“We are multiculturalism”: A self-study of faculty of color with preservice teachers of color

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This paper is the self-study of three faculty of color engaged in teaching a special summer session geared to recruiting people of color to teaching. Given our past experiences in institutions of higher education, we recognized the unique situation and potential of faculty of color teaching a class made up almost exclusively of students of color. We analyzed our own reflective writings constructed while teaching the course. Using an emergent grounded research approach to data analysis, we identified common themes, and reconciled ambiguous information until a synthesis was achieved. Four themes rose to the surface: 1) creating connections; 2) the curriculum remains the same…mostly; 3) identity issues; and 4) a positive affective environment. We detail these themes and provide samples to tell our story about cultural identity, social justice and teaching.

\textit{Key Words}: Reflective narrative; faculty/students of color; identity; multiculturalism; social justice

Introduction

\textit{You know what? Nobody in this class needs multiculturalism. I looked around this class and I said, “We are multiculturalism.”} 

Tyrone\textsuperscript{1}

As Tyrone, an African-American preservice teacher relates, preservice teachers/students\textsuperscript{2} of color hold initial misconceptions about coursework in multicultural education that need to be

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We Are Multiculturalism

addressed. The suggestion that preservice teachers of color don’t need multiculturalism because of “who they are” must be problematized. Fortunately, based on our experience, preservice teachers of color quickly come to realize that “who they are” is but one (important) part of the pursuit for multicultural education competence. Once they recognize that what you know, what you do, and how you feel are equally important in creating a culturally responsive pedagogy, their belief in, passion for, and commitment toward multicultural education can be profound.

As faculty of color working with preservice teachers of color, we find ourselves personally renewed by the hopefulness of multicultural education courses as they might be. We find ourselves professionally renewed by the reflection on our practice that working with preservice teachers of color entails. After all, opportunities to work nearly exclusively with preservice teachers of color are rare for us and, importantly, push us to reconsider our common approaches to the coursework characteristic of teaching primarily Euro-American students. Finally, we find ourselves feeling culturally renewed when working with preservice teachers of color since we are able to sense compatibility with our communication styles, cultural orientations, worldviews, and socio-cultural experiences.

The need for personal and professional self-renewal is important for all teachers. The need for cultural self-renewal is especially important for faculty of color who, in our experiences, often feel a sense of cultural alienation in institutions set up to serve the Euro-American mainstream. Martinez-Aleman (1996), a “Cubana,” describes the alienation many faculty of color feel on US college campuses:

Living so far from the familiar has made me painfully aware that I am a cultural “mestiza” in crisis. Somehow the move to…a college where cultural sameness seems unusually durable, has become a turning point, for better or worse, in this fever of assimilation. The absence of the culturally familiar suddenly brings all my Anglo habituations into sharp focus, signaling a decisive moment in my exile. How will my “cubana” self survive this cultural loneliness? (p. 72)

And if this were not enough, colleges and universities are themselves situated within larger societal and civilizational contexts that can be construed as ethnocentric in Euro-American orientation (Sheurich & Young, 1997).

This paper details the experience of three Chicana/o professors who had the opportunity to teach a six (6) unit course on cultural diversity. Unique to this coursework was the fact that 22 of the 23 students who took this class were preservice teachers/students of color. The paper begins with a discussion of the need to explore issues of preservice teacher professional socialization for diversity as it interacts with cultural self-identity development. We provide a detailed discussion of the context of our work with those students. We then identify themes that emerged from our work with the students via-à-vis cultural diversity course content. We end with what the experience meant to us as Chicana/o professors of multicultural/multilingual

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2 We chose to use “people of color” throughout because terms like minority hide the demographic reality of most communities. We are using “preservice teachers/students” to make the multiple relationships we have with the people we work with visible.
education. The question that guides this study is: what does it mean for Latina/o faculty to work with preservice teacher/students of color on issues of diversity and multiculturalism?

Teacher Socialization for Diversity and Cultural Identity Development

It’s important to acknowledge that there is much that teachers of color bring to the profession (for a more extensive discussion than is offered here, Burant, Quiocho, & Rios, 2002: Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). In summarizing the research, Gay, Dingus and Jackson (2003) found that beyond their function as role models, the presence of ethnic minority teachers has school achievement effects “such as increased attendance rates, lower disciplinary referrals, fewer dropouts, higher overall satisfaction with school, and stronger self-concepts, cultural competence, and sense of efficacy for students,” (p. 5) as well as higher academic expectations. Additionally, Quiocho and Rios (2000) found that teachers of color are more aware of racist schooling practices, more willing to name them, and will actively work to combat them. This is in addition to important contributions ethnic minority teachers bring to Euro-American students (Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003).

