

# Embedding Culture in a Field Experience Seminar: Lessons Learned About Promoting Preservice Teacher Critical Consciousness in an Urban School Partnership

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reports the research findings of teacher educator inquiry using qualitative methods examining how incorporating the topic of culture into the field seminar component of a newly developed urban school-university partnership influenced preservice teachers' abilities to become critically conscious. After analyzing preservice teacher reflective journals, findings indicate that preservice teachers experienced an ebb and flow of critical consciousness as they developed an understanding of culture across the semester. In addition, preservice teachers engaged in various levels of praxis ranging from intent of action to enacting elements of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. This study's findings have implications for teacher education program development and stakeholder professional development in school-university partnerships.

*NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants*

Teacher educators have responded to the changing demographics and inequities found within school systems across the United States with calls to increase teachers' capacities to successfully teach all students, including those who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse (Howard & Aleman, 2008; McDonald, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Unfortunately, in many teacher education programs, discussions of diversity and equity are still relegated to one or two courses (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). There is a need to develop coherent, connected teacher education programs where preservice teachers (PSTs) have the opportunity to develop as culturally responsive teachers over time within clinical settings (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as:

Using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 15)

To help PSTs develop as culturally responsive teachers it is necessary to understand how they learn about culture and equity in schooling and through that learning begin to implement CRT into their field experience classrooms. This qualitative research

study examined how the purposeful integration of a focus on culture, within a supervision seminar in the context of a school-university partnership, influenced PST learning.

The 2001 NCATE Professional Development School (PDS) standards call for a "learning environment that supports candidate and faculty development within the context of meeting all children's needs" and "PDS partnerships are committed to providing equitable learning opportunities for all, and to preparing candidates and faculty to meet the needs of diverse student populations" (NCATE, 2001, p. 1). However, there has been some criticism regarding the lack of empirical literature focused on preparing PSTs to become responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students within PDS contexts (Breault & Lack, 2009).

Breault and Lack (2009) reviewed 95 articles in relation to PDSs from 1990 to 2006. Out of the 95 articles, 78 made no mention of CRT or issues of equity, 15 of the studies mentioned the NCATE (2001) PDS standard or casually referred to issues of equity, and two clearly studied issues of culture and equity. More recently there has been some attention to issues of cultural diversity within the PDS literature. In a study of curriculum and pedagogy in professional development schools, Taylor and Sobel (2010) found PSTs need an integrated curriculum able "to provide PSTs with supports and outlets for questions, reflections, and candid conversations about their interactions with real students, teachers, and parents within the broad

cultural diversity of a PDS context" (p. 255). Additionally, Taylor and Sobel (2010) found the PSTs valued observing theory to practice connections within the PDS. In an article reflecting on the restructuring of Tufts University's teacher education program, Beardsley and Teitel (2004) summarized the importance of effective PDS partnerships:

If future teachers were going to learn to see color and become committed to dealing with issues of race and ethnicity in student achievement, it was imperative that the program cultivate strong relationships with urban schools with diverse populations of students and staff—schools that were working to be successful with all students and were creating a culture of learning as a transformative process for urban youth. (p. 96)

Our university elementary teacher education program holds similar beliefs as described by Beardsley and Teitel (2004). We believe that because of the deep connection that is fostered between schools, communities, and universities, PDSs can become contexts where all stakeholders can engage in learning about diversity to promote equitable schools for students.

Currently, we are in the beginning stages of a partnership with eight elementary schools in a large urban school district. At this point, our PDS could be characterized as beginning in relation to the NCATE PDS standards. While we are at the beginning stages, we do demonstrate connections to the nine essentials of a PDS (NAPDS, 2008). For example, we have developed a PDS advisory board that meets several times per semester where teachers, administrators, and university faculty come together to talk about areas of strengths and growth for our PDS. We also now have several district teachers who have been reassigned to work in supporting both the preservice and inservice teachers across the partnership. Inquiry has become embedded in our PDS as preservice teachers and now many inservice teachers are systematically studying their practice. University faculty and graduate students each become connected to one of the PDS schools where they spend several semesters. Prolonged placement with one of the PDSs supports the development of relationships with that school (administration, veteran teachers, etc.), community, and preservice teachers.

Seven of the eight elementary schools we currently partner with are Title I and have a large population of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The PSTs stay at the same elementary school for at least three semesters. During this time the number of hours they spend in the school increases with each field experience. They also have both primary and intermediate placements. A key strand that has been agreed on by all stakeholders (university and district) is a commitment to preparing teachers who are culturally responsive and promote the success of all students.

Since we are early in our partnership, our first step was to think about how we could embed a focus on cultural diversity within the field experience seminar within one level of the program. While we acknowledge that PDSs are contexts of

simultaneous renewal for both inservice and preservice teachers, the focus of this research centered on the preservice teachers as a starting point. We believed that starting with the PSTs could be a springboard to deeper, often uncomfortable conversations with the inservice teachers. Badiali, Nolan, Zembal-Saul, and Manno (2011) found that PSTs can play an important role in the change process for inservice teachers within a PDS. They found that inservice teachers' change of practice in science was influenced by seeing the positive reaction and engagement of their elementary students to the methods of science teaching enacted by their interns. As inservice teachers supported their interns implement innovations in practice they "naturally reason through how they personally would implement the innovation in light of their practical knowledge of children learning particular content" (p. 334). This may influence the inservice teacher in beginning to "rethink his or her current approach" (p.334). By starting in our seminars with PSTs we hoped that we could begin to influence change in this way before moving on to formally working with the inservice teachers in this area.

