces for a generative curriculum—a curriculum built from the ground up—as she sought to syncretically bring together students’ interests, backgrounds, and cultural literacies with the school sanctioned curriculum. She sought to create a pedagogical third space (Souto-Manning, 2010b) by destabilizing the rigid teacher-student power relationship that was established in the classroom. Jill sought to blur the role of teacher and learner (Freire, 1970), dialectically negotiating authority. She wanted the students to view her as a real person, with hopes, feelings, fears, successes, and failures. Jill made herself vulnerable and thus opened up spaces for students to do the same. She made a point to tell students when they had a good idea, raised an interesting question, or did a great job on an assignment. Jill used specific language that valued what students had done, pushing them further.

On Literacy Practices

The lessons Jill created for her students centered on references to popular culture—emanating from their interests rather than from her expertise or preferences. She also made an effort to provide a variety of options—arts-based responses to classroom assignments that stemmed from those popular culture references. Students created collages, made CD covers to represent their hopes and dreams, and participated in lessons designed to have them embody responses to texts and ideas from lessons. The goal was to move away from paper and pencil assessments—which further reified ethnocentric literacy practices (Souto-Manning, 2010c)—allowing students more opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in different media. Jill did not abandon the literacy practices her mentor teacher had established; she expanded the options available to students. The intent of her pedagogical choices was to capture the community and popular culture knowledge students brought from home and unify those together with the school curriculum in syncretic and meaningful ways. The overall impact for the students was more space to carve out their interpretation of what they were learning—and to have their perspectives and voices heard. Table 1 outlines how Jill’s pedagogy expanded the options available to students.

Table 1

Literacy Practices: A Comparison and Expansion

<i>Literacy Practices: Mentor Teacher</i>	<i>Literacy Practices: Jill’s Student Teaching</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Worksheets</i> • <i>Lecture</i> • <i>Read from textbook and answer questions</i> • <i>Individual work</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Guided notes</i> • <i>Visual media (slide shows; video; maps)</i> • <i>Group projects</i> • <i>Arts-based projects</i> • <i>Work in multiple configurations</i> • <i>Partner reading and responding to questions</i>

The mentor teacher’s practices highlighted competition and individuality, thereby aligning with the banking model of education, which reinforces the status quo (Freire, 1970). Jill’s practices—even as a pre-service student teacher, a role traditionally bound by many constraints—moved away from calcified notions of the expert and embraced more democratic practices that challenged ethnocentric literacy practices.

As Jill expanded pedagogical possibilities, she located her own literacy practices as ethnocentric (Souto-Manning, 2010c). Becoming aware of the alignment of her own literacy practices with success as sanctioned and defined by the school, she sought to embrace and value student literacy practices making them part of the official and sanctioned curriculum. In addition, Jill explored her own racial privileging and acknowledged that to understand one’s racial identity and development is not a simple

process (Lawrence & Tatum, 1999). In doing this work, it is important to understand that the process of racial identification and recognition of racial privileging is complex (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). As we learn from Jill, it is important to understand that teacher education can create spaces of possibility where individuals not only acknowledge racial inequities, but also explore their racial identities (e.g., Whiteness), envisioning their roles in positive pedagogical transformations.

DISCUSSION

Nurturing a Community of Inquiry

Jill wanted her students to recognize that she cared about their lives and wanted to acknowledge their successes—in their own terms and not as measured against her own ethnocentric notions of success. She recognized each student as a unique human being—an exception, as most of the students in this class had the opposite experience with other teachers throughout the day. During one observation, a small group of students working on an assignment shared the following thoughts with Price-Dennis: “That’s what we like about Ms. Lane, she helps us. She reads the directions to us and explains what to do. She doesn’t just give out the paper and say do it. You know, she acts like she cares.” Jill was seeking to foster a different kind of space to learn in—one that showed value, compassion, and care for her students’ lives, ideas, and futures. She fostered practices that did not assume common understandings and alignments. She explained what she meant in respectful ways, thus covertly acknowledging the cultural nature of knowledge and challenging practices that may have led to the overrepresentation of African American students in special education. By assuming that students’ home cultures and linguistic practices are aligned with the discourses privileged in schools, many teachers disadvantage students of color. Jill was acknowledging such misalignments as she was enacting her pedagogy of love—truly caring for her students and their culturally-located literacy practices.