The preparation of preservice teachers/students of color to enter the teaching profession should not be taken lightly. Consider that Gordon (1994) found that one fourth of 140 teachers of color did not feel prepared to work with inner city youth. 59% of Latino teachers felt unprepared to deal with Latino youth (Tómas Rivera Center, 1993). Indeed, Gay (1993) and Montecinos (1994) have found that without substantive involvement with multicultural education coursework, preservice teachers/students of color understanding of the pedagogical and curricular impact of teaching students of color is minimal.

Nieto (1998) claims that preservice teachers/students of color are culturally self aware and aware of the oppression their group has faced. However, there is not automatic transfer to understanding other cultural groups nor the experiences with oppression that these other groups face. In her own experiences in classes with students of color, Nieto relates:

…the course taught me about the folly of believing that understanding one kind of bias will automatically prepare students to understand others. The transfer is far easier, to be certain, but it is not automatic. (p. 2)

Consider this in light of traditional understandings of racial/ethnic identity development (Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1993) wherein one stage of ethnic identity involves the internalization of negative cultural stereotypes (pre-encounter stage). This is fostered by families who may pursue cultural assimilation since, they may believe, social success is more likely to result and/or it protects students from discriminatory behavior associated with “being” ethnic minorities. Schools then extend and deepen this negativity by suggesting an ideology and curriculum consistent with cultural assimilation to the hegemonic mainstream (Apple, 2004).

Concomitantly, we also have come to understand cultural identity within a post-structural orientation (see, for example, Rosaldo, 1989). Montecinos (2004) summarizes and extends this work to provide the following description of cultural identity. For her, culture is more than just a
set of customs and knowledge to be learned. Rather, it is open, dynamic, and permeable to the influence of others with whom you interact but most especially in the context of relations of domination-subordination. Cultural identity, then, is continually constructed and reconstructed in the context of interacting both within and across difference. It is, Montecinos continues, a kind of performance which is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the Other rather than something that is self-defined.

The power of helping preservice teachers/students of color to develop a cultural identity marked by a critical consciousness is made clear by Darder (1995). She asserts that when teachers of color bring a critical consciousness to their work, additional advantages of their presence include an understanding/empathy with their students of color, acknowledgement of their students’ (and family’s) cultural capital, and realistic but high student expectations.

It would seem that the socialization of preservice teachers/students of color interested in pursuing the teaching profession would involve, indeed must involve, different strategies than those traditionally used when socializing Euro-American students into the profession (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). Yet Zeichner and Hoeft (1996), after a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher socialization for diversity, found little scholarly work that focused on preservice teachers’ of color socialization for diversity. It is our hope that this chapter on working with preservice teachers/students of color might begin to ameliorate some of that knowledge gap.

The Power of Self Study

We characterize the work here as self study in teacher education. Self study is engaged in for a variety of purposes but the two most often cited are for personal/professional development and to better understand teacher education (in short, to make us more “thoughtful” in our work) (Cole & Knowles, 1996). Additionally, Hamilton (1998) and Dinkelman (2003) raise the possibility of ways in which self study can also be a precursor to reforming the ways in which teacher education is carried out. Cole and Knowles (1996) offer that such possibility of reforming teacher education (and higher education more broadly) is precisely at the root of the threat of self study within the academy.

Traditional forms of academic scholarship are different from self study in that the latter is “up close and personal” with its own set of epistemological positions (personal, subjective, practical, qualitative, and communicated via narrative) (Cole & Knowles, 1996). However, self study is as rigorous (within the bounds of qualitative research) as other forms of academic scholarship despite its often marginalized status. In essence, we agree with Zeichner’s (1999) claim that self study is THE most “significant” advance in research in teacher education.

Dinkelman (2003) asserts five rationales for conducting self study in teacher education. These include the value of becoming more reflective about one’s practices, the construction of new knowledge both of the local setting but also of broader questions for the academic discipline, the model of self-reflection for our students, the value for students who participate, and the possibilities for programmatic changes (as described earlier).
Indeed, reflective narratives are a powerful pedagogical tool of self study. As instructors we’ve utilized personal history assignments in an attempt to enter the internal dialogues students have about teaching and learning (Holt-Reynolds, 1991). In this instance we use our own reflective narratives to examine what we believe and know about teaching and learning with a diverse group of students. By turning a critical lens to our reflections, we make visible our “professional theories,” (Holt-Reynolds, 1991, p. 6) and develop an awareness of the autobiographical nature of our teaching (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Cole and Knowles (2000) argue that the practice of teaching is “an expression of who we are as individuals” (p. 15). For us, the opportunity to be reflective of our own practices in the context of meaningful interaction with each other and students from traditionally marginalized communities as well as what we learn from doing such is pivotal to our work herein.