This study sought to understand how a supervision seminar within a PDS can be designed to include a focus on cultural diversity and the influence on PST learning. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to study our own practice as teacher educators in order to better understand how to best support PSTs in this area and then eventually move to working with the veteran teachers in relation to culture within our beginning PDS. As a first step in embedding culture within an emerging school-university partnership, the findings of this study have implications for how a focus on culture and equity can be embedded within a PDS context.

## Conceptual Framework

In thinking about the PST preparation needed to support the learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students, Grossman, McDonald, Hammerness, and Ronfeldt (2008) explain teachers need to develop both conceptual and practical tools. These conceptual tools include frameworks and theories of learning (i.e., constructivism) as well as philosophical views (i.e., purposes of schooling) that guide teachers' decisions about teaching and learning. Practical tools are actual practices and strategies teachers can use with students. These practical tools include a development of a culturally responsive pedagogy where teachers see the intersection between a student's culture and learning. Developing a pedagogy that is responsive to the diverse backgrounds and needs of students must be a process where teachers not only reflect on their practice but also become sociocultural conscious of how their own identity and experiences with diversity influence their teaching (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers must go beyond simply the incorporation of celebrations, foods, and traditional clothing into the curriculum but to the deeper definition of culture and the inner-workings of students' daily lives (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers need to build positive relationships with students and families as well as value students' culture

within pedagogy and curriculum (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Additionally, PSTs must possess both subject matter knowledge as well as pedagogical content knowledge in order to provide students equitable access to curriculum (Howard & Aleman, 2008).

The concepts of critical consciousness and praxis informed this study, particularly our lens to analyze PST learning. Freire (1970) asserts that all education is political. Schools are not neutral contexts; they either serve to reproduce the current social arrangements or can possibly become sites for liberation when people are empowered to transform. According to Freire, true critical reflection leads to action. Pivotal to critical reflection is Freire's idea of the critical consciousness or *conscientizacao*. Critical consciousness occurs when stakeholders "achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them" (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 14). Critical consciousness occurs not only through self-reflection but also through dialogue with others (Freire, 1970). Freire explains that "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking" (p. 92). Instrumental in this transformation is Freire's idea of praxis, a balance between theory and practice. Praxis is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). While Freire discusses the fact that reflection can lead to action, he also cautions against action that does not include reflection. The "action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (Freire, 1970, p. 66). These opportunities to critically examine should start with what is immediately in one's reality with reflection on identity, power, and one's own assumptions. Moving from there, critical reflection involves identification of structures, practices, and policies that serve to oppress and reproduce the current social order. The concepts of critical consciousness and praxis were central to supporting the analysis of PST learning about culture in this study.

## Plan for Seminar

Before the semester started, we met to systematically plan how to incorporate discussions of culture into the seminar syllabus. After we established the topics we intended to address, we planned several key experiences during our seminar classes to encourage our PSTs to critically reflect on these topics. Our research team met weekly throughout the semester to discuss the previous week's activities, how our students were progressing, and made adjustments to the schedule based on their developmental needs. By meeting weekly, we used our PSTs' progress to guide our own decisions throughout the semester.

Culturally responsive frameworks guided our work. Gay's (1998) framework of culturally responsive supervision discusses developing self-awareness and cultural appreciation, acquiring cultural knowledge and appreciation, and developing culturally responsive pedagogical skills. We also aligned our work with Villegas and Lucas' (2002) curriculum proposal for preparing culturally responsive teachers, which included six strands:

(1) gaining sociocultural consciousness; (2) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds; (3) developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change; (4) understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching; (5) learning about students and their communities; and (6) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices. (p. 26)

Milner (2010) calls for the inclusion of the concepts of color-blindness, cultural conflict, meritocracy, deficit conceptions, and high expectations within teacher education with a focus on cultural diversity. In accordance with these frameworks, we divided our seminar topics into four sections: (1) What is the current sociocultural context of schools? (2) What is culture? and What is my personal culture? (3) What are the dimensions of culture? (4) How do we develop culturally responsive classroom environments? A breakdown of our seminar schedule and activities is shown in Table 1.

## Session One

In the first week of seminar we organized and displayed current demographic and educational achievement statistics from national, state, and local data. Our goal was to begin the semester by guiding PSTs through an exploration of their assumptions and beliefs regarding the well-documented pattern of academic disparities observed among students in relation to income, race, gender, language, special needs, etc. Our PSTs engaged in an analysis of national, state, and county achievement data. We also showed demographic statistics related to the partnership district and schools. This activity provided the PSTs with a visual representation of the inequities in schooling.