Jill set out to create a learning environment where students were invited to participate as knowledgeable teachers and learners. In practice, this meant moving away from a silent, individualized autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1995) to a space where students were asked to work with a partner or group to answer questions and then share what they had learned with the rest of the class. It meant allowing students to move around the room during lessons, pose questions to peers, and have discussions about the responses. Jill was aware that her students had opinions about how they were experiencing school, particularly those who were marginalized due to identities linked to cultural constructions around “difficult behavior,” “English proficiency,” or “cognitive ability.” She understood the need to help them share their ideas with each other as capable human beings, without reciprocating the methods of silencing that they collectively experienced every day. In essence, this required Jill to construct a space where school and the curriculum could be politicized and students would be motivated to learn.

The data suggest three principles that Jill consistently employed in her teaching: (a) Each person has something to teach and something to learn from everyone in the class; (b) The teacher is only one source of knowledge in the classroom, not the only one; and (c) Debating ideas or asking questions is not about yelling over someone, but pushing back (asking questions to clarify meaning or problematize issues) and seeking to understand multiple realities.

Working with the students to convey critical viewpoints about their schooling experiences were essential to the learning community Jill was carving out. Jill believed that her students had been disengaged because they felt their voices were not valued or being taken seriously by the adults in the building. Therefore, re-centering silenced student voices and exploring issues that mattered to students—e.g., race, popular culture, and violence—were necessary and powerful starting points.

Addressing Inequities

Jill’s effort to shift the focus away from the teacher and the “culturally neutral” (Grant & Sleeter, 1996) curriculum and onto the students’ interests and life experiences made a difference in how students participated in class. She explicitly made the students’ production of knowledge and agency the focus

of her work as she tried to navigate multiple domains. She began her anti-racist journey by problematizing the silence about Whiteness and its privileges (Tatum, 1992). Because of her upbringing, she had stepped aside from locating her White identity as American and was able to tease apart the double location she occupied, developing a double-consciousness that is inherent to those who do not fit the so-called norm, who, as Du Bois (1897) wrote, have a consciousness fettered by a "second-sight," cluttered by a "veil." The concept of double-consciousness can be brought to light in teaching for social justice, to unveil and investigate issues of racial power and privilege in education. Jill gained a new understanding of educating African American students when she realized—through her pedagogical practices and stances as well as in interviews that:

the Negro is . . . born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (Du Bois, 1897, pp. 194-195)

Overall, developing this double-consciousness can help unveil the privileges of White pre-service teachers and deconstruct the idea of meritocracy while simultaneously introducing a veil as they read the world in which they live from conscious locations and positioning. This double-consciousness led to Jill's reconceptualizing and restructuring of literacy practices and classroom interactions.

By restructuring the literacy practices in which students engaged, Jill made space in the curriculum multiple voices to enter the conversation. She modeled and taught students how to express, listen to, and respond to divergent points of view—acknowledging their communicative repertoires as valid while introducing them to power Discourses—ways of being, behaving, talking and interacting (Gee, 1996). Jill made an effort in her lesson plans to create situations where students would be required to juxtapose their positions and examine those as a community of learners. Every lesson Price-Dennis observed included time for inquiry into multiple positionalities and points of view—thus reconceptualizing the curriculum in inherently multicultural ways.

Many weeks before Jill assumed full responsibility for teaching and planning, she observed how her mentor teacher interacted with the students, how he planned, and how he attended to the curriculum. She found that in the majority of classroom interactions, the students were expected to work quietly and independently. A typical lesson involved lecture from guided notes using the overhead, and then completing a worksheet based on the lecture or the social studies textbook. She noted on several occasions that students seemed uninterested during these lessons and lacked motivation to complete the assigned work. This was evident by incomplete assignments, lack of participation during discussions, and missing homework assignments. Jill had noted in various discussions and in her teacher research project that students were shut down when they attempted to discuss "controversial topics" such as race or the war in Iraq. She wrote, ". . . teachers need to move outside of their comfort zone and re-adjust teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse populations." She felt students lacked incentive to engage in the official curriculum when social and cultural events from the community that shaped their production of knowledge—and thus their own selves—were excluded. Jill worked to make sure her classroom could provide a space for students to examine multiple facets of a topic.