**The Context of Our Work**

California is a state where communities of color justifiably feel under attack. Recent political activity has assailed a commitment to diversity and social justice by way of approval of propositions against the provision of social services for immigrants (proposition 187), affirmative action (proposition 209), and bilingual education (proposition 227). These propositions have legalized an ideology that legislates the unequal treatment of students of color, their families and communities of color.

The academic context for this study was a state, public university located in a politically conservative, agricultural-based, growing community in the pacific southwest, just north of San Diego. The university itself is mission-driven with a strong commitment to diversity in its mission. The demographics of the faculty and students (33% of faculty and 43% of students, at the time of this study) demonstrate their diverse cultural backgrounds with Latinos being the largest group. These demographics demonstrate one way the university has actively worked to bring the commitment to diversity “to life.”

This commitment to diversity did not go unchallenged as evidenced by various incidents of hate speech on campus “sponsored” by White supremacist groups from the area over the years. Surrounded by strong political conservatism and immersed in the climate of intolerance and bigotry-exacerbated political propositions, the university struggles to fulfill its potential for social justice and to live up to the expectation of those who believe in true democracy.

The College of Education’s working agenda reflects the same strong commitment to diversity through education as expressed in one core value that suggests, in part, that the success of the College depends on creating and sustaining an inclusive environment that reflects and affirms diversity. Toward that end, the College acknowledges the need for a demographically diverse faculty/staff and student body, aims to serve diverse K-12 school populations, and seeks to affirm diversity as a communal responsibility. While this guides the work of many of the faculty and staff members of the college, there is also tension within the college around what this value means in the curriculum and how diversity is supported or undermined by various members’ actions.
Several initiatives represent the tangible commitment to this value. These include significant faculty of color representation and a commitment to embed the competencies associated with preparing teachers for cultural and linguistic diversity in all of its programs and classes. The faculty had engaged in a series of forums designed to more clearly understand how issues of race and racism subtly creep into their own interactions and in the ways these get played out in teaching. One other initiative, the Teacher Diversity Project, worked to increase the number of preservice teachers/students of color who are eligible to apply for the college’s teacher credential programs.

*The Teacher Diversity Project (TDP)*

The State University System began an initiative, in the late 1980s, to develop a teaching workforce that looks more like the students in California’s public school. Originally called the teacher diversity project (in post-Proposition 209, the project was renamed the teacher “recruitment” project), each campus was given the freedom to carry out activities aimed at this important goal. At this university, the project is inter-institutional involving both high schools and local community colleges. Other activities carried out included a Teaching as a Career Day conference for high school youth, a para-educator scholarship program, student scholarships, educational and support forums, and the Summer Institute Program.

*The Summer Institute Program*

The Summer Institute program first began in summer, 1997. To participate, candidates (college-level) completed an application that asked, among other things, their reasons for considering teaching as a career. During summer, 1999, about which we report, 23 students were selected to participate in this summer scholarship program. More specifically, the class was comprised of 17 Latino students (and all the variations therein), (2) two African Americans, (1) one Caribbean Islander, (1) one Chinese American, (1) one Bi-Racial student (Chinese-Latina), and (1) one Euro-American. There were 15 females and 8 males. Eighteen of the 23 students were from lower to lower-middle class economic backgrounds.

The program entailed two courses taught concurrently. One of the courses, EDUC 364, The Role of Cultural Diversity in Schooling, is prerequisite for the teacher credential program. All applicants to the College of Education must take EDUC 364 or an equivalent. Its focus is on theories of culture and multicultural education, first and second language acquisition, and the social context of schooling. Specific topics include racism, white privilege, sexism, homophobia, linguicism, and religion intolerance. Assignments require students to construct a family history and personal life narrative, conduct independent research on a timely multicultural educational issue and to assess their learning and growth at the end of the course. The underlying perspective of EDUC 364 is that students must know themselves and their biases in order to be a critical and effective teacher for the 21st century. As instructors, we did not assume that we were, as faculty of color or students of color, free from bias or prejudice. We see social justice and equity as a life-long learning journey.

The other course, EDUC 391, Strategies for Empowering Multicultural Future Teachers, was specifically designed for the TDP. Its focus is on developing the skills (test-taking skills, academic achievement skills, networking, etc.) needed to qualify for the teacher credential
program as well as to motivate students toward realizing the possibility of their becoming teachers. Assignments had students connect with teachers of color in the schools, complete a service learning project, and learn what they need to do to become a teacher.