## Session Two

In the second seminar session, we asked the PSTs to define culture. Their definitions included phrases such as: shared traditions and food, beliefs and traditions, and values. Then we supplied a definition we could discuss:

Culture is a set of practices and beliefs shared by members of a particular group that distinguish that group from other groups. Culture includes all characteristics of human description including: age, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, ancestry, religion, language, history, sexual orientation, physical and mental level of ableness, occupation, and other affiliations. (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p.16)

We introduced the idea of hidden culture, the aspects of a person's culture that cannot be easily seen. After looking at the general definition of culture, we shared a visual displaying the different aspects of culture including: race, gender, family, sexual orientation, marital status, geographic region, education level, age, health, nationality, religion, and language. The goal was for

Table 1. Seminar Activities Organized by Topic

Session	Activity	Journal Prompts
<i>What is the current sociocultural context of schools?</i>		
Session 1	Current testing statistics in education	What did this data make you think about? What questions are you left with?
<i>What is culture? What is my personal culture?</i>		
Session 2	What is culture?	What is the disconnect between how you view yourself and how others view you? Why is this the case? How did engaging in this activity influence your thinking? What questions are you left with?
Session 4	Colorblindness	Reflect on today's discussion of colorblindness. Possible Prompts: How did this discussion influence your thinking? What questions do you have? What disturbs you about this? What do you want to think more about? What surprised you in the conversation?
<i>What are the dimensions of culture?</i>		
Session 5	Privilege	Reflect on your experience in class today engaging in dialogue and activities connected to privilege. What questions are you left with?
Session 8	Listening to the voices of actual students	
Session 9	Dimensions of culture <i>Informed students about our inquiry</i>	
<i>How do we develop culturally responsive classroom environments?</i>		
Session 11	Culturally responsive teaching	Reflect back on the semester activities we did surrounding the topic of culture. Which activity/activities played an integral role in your understanding of culture? How did this/these activity/activities shape your thinking?

the PSTs to understand the depth of culture since they mainly thought of culture as race and ethnicity. Each PST was given a document listing the aspects of culture stated above, and they were to write keywords that described themselves above each cultural aspect. After describing themselves using the different aspects of culture, they discussed with peers the aspects of culture they identify the most closely with, and the aspects that others use to view them.

### Session Three

During the third session, we approached the topic of colorblindness. We displayed the quotation, "I don't see color, I see children" and had our students share their thoughts about this idea in small groups. As we listened to these discussions, we noticed many PSTs agreed with this idea of colorblindness. Therefore, we changed the quotation to say, "I don't see culture, I see children." We had the PSTs think about how this may change their perceptions of the quotation. Then we shared a few definitions of colorblindness to further explain the topic.

### Session Four

In session four our PSTs completed a social identities portrait in order to introduce them to the concept of privilege. During this exercise they circled identifiers related to their identity and these were categorized as "groups defined as the norm; recipients of societal advantages" and "groups that are targets of institutional prejudice and discrimination." Afterward, we engaged in another activity to further illuminate the effects of privilege on their own lives. We asked the PSTs to stand in a straight line and read aloud statements pertaining to privilege. For example, one statement read: All of those who attended a school where the majority of the teachers were of your same race or ethnicity, take one step forward. The students were asked to move a step forward if they had experienced this statement, illustrating the advantages of privilege. The purpose of this activity was to show how privileges affect a person's life. Then we reversed the activity to include statements that treated diversity as an asset instead of a deficit. Following this activity, we engaged in a class discussion.

### Session Five

In session five our students engaged in a jigsaw activity where each group read a different case study about the impact of cultural mismatches and the school environment. Most of the case studies were pulled from Spradlin's (2011) text, *Diversity Matters: Understanding Diversity in Schools*, except for one entitled, "An Indian Father's Plea," that was written by Robert Lake (1990). We made sure that each case study focused on a different aspect of culture including: race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, learning disability, sexual orientation, and language. Students met in their groups to read and discuss their particular case study. Then we mixed the groups and they shared across studies. From this discussion, we asked the PSTs to come up with strategies that would help to alleviate the cultural mismatches in each case.

### Session Six

The next seminar we discussed the different dimensions of culture and the possible mismatch students can encounter in school due to their cultural beliefs. In order to help our PSTs understand their own cultural values we engaged in a "Two Corners" activity. We displayed different statements summarizing beliefs about certain topics. For example, we asked students to select how they would describe their values and beliefs in terms of personal relationships. They had to answer the statement, I describe myself as having:

- A. An individual social focus. I can be described as competitive, seeking individual success, feel pride in and make accomplishments public.
- B. A collateral focus. I believe in doing things to contribute to the survival and betterment of family and community, places high value on cooperation and strive to suppress individual accomplishment

We then asked our PSTs to discuss the different values and how these may match or mismatch with the values promoted in schools. We discussed specific practices within schools that would align with certain values and how we could be responsive to varying values.

### Session Seven

In our last session, the PSTs read an article on CRT by Villegas and Lucas (2007). The PSTs were divided into groups and given a section of the text to read and discuss. Each group highlighted the important points in their section to the rest of the class, and we discussed the entire article. After our discussion, we viewed video of a teacher implementing CRT techniques in her classroom. This session illustrated the importance of infusing culturally responsive practices into lessons.

All of these sessions specifically occurred during the supervision seminar each week. Each of us worked to connect

the ideas from seminar within our pre and post conferences as we observed our interns. However, we were definitely not as systematic in our planning of the observation conferences as the seminar. In order to better our future practice as field supervisors, we wanted to study our systematic incorporation of culture into the field experience. Specifically, we wanted to determine the extent to which we could help our PSTs reach a critical consciousness about culture in education.