Before Jill began her student teaching, she explained that she wanted to expand the restrictive district curriculum in meaningful ways to include multiple perspectives and life experiences. This meant that Jill would spend a lot of time after school looking for outside resources to expand the curriculum in an effort to disrupt the traditional model of teaching that students were experiencing and rejecting. This was her attempt at bridging the theory she learned in university courses with the needs and knowledge of her students. As such, she created lessons that pushed students to consider missing perspectives and ask why those perspectives were absent from the curriculum. She included popular culture in the curriculum and created projects that examined divergent opinions. An example of such work was an arts-based project, part of a unit she taught about the Renaissance.

During a lesson Price-Dennis observed, Jill began by reviewing material from the previous day and then linked this review to a discussion about how people in society comment on their social conditions or views of the world. She showed several slides of artwork from the Renaissance period and asked the students to share how artwork can provide commentaries on society. Price-Dennis wrote in her field notes:

This is the first step in asking students to read the world. First, they must recognize that others have found ways to show them versions of the world that are imbedded in everyday cultural artifacts. Once they have a chance to explore and analyze these perspectives, their ability to recognize the tensions and contradictions that exist among various versions of lived experiences in our world will become more frequent and sophisticated. (5.15.07)

Jill began by showing a slide of the Annunciation, a Catholic religious image. The slide of Renaissance art depicted the Virgin Mary and an angel near her. She asked the students to share what they thought of the painting, posing questions such as: "What does it mean?" and "What's happening in the painting?" As students began to respond, Jill probed with other questions, such as: "Why do you think the lady in the painting is a widow?" and "What aspects of daily life are shown in this picture?" Students continued the discussion about how the artist had depicted daily life and provided insights into what was meaningful to groups of people during the Renaissance.

Next, Jill's lesson took a turn unexpected by the students, but purposeful to her. She clicked to a slide of Akon's *Convicted* CD cover that depicts him dressed up in a suit in an empty courtroom. She asked the same series of questions: "What does the cover mean?" and "What's happening in the scene?" As the students responded this time, Jill pointed out that Akon is sitting in front of the jury box; she asked the students to comment on his appearance and what that has to do with the statement he is trying to make about his life. Then, Jill moved on to share slides of Ludacris's CD cover, *Word of Mouth*, Metallica's CD cover of . . . *And Justice for All*, and Paul Wall's CD cover of *Get Money Stay True*. The basis for her questions remained the same—thereby valuing art across time and space and moving away from ethnocentric curricular notions. In considering the art presented collectively, she went on to ask: "What are the artists trying to convey about their lives? Their society?" and "Are there critiques of the world or messages that we may have overlooked?"

After twenty minutes of thoughtful discussion, Jill told the students that they were going to create CD covers to represent their society. She asked them to think about what was important to them. Specifically, she asked: "What message do you want to convey about your life?" She also asked them how this assignment could be a place to counter images that others have projected on them, challenging stereotypes about who they are in the world—offering counternarratives. Students had a chance to not only engage in reading worlds, but were invited to rewrite their own worlds and identities in a critical and relevant way.

Jill's lesson was significant because she was able to draw direct connections between popular culture and the Renaissance—syncretically bringing together two apparently opposite worlds in a way that was academically sound and relevant to students' cultural identities at the same time. This approach allowed students to draw on their expertise in music, hip-hop, and issues that plague celebrities. By reading the CD cover art as a text that works to position its audience and subjects in particular ways, Jill was modeling how to speak back or disrupt meta-narratives that operate on an unconscious level in our society; from religious icons to urban youth cultural references. She was involving them in appropriating institutional discourses which cast less than desirable identities onto African American boys—as opposed to being colonized by such discourses (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). This message was clear in their dialogue: Images and texts are not fixed.

Her lesson also created an opportunity for Jill to draw on her knowledge of hip-hop culture—which she had learned was of prevalent interest to many students. In this classroom, her access to and experience with youth and popular culture was invaluable. She knew how to make connections between curriculum and popular culture by building on her students' understanding of images and texts from art forms that she also enjoyed. By positioning her students as resources and directly drawing on their cultural experiences and personal learning styles, Jill helped them to gain access to a language of

critique and resistance. Jill was able to capture the political and social critique this genre of music relied upon to examine inequities in society, in her life, and with her students. As Lewison and colleagues (2002) pointed out, disrupting the common place requires teachers to include popular culture and media in the curriculum to examine how people are positioned or choose to position themselves in society. This work with her students is a testament to Jill's stance that "Teachers should advocate for those groups of students who are continually excluded from the curriculum." In a final paper for the class Price-Dennis taught, Jill wrote, "I want to draw on popular culture to motivate and engage students. I believe this will allow them to draw on their expertise . . ." thus shifting the power dynamics around knowledge production in the classroom.