*Summer Institute Faculty*

We are two Chicanas and one Chicano tenure line faculty members who worked in the College of Education at the time. Our advanced degrees are in the areas of educational psychology and teaching, learning and curriculum. In terms of our teaching experience, we have all worked in the public schools as teachers and/or instructional aides. Our years in teaching in the K-12 public schools and university range from seventeen to thirty years.

We have different degrees and areas of study, are diverse in our experiences in the public schools, and attended universities at different times during our undergraduate years. Lillian completed her undergraduate education in the early 1970s; Francisco completed his undergraduate education in the late 70s; and Patricia completed her undergraduate work in the late 80s. It is important to note these time and space differences because they influence the different perspectives we take on the evolution of our Chicana/o consciousness as situated within the Chicano movement itself. Yet we share a common experience of what it is to be Chicana/o, and this unites us in our quest to work, actively and consciously, toward the betterment of our community. Indeed, this desire to improve the community is what unites us in our work to prepare teachers of color. We are united as Chicano faculty in a way that draws on our historical, cultural, and shared experience that is, in essence, our spiritual journey as political activists. While we have the obvious natural affinity to our own cultural group, we also have had extensive experiences in a wide array of communities of color beyond our own. These experiences have been critical to our embrace of a wider sense of “nuestra comunidad” that includes the African-American, Native American, and Asian-American communities as well.

*The Data Set*

For this paper, we analyzed our own reflective writings constructed while teaching the course. The data set consisted of over 20 pages of type-written comments in response to prompts regarding our students’ skills, dispositions, and knowledge; why and how, if at all, we can be more of our "authentic" (transparent/revealing, trusting) selves; "connections" made between and among students, and the faculty; how we sensed our (one) Euro-American student was making sense of all this “diversity”; and, how what we teach (content) and how we teach (instruction) around cultural diversity differed when teaching students of color? Finally, we shared perceptions on what it means to be faculty of color (generally, and Latinos specifically) working with preservice teachers/students of color on cultural diversity issues.

Using an emergent grounded research approach to data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), through repeated and continuous examination of the data set, we identified common underlying themes in the shared, written discourse. We reconciled ambiguous and/or contradictory information until a synthesis was achieved. We will detail these themes and provide samples from faculty excerpts to demonstrate our thinking about these themes.

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3 Since the time of this study, two of us have taken work at other public universities.
Detailing our own experiences via self-narrative within a specific context allows us to join an emerging genre of scholarship called critical personal narrative and autoethnography in education (Burdell & Swadener, 1999). The intent of this genre, an intent we share, is to promote multivocality, highlight tensions and joys of our work (teaching), illuminate relations of power, critique social structures that constrain equity and raise the value of self-reflection. Importantly, this happens where social justice, multicultural/multilingual education, cultural identity, and critical pedagogy are central to our purposes in schooling. It’s culturally congruent in that we find ourselves in “testimonio,” defined by Chamberlain and Thompson (1998) as “a secular spiritual testimony, telling a life…with…the overt intention of raising consciousness” (p. 6).

We feel compelled to share some of the activities in the class and our interactions with this group of preservice teachers/students which spurred some of our self-reflections as we share the themes and principles below.

**The Four Principles**

In examining our self-narrative four themes or principles rose to the surface. These principles are a descriptive framework that supported the everyday lived experience of the Institute as we, and we believe our students, experienced them.

*Principle One – Creating Connections*

Students seemingly connected with each other and with us in numerous ways and on multiple levels. The students worked to connect with each other broadly even when there were conflicting communication and relational styles. In other words, exclusive groups or cliques did not develop. Students made an effort to get to know everyone in class with special sensitivity to the one Euro-American student in the class. Lillian wrote:

They began to listen to each other, tease each other – once they were able to figure out what to tease for – they began to question each other during discussions, brought readings to share, began to share personal experiences, began to sit and commune with each other in the open sunshine. (Data set, p. 9)

Connections began during the first day of class. We had made a concerted effort to inform the students about the nature of the class and to share a little bit about ourselves. We shared some thoughts and stories about why we teach. We shared our passions. This led to some sharing from the class. We sensed a trust and respect that first night that is rare to achieve after a month with other classes. We felt as if the students responded to our willingness to be open and honest, not with ridicule or resistance, but with respect and a willingness to take a chance with us and with each other.