## Methodology

The research question guiding this study was: In what ways do the strategies we utilized within a supervision seminar influence PSTs' critical consciousness toward culture? Our research team consisted of three doctoral students and one faculty member who served as field supervisors within four of the partnership schools. During the semester of this research, the PSTs were in the second semester of the teacher education program and attended internship two half days a week within a partnership school. Most of these PSTs were in the same classroom as the previous semester. Also, at the point of this study we had supervised the same PSTs for two semesters.

We took a practitioner inquiry approach to our work as we studied our practice working with preservice teachers. Within the teacher education literature, there has been attention to teacher educators engaging in self-study (Berry, 2004; Dinkelmann, 2003; Loughran, 2007; Kosnick, Beck, Freese, & Samaras, 2006; Zeichner, 2007), action research (Hyland & Noffke, 2005), and practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith, 2003) as processes for professional learning. All of these paradigms refer to teacher educators engaging in systematic study of their teacher education practice. These paradigms describe a process that involves exploring questions connected to teacher education praxis and systematic collection of data. This process is cyclical in nature and situated in local contexts.

## Participants

The participants within our study included 35 PSTs supervised by three of the field supervisors on the research team. These PSTs interned at three different Title I elementary schools within the same large urban district. Of the 35 PSTs whose reflections were analyzed as part of this study, 20 identified as White, nine as Hispanic, two as Black, and three as bi/multi-racial. There were four males and 31 females.

## Data Collection and Analysis

In order to understand the influence of the seminar on the PSTs' understanding of culture, our primary form of data collection were the PSTs' journal reflections. At the end of each session we provided the PSTs with a prompt to focus their reflection. The prompts for each of the journal reflections are outlined in Table 1. The PSTs had 10-15 minutes to handwrite or type their reflections. We then

collected the reflections to read and provide comments. While these journals were a naturally occurring part of the coursework and helped to inform our planning of the sessions throughout the semester, we did have approval for this research through a departmental IRB to use these journal reflections for research purposes.

After the semester ended, we met as a research team to decide on a process for coding the data. During this time, a fourth researcher joined to assist with data analysis. This additional researcher helped to support trustworthiness as she offered a different perspective since she did not have any connections with the participants. Data analysis consisted of several readings and rereadings of the PST reflections to engage in coding—that is, “to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristic—the beginning of a pattern” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8). Based on our conceptual framework, we made the decision to color code each PST reflection by instances of critical consciousness, places the PSTs showed maintaining status quo/dominant thinking, which some could refer to as resistance, and finally reflections that indicated praxis. However, during this time, we were open to the emergence of additional codes.

Next, we read through the reflections and coded as a team to ensure our thinking about the codes and data were aligned. Together we coded the first three weeks of reflection data. For the first week of reflections, we read each reflection aloud and then coded together as we read to ensure we coded the data similarly. For the second and third weeks of reflections, we silently read each PST’s reflection and coded individually. Then we checked our codes with one another aloud. Upon completing the coding of each week of reflections we memoed highlights from the overall group of weekly reflections.

Due to the large number of reflections, after codes were discussed and identified from the initial read of the first three weeks of reflections, we divided the remainder of the weekly reflections by researcher to code and memo individually. Once the reflections were coded and memoed we met to discuss each week’s reflections using our memos to guide the discussion. During this meeting, we combined codes and wrote several themes about each week of data and pulled direct quotations to support these themes. We created a shared document to compile themes and quotations from the weekly reflections. Once the themes and quotations were compiled in a shared document we met to connect themes to develop overarching assertions about the data. From this conversation we developed three main assertions regarding the ebb and flow of PSTs’ understanding, the definition of culture, and praxis. Then we went back to the data again to see if these three assertions were supported. Finally, we met again to revise our findings. During this time we collapsed two of the assertions into one and from here we developed the following two assertions: 1) PSTs experienced an ebb and flow of critical consciousness across seminars and 2) PSTs moved through various conceptions of praxis in regard to culture throughout the semester.

## Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of embedding a focus on culture within a field experience on PSTs’ critical consciousness. Two assertions emerged from our analysis of the data related to PST learning. One assertion relates to the ebb and flow of critical consciousness experienced by PSTs across seminar sessions. During our instruction in the seminar sessions, we found our PSTs continually struggled with the dissonance they felt in revising their own assumptions and creating new learning about culture. The second assertion describes how PSTs moved through various conceptions of praxis in regard to culture throughout the semester. From the reflections, we noticed the PSTs developed various ideas of how to change their teaching to accommodate for the differing cultures in their classroom.

### Assertion One: The PSTs Experienced an Ebb and Flow of Critical Consciousness Across Seminars.

The PSTs exhibited an ebb and flow of understanding of culture during the various activities presented throughout the weekly sessions over the course of the semester. Within the PST weekly reflections we noticed changes in their thinking within a continuum of understanding over the course of the semester’s activities. These included variations among the group of PSTs from week to week as well as within individual PST’s reflections each week. See examples of this in Figure 1.

This continuum of understanding allows us to unpack the ebb of flow of the PSTs’ understanding of culture over the course of the semester.