Overall, Jill wanted to make a difference in the daily experiences her students had in school. She wanted to connect with them, demonstrate that she cared for them and their future, and most importantly let them know that the knowledge they walked into her classroom with was valued and needed in her class. She crafted a relevant pedagogy that re-visioned how knowledge was produced in the classroom and who had the right to participate in that process. Jill's teaching made visible some of the taken-for-granted assumptions about what school is supposed to look like and how teaching and learning should occur with particular groups of students (Kumashiro, 2004). She engaged her students in culturally relevant learning—negotiating a loaded terrain as a pre-service teacher. She did so by fostering a third space between her mentor teacher's expectations and her students' interests—creating a hybrid space that honored both.

IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests that a curriculum for young people of color that enables them to examine their concerns about their world is an important factor in motivating students to achieve academic success. By drawing on tenets of critical pedagogy in her planning and teaching of the literacy curriculum, Jill was able to teach students to skillfully read and write and address the many ways that texts work in social life. Jill was working within a social justice education framework, which honored her mentor teacher's expectations and students' cultural repertoires. While addressing the sanctioned curriculum, her goal was to go beyond mandates, to tailor the curriculum to her student's lives, and to motivate and engage them in meaningful learning experiences.

Implications of this study for pre-service teachers include—but are not limited to—the power and possibility of envisioning ways to value diverse students' knowledge and cultural practices while simultaneously and syncretically engaging them in a rigorous academic curriculum. The pre-service teacher in this study wanted to learn how to translate tenets of critical pedagogy into practice, thereby moving the conversations taking place in her university courses into the middle school setting. To support this type of inquiry, teacher education programs need to engage their students in sustained conversations about diversity, equity, and pedagogies of hope by integrating these topics into every facet of their program. By doing so, pre-service teachers would not wait until they have their own classrooms to start negotiating pedagogical change and their classroom settings can be (re)framed as spaces for culturally relevant teaching. Jill's experience is a case in point.

As seen in this article, by engaging in politicized literacy practices, Jill worked with her students to resist the binds placed upon them by dismissing the deficit model imposed on the students; she did not subscribe to the pedagogy that accompanied such a model. Jill had high expectations for her students. She did not want them to get by or merely pass seventh grade, as she commonly heard in others' hopes. She wanted them to excel. As a student teacher, pushing against this dominant belief system in the school was a risky move. Her decisions could be perceived by her mentor teacher as a direct affront to his practices and beliefs; and he could have potentially asked her to leave the class or school site. However, if one considers Jill's case a situated representation of a prevalent phenomenon, one must consider that while pre-service placements are power-ridden, they can be (re)framed as sites of possibility.

Jill's pedagogy became a site for praxis—even at the pre-service level. Each day she would reflect on the conditions in which her students were required to work and create opportunities for them to be

successful based on their interests and learning styles. Her insistence on working with the lowest achieving group of students in the seventh grade to re-engage them with school and show them that someone cared about their future and success was an act of social justice. She did not want to save them. She saw them as fully capable participants of a society that had pushed them out, given up on them. Jill's willingness to ask questions, read literature related to race, equity, and social change, as well as constantly search for ways to engage students in the curriculum by focusing on their interests and bringing in their culture demonstrate Jill's growth and commitment to becoming an educator who reflects on injustices in our society and uses those reflections to craft a relevant humanizing pedagogy that offers critique and hope. It is our hope that this article—and Jill's experience—can shed light onto other contexts, underscoring the importance of teacher educators working with White pre-service teachers to bring together or to reconcile apparently contrary beliefs, teacher educators can expose pre-service teachers to the many contradictions that lie ahead.

In considering these contradictions, implications for teacher educators point toward the need to invite pre-service teachers to engage in fostering pedagogical third spaces which syncretically bring together mentor teacher academic expectations and students' interests and cultural repertoires. Teacher educators should fully support pre-service teachers as they seek to negotiate this loaded terrain. Implications for research include the need to document ways in which pre-service teachers negotiate change in their student teaching settings and beyond. Jill provides one example, but more research is needed to unveil the ways in which culturally relevant teaching is taking place and benefitting all students across time and space. Finally, the field would also benefit from long-term research seeking to learn if teachers—such as Jill—who engage in culturally relevant pedagogy in their pre-service placements are ultimately more effective educators of students of color.

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