The connections made between the students and faculty allowed us to humanize the curriculum. We shared a different part of ourselves than normal. We have all had painful experiences in our education, careers and personal lives. Sharing these painful experiences served as useful learning for the students who also had experienced pain and fostered deeper
connections. Francisco learned that a visiting teacher who was leading a writing workshop with the students was concerned about their writing skills and would soon be giving them back their writing samples with many corrections. Francisco wrote:

She observed that many of the students were obviously not native English speakers and attributed their difficulty to this fact. When I got to class, I thought I would tell them something about my own experience in writing to “soften the blow” that was, I presumed, to come. I told them that when I was in college, the first paper I turned in…prompted the professor to point out such simple things as the difference between “to” and “two” and “too” (I just changed from one to the next; I thought it had something to do with avoiding repetition; I was “into diversity” even back then). At that point I felt like quitting college….and then ended by telling them that I didn’t quit, that the teacher made sure that he was there to help, that friends didn’t let me quit, and that my preparation in high school did not match my potential. And that I hoped that as they read their own papers, that they would think about these things. (Data set, p. 7)

We realized that the stories we told were different than those we share with other classes. Patricia wrote:

But I found myself revealing more to these students. At the same time I found myself revealing less. I realized I have a stock of stories that I tell all classes. With this class different stories came out, some that I’ve never told. I think the needs of the class drove that. For example, since a lot of the class members were Latinos, we talked in depth about Latino identity and the role of language in identity. I shared with them conflicts I feel as an English-speaking Chicana who learned Spanish as a second language. We discussed who is and who is not Latino/a. This kind of discussion would never have happened in a mostly white class. (Data set, p. 6)

Truly the stories were “shared” rather than “told.” They are not necessarily told as examples but rather as shared experiences. We believe that this is a critical difference.

*Principle Two – The Curriculum Remains the Same...Mostly*

The course on cultural diversity met objectives commonly established by the multilingual/multicultural faculty of the College of Education as well as state-mandated guidelines. To that extent the curriculum remained the same. And yet the curriculum was different. It was influenced by the deep connections we believed were established in class and by our own personal efforts to motivate and recruit the students to teaching.

While the students seemingly came to class eager to learn, they also entered with the attitude that they “know it all.” As the opening quote reflected, they wondered what they could learn about diversity. But they learned that while they knew their own experience, their own history, their own struggle, that they also needed to learn about others and thus more about themselves.
We also emphasized a pedagogy of exploration and questioning. In doing so, students learned that they did not need to agree with us but rather to seek their own answers. Rather, we sought to provide the students with multiple ways of thinking about issues like racism, diversity, minority student academic success and failure. The curriculum also had an important relational focus to it. Lillian wrote:

There also exists an underlying, undergirding, intentional content that distinguishes this class. This curricula is not reflected by the course syllabi but exists and is supported by the connections made in class. This added curricula includes our stories – about ourselves, our lives, where we came from, where we’ve been, where we’re going and specifically about oppression, prejudice, and racism and how we’ve striven to overcome obstacles. Collectively, we also share ourselves in terms of our political, ideological, social experiences, the politics of education, the pedagogy of oppression and subordination…the list goes on. (Data set, p. 17)

**Principle Three – Identity Issues**

Lillian wrote:

We are the Other. People of color, “los Chicanos,” “las mujeres Latinas,” “los estudiantes de color,” “la gente de nuestra comunidad,” the undocumented, the gays, the lesbians, those who have suffered at the hands of racist acts, institutions, other human beings. We designed the class to come together as the Other, to consider our place and where we are going in unity and in force. We are conscious of this mission. (Data set, p. 11)

As is evident, part of our reflection focused on issues of identity. Students explored their personal identity, their cultural identity and notions of collective identity.

Numerous discussions focused on how we describe ourselves as individuals. Every student had a sense of an ethnic identity. As an example, it was clear that the largest group in class could be collectively called “Latino.” The label, of course, meant different things. Some were immigrants and spoke Spanish as a native language; others were third-generation and did not speak Spanish. They had to negotiate amongst themselves what those different experiences meant for people who all identified themselves as Latino.

The students also struggled with negative internalized images and stereotypes. Francisco wrote:

…that they may not have a necessarily positive regard for bilingual education, based on actual experience, is also something that they bring. Unfortunately, some have internalized it as the program itself and not the fact that their subordinated status within the school is, in most instances, what made it unpleasant, why they quickly wanted to get out. They also come to see that pretty readily and then are quick to reaffirm the value of bilingual education. (Data set, p. 5)
As the students came to a new sense of Latino identity, they also came to a more complex understanding of power and hegemony. During discussions of bilingual education, multicultural education and race and racism, we periodically heard them repeating myths and misinformation that are broadly available. Each of us pushed them to examine their beliefs in the context of new information and research. We asked them to tell us how they know what they know. Where is the evidence? From whose perspective does it arise? Who defines the evidence; who frames it? And for what purpose is this evidence presented? These were difficult questions. But the connections that were established allowed the students to candidly explore their thoughts and beliefs on these controversial topics.