In the first session, we shared state and national demographics as well as some standardized testing data disaggregated by various student groups. While many of the demographics interested students, they were disturbed by the achievement data that showed how some student groups scored higher on state tests. Many of our PSTs believed the statistics were portraying “stereotypes” because the data was disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES). Even one PST thought this data was incorrect as she stated, “I didn’t personally agree with most of it.” We encouraged our PSTs to consider the gaps portrayed in this data, and what it might tell us about the state of education. A PST asked, “Why are numbers [statistics] of different races so different?” Another PST believed the data showed “low SES, Hispanic, and black [students] have a higher chance to fail FCAT.” Several PSTs expressed some deficit thinking about the data. One PST asked, “Why are certain races better in reading?” Another PST remarked about the effects of race and socioeconomic status on testing scores: “The effect that socioeconomic status and race can make on different statistics... makes me realize that there are such big differences caused by SES as well as race.” We tried to push the PSTs to think beyond blaming students and families to what else could be influencing these scores. At this point, the PSTs struggled with how to respond to the data and the idea of different identifiers. They

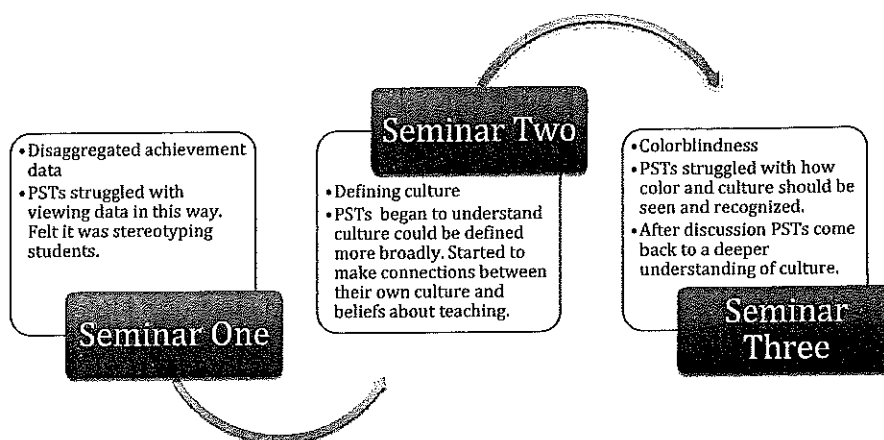


Figure 1. Examples of Ebb and Flow

also had difficulty thinking about the reasons behind the scores especially in relation to cultural responsiveness. Across the group, they kept saying the data was stereotyping students. After this seminar, we chose to revisit this topic in order to explain that data is typically disaggregated in these categories and what can we learn from this data.

During session two we had our PSTs identify the different aspects that make up their own cultural identity. Through this activity, the PSTs became more aware of their own culture. One PST noticed that "People don't know the inner level of my culture (nationality, religion, etc.)." Some PSTs were able to note the ways in which their culture influenced their values. For example, one PST even realized that her own culture influenced her decisions, stating they "made me think more about why I make different choices." Additionally, another PST reflected that "It made me realize what values about myself I hold closely, and also take into account how others perceive me." Here we noticed our PSTs understanding the meaning of culture and making connections to how their own culture would affect pedagogical decisions in the classroom. This was a change from the previous session when the PSTs were more confused about the data and were not seeing direct links to their own teaching practice.

Furthermore, several of the PSTs made note of the disconnect between how they view themselves and how others may view them. This idea is evident in one PST's comment: "Many people will look and see a college student and may make preconceived notions about me. Many disconnects are because of stereotypes." Another PST further explained the negative effect of this disconnect: "I feel when people judge me it's a negative view as being incapable of some things." By making PSTs aware of this personal dissonance we hoped to help them understand how their students may feel. Some PSTs were able to make this connection. For example, a PST reflected, "It made me assess how I deal with my feelings and how it affects my attitude towards students." This reflection showed some PSTs made the connection of how their own culture might affect their

own attitudes towards their students. After the confusion from session one, in session two, many of the preservice teachers began to understand culture and start to look at themselves as well as make connections to the classroom.

While the PSTs started to see how people may view them differently based on the elements of their culture, they began to experience dissonance and wavering understanding in session three when we brought up the concept of color-blindness. The PSTs seemed to struggle by how color and culture should be seen and recognized. After seeing the statement on the board, "I don't see color, I see children," there was a lot of nodding and affirmations in favor of color-blindness. We even heard a few "ahhs..." We then began a discussion about what the quote really meant for how we work with students. We also prompted the PSTs to think back to the previous week when they shared about their own personal culture. Would they want their teachers to ignore who they are? We then changed the statement to say, 'I don't see culture, I see children' and this helped the PSTs realize that as teachers we *should* see our students.

The ebb and flow of their understanding throughout this session could be seen in their reflections. For example, one PST reflected: "When we started I had thought the quote was simple and that everyone who agreed was racist in some way but the definition of colorblindness and the discussion opened my eyes on how 'blind' I was being." Another PST wrote, "What surprised me most was how the statement 'I don't see culture, I see children' changed the 'I don't see' part into something negative." Finally, one PST wrote, "I was surprised so many people said they do see color and culture. It made me realize that you *HAVE* to see these things in order to truly see your students as individuals." After seeing the reflections from the session on defining culture, we really believed the PSTs were beginning to understand culture. This understanding seemed to waver as they were first introduced to the idea of color-blindness. However, after discussion and dialogue they seemed to come back to a deeper understanding of culture.