The students ended the semester with a renewed commitment to teacher education. And they knew that the paths they follow to being a teacher are different for them than for others. They often start off on the career path with the belief that teaching is not for them, that they are not smart enough or they cannot go to college. At some point the commitment to pursuing a credential is made and they find themselves in our class. And they seemed able to voice their ambition and to live the belief that becoming a teacher is a real possibility.

**Principle Four – A Positive Affective Environment**

This last principle is deeply embedded within the preceding three principles. Perhaps above all, we strove to create a safe and caring environment for the students. We did this deliberately and with a specific purpose. We wanted the students to learn, to grow and to engage with us and, more importantly, with each other.

Starting with the first day of class, we broke the structure of a traditional classroom. Lillian wrote:

During my first days of class I asked our students to sit in a circle with me, maybe it’s a throwback to my early days of teaching younger children, where I could connect, -- or at least try -- with each one, rather than have some of them sitting in front while some of their classmates sat behind, possibly, not getting my attention, my face to face interaction, caring. (Data set, p. 8)

Since Lillian taught the class early on in the course, a pattern was established. The circle endured. Students came into class and immediately set the desks in a circle. They left a space for Iban, a student in a wheelchair, to fit his chair in. They brought food to share with each other. By breaking bread together on a daily basis, the students showed their caring and respect for each other.

They nurtured each other academically also. They monitored each other’s work and they held each other accountable for the ideas expressed in class. Lillian noted:

Or take Paula for example, a strong, outspoken, no nonsense woman. She was extremely caring of our students in class, but in a way that was firm. She tended not to let her classmates get away with making statements that they couldn’t defend. (Data set, p. 9)
We had high, positive expectations for their academic performance. We communicated these expectations the first night of class. A couple of students, Lawrence and Gerardo, stayed after class to discuss our expectations. Gerardo talked to Patricia about his writing and his “lack of skills.” They established an agreement to work directly on his writing from the very beginning in addition to looking at content. Lawrence also needed assurances about his writing. Though concerned, both students stayed in class and worked very hard.

We expected openness with the students. We found it to be fairly easy to be open with them. Francisco wrote:

I think it’s easier for me to be my more true self with these students because it feels like I’m talking to an “other” that’s been there, will have experienced something similar, will know what it feels like, will be curious about how I “dealt” with it, will help them think about how to deal with their own issues. In this sense, I know that my sharing has value. (Data set, p. 7)

Patricia also noted a different tone to the openness of discussions:

This class was not quiet. That was also unique I think to the students of color. They brought lived experiences. Either their own or someone close to them. …And the discussion was impassioned. It went places I hadn’t gone to before, at least not since I taught Chicano Studies at Pomona College. We didn’t stick to the theory and the research. We could talk about lived experiences, and not just mine. That was great. (Data set, pp. 2 & 12)

Lillian saw this also. She wrote:

…during our second class meeting Iban shared with us his experience of being shot and losing the use of his legs, his peripheral involvement with a gang—in an effort to be accepted. Many of us – myself included – were touched by his willingness and trust in sharing this with us at such an early juncture of the class. (Data set, p. 9)

Teaching a course on diversity to a class of students of color was different than teaching to a mostly Euro American audience. Gone was the overt resistance we often face. Gone was the necessity we feel to “prove” one’s credentials to teach or to establish one’s “objectivity.” Patricia wrote:

I guess I’m still surprised by the impact faculty of color have on students of color. And I don’t know why. Because I relied heavily on the faculty of color when I was in school. We are obviously role models for them. I heard that repeatedly last night (at the family reception). We represent success and strength to them. I feel like I’ve done so little. I guess that describes my feeling in general. I feel like I’ve done so little for them. I just taught them for a couple of weeks. And they feel so positive and grateful? It’s overwhelming. (Data set, p. 8)
Teaching students of color in this program benefited everyone, students and instructors. We were able to learn much from each other.

**Teaching this Institute and What it Means as Chicana/os**

What did it mean to teach in the Summer Institute as a Chicana/o? We are Chicanos. It is our lived and collective experiences -- familial, social, political, cultural, and educational, and ideological framework. This still is, 40 years after the start of “el movimiento Chicano,” an intentionally political statement. Still, in the early years of the millennium, Chicano is a political (if not radical) term which some of us choose to self-identify. This is important to note, in that, we three did not choose to become “Hispanic.” Thus, overall, our work with the summer institute was intentionally political, ideologically driven, with intent toward activism. Teaching is, we believe, a political act.