The tides turned again for PST understanding during our session on privilege. Many of the PSTs wavered back-and-forth in their understanding of privilege and the connection to culture. For example, many PSTs equated privilege with hard work as well as meritocracy. One PST stated, "I really think I've been privileged with a lot of things in life, yet I believe a great deal of these things come from earning them and working hard." This topic created a lot of dissonance for our PSTs. They could not all see beyond the idea that privilege is equated with wealth or materialistic items. Even the PSTs who began to think about privilege differently did not yet have a definite grasp on the concept. For example, "it made me really question what privilege really means. It was interesting to mix being privileged with culture and how that may affect it. Why do people judge others so much?" This PST reached a level of critical consciousness by questioning what privilege means, however, she did not recognize the connection between privilege and culture.

After the privilege session we moved on to looking at potential conflicts between families and school values and connecting this back to privilege. The PSTs reflected on their own beliefs about culture once again and made connections to their classrooms. Within the reflections after this session we saw real growth in their understanding of culture. One theme across the reflections was related to how they continued to reflect on their own culture. The act of seeing their peer's beliefs in the classroom was influential in their critical consciousness. One PST wrote, "Some of the aspects of my personality and my values I naively thought reflected everyone else's ideas, which made hearing what everyone said interesting." Another said, "I was able to look at myself and really analyze how I am and how I feel in certain situations." Finally, one shared, "this activity gave me the opportunity to get to know myself better." One PST wrote about how this session prompted her to see culture differently. She wrote, "It allows people to think of culture in a different way. Usually people think of culture as race."

In addition, this session promoted PST reflection on the cultural conflicts that may occur for students in the classroom. One PST teacher wrote, "I will have students who have completely different cultures from my own and I will need to adapt my teacher style and preferences to benefit them." One PST shared her changing beliefs about how she viewed culture in the classroom:

I was shocked and intrigued to learn about the ideas that some students may not necessarily be "lazy" but rather more focused on the 'process' of an assignment and working through it effectively. I have such an excellent example of this in my intern classroom right now with a gifted student. He is incredibly smart, but still struggles to get his work done on time. I've always thought it was because he spends too much time working on the assignment and that he just needs to move at a quicker pace. In reality, it is more

than likely because he wants to do his best and wants his work to be perfect...

For one PST, this session was an important moment in his critical consciousness:

After completing this activity I am left with a lot of questions about culture. I will be the first one to admit that I have been pushing the unimportance of culture in the classroom. I feel like culture obviously is something to be considered and it is relevant to teaching, however I struggle with the way it is handled in the classroom. We learn a student's nationality and suddenly decide to do a whole unit plan on their culture that consists of shallow surface knowledge probably gained from Wikipedia, without any real interaction or cooperation with the student who is in fact, apart of that culture. This whole practice seemed really ineffective and without depth to me. I am now after this activity realizing however that it was my own judgmental, partial understanding of culture that created this disconnect in my mind. I enjoyed this activity because it allowed me to explore concepts related to culture that I would not stereotypically have considered. It really helped me widen my understanding of what culture entails, which I a learning is quite a bit of things.

This session illustrates another example of ebb and flow as the PSTs developed in their understanding of culture personally as well as in the classroom.

These examples across the semester illustrate our PSTs' struggles with understanding culture in relation to their own students; they demonstrated an ebb and flow of understanding throughout the semester. Each session allowed the PSTs to unpack a new aspect of cultural understanding; however, we saw a need for clarifications throughout the semester as they exhibited dissonance between their previous beliefs and new understanding of culture. We saw a deeper understanding when we discussed colorblindness with our PSTs. However, when we discussed privilege just the next week, our PSTs struggled to understand how privilege can be connected to culture. During the next session they displayed greater critical consciousness about culture and privilege in regard to cultural conflicts in the classroom.

### **Assertion Two: PSTs Experienced an Ebb and Flow in their Ability to Engage in Praxis in Regard to Culture**

While the PSTs experienced an ebb and flow of critical consciousness across the semester, they also experienced this same ebb and flow in regard to finding opportunities for praxis or reflection with action. Many of the PSTs expressed intentions of praxis while only a few actually engaged in praxis.

In the PSTs' reflections we saw that many did not necessarily engage in action, but were focused on intentions of



Table 2. *Various Intentions of Praxis*

<i>Intentions of Praxis</i>	<i>Described</i>
Discussing future intentions of action	After engaging in an activity or discussion about a specific topic such as privilege, colorblindness, culture, etc. many of the PSTs reflected on how they would translate these ideas to their future classrooms.
Asking questions about how to engage in action	Asking questions about how to enact CRT to inform their future action.
Discussing potential roadblocks to engaging in action	Excited by CRT, but questioned the feasibility of putting these practices into place. Many of the PSTs referenced the current context of teaching and how this did not allow for CRT.

action. Intentions of praxis included: discussing future intentions of action, asking questions about how to engage in action, and discussing potential roadblocks to engaging in action (See Table 2).

After engaging in an activity or discussion about a specific topic such as privilege, colorblindness, culture, etc. many of the PSTs reflected on how they would translate these ideas to their future classrooms. For example, after engaging in several activities related to privilege, one PST reflected:

It made me realize that as a future teacher that I want to know all my students or at least try my very best and have the students as well know each other. I want to recognize and incorporate as much culture as I can.

After watching the video of a teacher engaging in CRT, many of the PSTs shared strategies that they wanted to implement.

I would implement the think-pair-share strategy in my classroom because I think talking is an important part of learning.

I want to use the bottoms up, heads together in my internship.

I want to implement student experiences and opinions in my classroom.

After engaging in the privilege line activity, one PST shared how she would like to try this similar experience for students in the classroom to promote critical consciousness about privilege. She explained, "I would love to do this activity with my students in the beginning of the year with lower level questions to introduce each other and reflect."

While some PSTs included specific intentions of action, others spent more time asking questions about how to enact CRT to inform their future action. For example, after watching the video of a teacher engaging in CRT one PST reflected, "I

absolutely loved the video! The teacher used so many great strategies and had the students moving around constantly. How did she create a classroom environment like that? I would love to have a class like that of my own." After engaging in a discussion about color-blindness during class another PST wrote:

Teachers should use a students' cultural background as a tool to inform their teaching but not as a contingency for exactly how they will treat students. I want to think about more techniques or methods of how to reach out to students and gather this information.

Continuously within the reflections there were questions about putting these ideas related to the different concepts we discussed into action. Some examples of these questions included:

- What can we do to better help students who are falling behind?
- How will we understand and interpret our students' hidden culture?
- What type of activities can I do to learn more about my students' culture?
- How can I improve relationships with students?
- What are some creative ways to introduce culture to students of all ages?
- How can I approach students inquiry about controversial topics such as sexual orientation?
- How do I talk with parents?
- What if some parents are not comfortable with talking about these topics with me?

While these PSTs were not necessarily implementing some of the ideas discussed during seminar, they still reflected on how to engage in these practices. While they did not resist the practices, their responses indicated a need for more professional development and support for action.

Another theme within the intention of praxis is what we call, "sounds like a great idea, but...". This came up toward the end of the semester when we showed the PSTs a video about CRT. We had spent many weeks looking at ourselves and beginning to understand the elements of culturally responsive practice so we wanted to show our PSTs some of the strategies they could use in the classroom. This video included examples of: call and response, collaborative learning, set routines/procedures, student voice, etc. As evident in their reflections, the PSTs were excited and intrigued by seeing a culturally responsive teacher in action, but many of them questioned the feasibility of putting these practices into place. For example, several PSTs questioned whether these methods would work with certain grade levels. One PST wondered, "...will this work with every grade level because for the younger students it may cause them to become extra hyper and not get on task." Another PST discussed how the partnership schools all had their classrooms connected with another classroom and this could be a roadblock to some CRT methods. He believed that so much movement and activity

may be too noisy and a distraction to a joined classroom. Similarly, one PST explained:

I would love to integrate activities like this in my lesson, but I am scared of how my students will respond. In the class I am currently interning, the students do more of quiet work rather than loud activities. They also work in groups but I have not experienced anything similar to the video.

This PST worried about students' responses to these methods especially because they were in contrast to the classroom practices she saw in her internship. The dissonance between the video and the reality of the classroom made implementation seem very challenging. The PSTs' ability to engage in praxis may have been thwarted by their belief that the ideas were not possible. Many of the PSTs referenced the current context of teaching and how this did not allow for CRT. One PST explained:

I really liked the video but I feel like a lot of it would be much harder to implement in the classroom. I feel like teachers are not given nearly as much freedom as the video portrays. My classroom is very different from this, although they do group work, it is not very often.

One PST brought up the constraints of testing. She reflected, "I need to work on incorporating culture in writing. It's difficult sometimes to incorporate when we think of the types of prompts on tests and FCAT writes." While the PSTs did not seem to necessarily resist the idea and need for CRT, they did exhibit resistance in terms of the feasibility. This could be connected to the idea that "seeing is believing" as PSTs expressed their beliefs that these are excellent practices, but not seeing them in the field makes it difficult to believe they can actually happen.

Some of the PSTs were able to engage in praxis as they reflected on their beliefs and ideas within the seminar, and then actually went into the classroom and engaged in action. This praxis was "seen" in PSTs' responses in their end of the semester reflections.

Some examples of engagement in action included:

I incorporated culture in my last lesson. We did a lesson on tacos. I find it easy to incorporate culture with my class because we share the same culture.

My last lesson was culturally relevant because we talked about what we think people do all day while we go to school, and the students said, 'Pick tomatoes, firefighters,' and other jobs that are familiar to them because that is their culture. So I made them and jobs in their community welcome in our class.

My last lesson I was able to incorporate community as I used some examples of my students' home life.

I do and will implement strategies for CRT with my students. I have found it extremely useful for all lessons, transitions, and classroom management.

Within some of the responses about intentions and actual praxis we still see an ebb and flow of critical consciousness and understanding of culture. While the actual discussion of engaging in CRT within the classroom was not as prominent as the reflections of the intentions of action, we did still see this emerging evidence of praxis.