Several collective themes emerged in our role as Chicanos as it pertains to the Summer Institute. These themes center on the following: (1) our intentional focus on dealing with difficult concepts (that we would not necessarily teach to the same degree in a “mainstream” classroom); (2) reaching out and connecting with students “where they are” both academically and personally; (3) cultural renewal - giving back to the community; and, (4) teaching our students that teaching is a political act.

The Chicano movement emphasized a focus on dealing with social, political, and ideological issues that mainstream America does not want to address. We intentionally focus on difficult issues associated with race, class, sexism and the role of the monoculture in maintaining a social hierarchy within our public schools. We were clear about our perspectives and with these students we had a sense of liberty and freedom to express our views. Difficult issues were addressed “head-on.” We shared this through our frank discussions surrounding race, prejudice, and dehumanization of racial minorities in the US. We further added our specific stories (past and current) of racial and ethnic oppression, and encouraged our students to do the same. We were, decidedly, political. For example, Francisco writes:

> I love teaching the class because I like to tell my stories but rarely feel comfortable doing so in regular classes. I like the opportunity to experiment and try different things, which I feel more comfortable doing since I feel like we’re a lot more accepted in this program. I like the opportunity to be more “political.” (Data set, p. 20)

Some of our stories speak to our privileged status, with issues of equity and justice associated to our role in academe. Patricia writes:

> I often have trouble believing myself as a role model because I believe my experience has been relatively easy. I did not have to learn a second language, I did not have to negotiate educational institutions as a newcomer, I did not have to work while in college to pay for my tuition...it is in the daily struggle to maintain a professional identity and existence that the example comes through. It is here that the experience with racism,
sexism, classism, come alive. It is in how I daily renegotiate my identity as a professor, as a mother, as a spouse within my Chicana ways. (Data set, p. 21)

Our stories, our lived experiences that we shared, were thirty years old, twenty years old, ten years old, happened yesterday. The Chicano movement has spanned a period of almost forty years. The stories that we shared with our students were stories from our early childhood, adolescence, college years, times from the Chicano Movement in its heyday (memories of Laguna Park and the riots, walkouts and moratorium of the sixties). Our stories were of yesterday, our stories were of today.

We reached out and connected with our students wherever they were in their current academic journey. Lillian writes that this:

...means that we are able (at least in this situation) to further reach out and support our students as they prepare to enter the teaching profession (hopefully). EDUC 391 is a vehicle for reaching out to our students ‘wherever they are’ e.g., completing their general education requirements at the local community college, preparing to transfer to the CSU from a local community college, to those students currently enrolled at CSU, to move those students toward graduation and eventual entry to the teacher credential programs. (Data set, p. 18)

We saw ourselves in their shoes (we’ve been there). Collectively, we each attended university at a different point in the Chicano movement, each with separate experiences but certainly from a position of the student. Francisco reflects on his student experience in higher education:

...I can recall sitting where many of those students now sit. I recall my own lack of preparation for higher education but pride in who I was culturally, a pride that sustained me throughout all the barriers and hurdles I had to confront. I used my own experiences as a Chicano to gain a degree of understanding and empathy with the students about what it means to go to school in an institution that espouses diversity but falls way short. (Data set, p. 19)

We saw ourselves as their role models, realizing that for many we were there to serve them and support them both academically and personally. We forged important relationships with our students as they moved toward the undergraduate program, entered the teaching program, and prepared to enter the teaching profession. Patricia writes:

I have a commitment to mentoring and to working closely with students who need extra help, for whatever reasons. I believe I was sent to Pomona to help one student, Sonia Valdez, graduate. She overcame tremendous obstacles and I know, I know, I was the reason she graduated. That makes everything that happened worth it. (Data set, p. 21)
Cultural renewal is another theme that we associate with our “Chicanismo.” We felt culturally “in community” with our students. We chose to interact and participate with our students in culturally significant ways as reflected in the stories we told, the stories that our students told, and the different discussions that occurred. That we were intentional in our effort to interact, communicate, and participate in culturally significant ways is noteworthy. Lillian writes:

I consciously decide to work and interact with my students (i.e., the curriculum, the method of teaching and learning, intertwined with our joint and separate cultural and social experiences)...in a way that is the curriculum that goes outside of the box, in ways that will (hopefully) help them to reflect on their experiences, understandings, and perspectives while moving them toward a process of development that will include a possible rethinking of their views, etc. and help them to shape who they will become as future teachers of color, for social justice. (Data set, p. 19)

We are Chicano academics. We teach, research, attend meetings, serve on committees, all within Euro-American male-dominated academic institutions. We interact (daily) in mainstream America. We are bi-cultural, moving between two worlds, with ease. Our work with the Summer Institute allowed us to become culturally renewed, moving back to our roots. Francisco writes:

But more than just empathy and understanding, I seek ways to capitalize on what they bring and look for the right kind of support I think will sustain them through. A second thing is that I feel culturally renewed. Working in a university that works to minimize difference, it’s culturally renewing in that I feel reconnected via the students to the Latino community. I hear it in their language, the music they listen, the way they think about “la vida loca.” In that way, a little of the Latino community comes back to me, back to my soul. (Data set, p. 19)

We agree that teaching is a political act. Teaching and learning are not colorblind. We intentionally and consciously treat schooling this way. As Chicanos we have lived a variety of experiences (both through our personal experiences, and as part of a larger collective Chicano consciousness) from the perspectives of women, community advocates/organizers, Chicano students, teachers, instructional aides, graduate students, college professors, etc. The political and social upheaval of the 60s, “el movimiento Chicano,” the Viet Nam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the evolution of bilingual education in the US, our role as teachers and learners impact who we are. We are political and taught our students to think of their lived experiences, the lived experiences of our communities of color, and their future students. We pushed our students to move beyond the obvious, beyond what we see, to consider the fundamental political and social implications about schooling for our communities and children of color. Lillian writes:

As a Chicana, I truly believe that this is a personal commitment to help our communities of color, and, in this class, I focus on bringing this home. It is my way of helping to awaken in them their personal understandings of our
society, the context and politics of schooling. So yeah, as a Chicana, the curriculum (class work) takes on special, focused, political meaning. My teaching becomes decidedly political, intentional, and hopefully transformative. (Data set, p. 19)

The political nature of teaching supports the notion of giving back to one’s community. That is, we believe that it is our role, as educators and scholars of color to give back to one’s community, and we strove to instill this in our students. Francisco writes:

It brings me back to my original teaching roots (actually as an instructional aid in an alternative high school) of working in the barrio with kids in West Denver who had been kicked out (for ever) from the Denver public schools and were only in middle school! The system had given up on these kids and would just as easily give up on our students. I won’t let that happen. But also, I’m able to work to get students to feel responsible “para ellos de abajo,” for those left behind, to remind them that this goes beyond them (it goes beyond me!) and extends to making a difference in our community. (Data set, pp. 19-20)

In sum, our “Chicanismo” took on authentic meaning in our teaching and in our learning, from our struggles along the way to where we are today as scholars and teachers. Our work with the Summer Institute students gave us a level of comfort and energy to allow ourselves to be our “real” selves as Chicanos. It allowed us to communicate, interact, and participate in ways that are specific to that group of students, that place, and that curriculum.

Reflecting on Our Reflections

The intent of this paper is to offer a glimpse of the way that we three professors tried to “live out” the theories and ideologies that guide our academic, professional work. We hope that we have highlighted a common, collective, privileged experience we have had working with preservice teachers of color.

We share the following lessons learned. First, it’s clear that who are students are matters in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. Our students “are not all the same” and accounting for who our students are is critical. We believe that students of color value a more explicit focus on diversity (including racism, a difficult subject to address with White students) since it’s “real” to them and connections to a transformative academic curriculum (Banks, 1993) with its attention to helping marginalized communities.

Second, we believe that it’s important when working with students of color to allow the “personal-cultural” curriculum (Banks, 1993) to be “centered” as we move toward that transformative academic curriculum. We suggest that students of color need to see themselves “reflected” in the curriculum on their way to “looking beyond” themselves to understand other kinds of diversity.
We also believe it’s critically important to create a supportive classroom environment. Attending to this in our teaching is essential if we want to facilitate the kind of openness, for both students and faculty, that we feel is evidenced herein. This means finding comfort “listening” to the “humanness” of our students as cultural beings as well as being comfortable with sharing our own humanness as cultural beings with our students.

In sum, our intent is to make visible our identities, conceptions, and actions to readers who might find value in a snapshot view of “who” faculty of color are and how they approach diversity when working with preservice teachers of color. But it’s equally important to say what we do not intend. We do not intend this to be self-congratulatory, individualistic, nor decontextualized. Indeed, some assumptions we harbor should be problematized: that these students would make sense of issues surrounding diversity more readily, that “telling” White students but “facilitating” learning for students of color is appropriate, and that sharing our real selves can only happen in absence of a significant number of White students are but three challenges to our thinking and teaching. Rather we hope that, like a wide-angle lens, the reader focuses instead on the larger image: the joining of politics and teaching, the importance of remaining hopeful, the struggle for social justice, the value of forging community, the worth of being sensitive to specific contexts, the multiple perceptions of collective activity, and the role of critical consciousness in teacher preparation.

References


transmission among Hispanics and other minorities (pp. 61-79).  Albany, NY:  SUNY Press.