## Discussion

Our elementary teacher education program has worked hard to begin to develop a coherent and connected school-university partnership with a local urban school district. Within this partnership, we are committed to a focus on facilitating the development of culturally responsive, equity-oriented teachers and schools. One of our first steps in the development of this strand was beginning to build a focus on cultural responsiveness in the second semester that PSTs were in the field within the supervision seminars of several graduate students and faculty who have expertise and passion for this work. We purposefully worked closely with PSTs in regard to cultural responsiveness as a springboard to future work with the veteran teachers in the PDS. As we studied the influence of this curriculum on PSTs we found wavering critical consciousness as they moved one step forward and then one step back in their understanding of culture. In addition, we saw a great deal of reflection with intentions of action in their reflections, but with less examples of actual praxis (reflection and action) by the PSTs.

Based on these findings, we discuss several implications for our partnership work. First, with the continued ebb and flow of understanding from the PSTs, we need to find ways to incorporate ideas and activities in relation to culture across courses and semesters in the program. We inherently know this from the teacher education literature (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Grossman et al., 2008) as well as our own experiences, but believed that it was within our power to change this one course as a start. We also learned PSTs need more exposure to not only reflecting on culture, but also ways to deepen their understanding of culture to make change in their classrooms. This idea of incorporating and supporting PSTs learning about culture and equity mirrors the literature on this topic as well. Grossman et al. (2008) assert foundational courses in multicultural education need to focus on the theories of social justice as well as help PSTs develop teaching practices to help typically oppressed groups succeed in the classroom. Furthermore, they call for methods courses to weave issues of equity into the coursework (Grossman et al., 2008).

These two points, along with the findings from this study, support the need to incorporate CRT into all classes in teacher education programs. Some of our next steps in this area include expanding beyond just the field experience seminar to the other coursework. At the end of the last semester we met with all course leads and discussed ways to embed a focus on CRT in all courses. We developed a theme of "culturally responsive and equity-oriented curriculum" and every course instructor committed to including at least one assignment or activity, as well as several

readings to support this focus. We also know now that we have been developing greater trust and relationships with our school partners, that culture needs to be a focus of our discussions in collaborating teacher meetings and when we plan experiences for PSTs and collaborating teachers with school/university teams.

One of the findings from this study illuminated the PSTs discussion of potential action but a lack of discussion regarding actual action. From our coaching experience during this study, we learned that we will need to systematically develop our coaching skills to help our PSTs engage in praxis. As field supervisors, we will need to concentrate more on our coaching in order to help our PSTs transfer their skills to their teaching practice. In order to support coaching for CRT we have developed a question guide that we can use to scaffold our pre and post conference conversations. These include specific questions about relationships with students, language, teaching strategies, sociocultural consciousness, etc. Bowers and Flinders (1991) explain culturally responsive supervision "provides teachers with a third-party vantage point that may help them recognize how language and cultural patterns that they take for granted (and thus are not aware of) influence the learning environment of the classroom" (p. 7). As field supervisors, we need to focus our formal lesson plan observations on providing this third-party vantage point for our PSTs. In order to better handle this task, we have reflected on supplementing our current observation tools to make the presence or lack of CRT more apparent to our PSTs. Finally, in order to coach PSTs in the field with a focus on culturally responsiveness and equity, field supervisors will need additional professional development to support their own understanding of CRT so they can better support the PSTs in this endeavor.

The most important implication from our findings is that in order to help our PSTs make a connection to their teaching, we need to employ the help of in-service teachers within our partnership schools who are culturally responsive. This is especially important in light of the finding where PSTs said, "sounds great, but. . ." Many of the PSTs seemed to perceive that the current climate and accountability context of schools conflicted with or did not allow for the possibility of CRT. We need the support of our school partners to help PSTs begin to navigate the current context of schools and CRT. Part of this could include having culturally responsive teachers from our partnership schools serve as models for our PSTs and answer any questions about the feasibility of CRT. We also need to provide professional development on CRT for the collaborating teachers and administration in our partnership schools. More specifically, we need to help the collaborating teachers understand the mentoring pedagogy needed to support PSTs with CRT. Our goal would be to have all stakeholders sitting around the table and discussing cultural responsiveness.

The findings from this study point to the need for future research on the influence of expanded discussions of culture and coursework on PST learning. What is the influence on critical consciousness when PSTs are having discussions in many different courses? As we begin to form trusting relationships

with school partner stakeholders it would be important to begin to understand what supports the university can give the collaborating teachers to help PSTs implement CRT in the field experience classrooms. It would also be important to know what experiences are actually taking place in the partnership classrooms between the collaborating teachers and the PSTs that are supporting the development of CRT. Future research will include an assessment of our collaborating teachers' needs in order to help them to support CRT in the PSTs. We also intend to focus our future research on our coaching in the field. This research can focus on PST learning influenced by our coaching in the field and specifically the influence of using specific questions connected to CRT in pre and post conferences as well as the use of CRT coaching tools. Case studies of field supervisors engaging in culturally responsive supervision would prove imperative to making progress in this field. The findings of the study only strengthen our intention of future research concerning the promotion CRT across professional development schools. **SUP**

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