

Three Cases of Student Teaching Practice for Social Justice in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Although teachers may agree that it is important to teach all learners equitably, it is challenging to practice social justice oriented pedagogy due to its multiplicity and complexity. This participatory action research attempted to examine student teaching practices that three teacher candidates approached to teach for social justice with young children (Preschool – 1st grade) in suburban and urban school settings. For this qualitative research, multiple data sources such as observations, interviews, and documents from course work and field placement were collected and analyzed. This study discusses different student teaching practices each participant chose to teach for social justice and different areas of diversities each participant focused in different contexts. It concludes with some suggestions for early childhood teacher educators with insights and tools to support teacher candidates to teach for social justice.

Keywords: Diversity, teacher candidate, early childhood education, teacher education

1. Introduction

Educational scholars and leaders have paid increased attention to the effect of inequities on student outcomes focusing on the academic achievement gaps among different racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic status groups of students (Grande, 2004; King, 2005; Lee, 2005), while others argue that it should be focused more on systemic inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2004). In response to these inequity issues sustained by various factors, teacher education programs have recognized the shared responsibilities for the resolution of these issues and commitment to preparing teacher candidates to incorporate diversities and equity into the classroom. However, the effects of such efforts in various teacher education programs have not been consistent. There are some programs that were able to influence teacher candidates perceptions and attitudes toward diversities (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001; Peterson, et al., 2000), while others have not (Causey, Thomas & Armento, 2000). The complexities and multiplicities of effective teaching for diverse learners, which involves a complicating dynamic system that are embedded in several interacting contexts may be related to the challenges or hesitance many teachers experience in reality. Hence, there need more exemplary practices of teaching for social justice in different contexts to better prepare teacher candidates to teach for social justice.

With the heightened attention on the issues of diversity and equity in schools, the term ‘social justice’ has been introduced and reintroduced in teacher education. Like many other terms, social justice has been conceptualized and practiced various ways with different emphases. Justice has also been frequently used by many people especially since 9/11. Such a phenomenon thrusts to raise the questions. First, do preservice and inservice teachers have shared meaning of social justice and what their practice of teaching for social justice in their classrooms look like?

To conceptualize teaching for social justice for the purpose of this study, I will use the major claims from Fraser’s three-sphere model of social justice—redistribution/recognition, sameness/difference, and macro/micro forces (1997). The dual elements of each sphere are “co-fundamental and mutually irreducible” (North, 2006, p. 511) and the tensions between the dual dimensions are inevitable. The redistribution of social goods such as school funding, quality teachers, options of multiple curricular, and others should happen from recognizing individual and institutional norms and values. Focusing on one dimension can cause failure of claiming social justice. That is, an emphasis on recognition can distract from the marginalization of unprivileged people and a focus on redistribution can result in unchallenged norms and power relations which are inequitable.

Fraser's model of social justice seems to be paralleled with many pedagogical theories and approaches provided by renown scholars: Cochran-Smith's (2004) six principles of socially-just teacher education; Chalise, Jackson, and George's (2006) five key principles; culturally responsive education (e.g., Gay, 2000 & Gonzalez et al., 2005); multicultural education (e.g. Banks, 1995; Grant & Sleeter, 2007); and critical pedagogy (Freire, 2002). This study adapted common principles drawn from these theories: incorporating similarities and differences into curriculum, viewing learners as a competent citizen who have their own cultural, linguistic, and academic knowledge, skills, and interests, pursuing academic excellence by critical and multiple use of equitable pedagogies and assessments; and intentionally teaching about activism and social reconstruction.

The second question that needs to be answered is 'how learners, especially young children, develop their understandings of social justice and what are teacher's views on children's knowledge of social justice.' It is often assumed that young children are unaware of differences or too young to understand the issues of diversity and equity. In addition, most children appear to know that adults do not expect them to understand the issues of diversity and equity (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Hence, they often mask their activities from adults when the activities have negative components of diversity matters. Many teachers hold the innocence, ignorance, or naiveté of childhood views and these views may influence their pedagogical decisions. The reality is that children often involve in fairly mature and sometimes very sophisticated behavior (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

There is no one best way to understand and prepare teacher candidates for socially just teaching; however, to have a knowledge base to guide teacher education practices, we need to know more about how each individual teacher candidate participant shapes their teaching for social justice.

2. Research Method

Social-cultural constructivist ontological and epistemological stance supported my use of a qualitative, interpretive approach, which uses a researcher's firsthand knowledge of the social context to interpret how participants create meaning (Burgess, 1985). In this research, I presumed that the participants' practice of teaching for social justice is socially and culturally constructed; complex and changing; and that multiple mental constructions exist that are specific and influenced by the participants' context (Guba, 1990). Using participatory action research methods, I aimed to support participants' teaching practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), as well as develop my own supervisory practices to be more socially just.

A case study approach was also used in an effort to develop in-depth understandings of each participant's learning process regarding specific events of teaching for social justice (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). For these cases, detailed information was collected and analyzed to describe specific cases that might be overlooked in studies looking for generalizable knowledge.

2.1 The Context

This research was situated in the context of a 5-quarter M.Ed. early childhood teacher licensure program in a Midwest university. There were two pre-Kindergarten to 3rd grade early childhood cohorts with 31 teacher candidates in each. The population was similar to teacher populations nationally for these grade levels--mostly young white women coming from the same state where they grew up: out of 62, there were 6 males, 13 students of color, and 2 from other states.

2.2 Participants

The primary purposeful selection (Patton, 1990) of sites and participants was a strategy of convenience. I chose the M.Ed. program in my university because I was already assigned to work as a supervisor, and it gave me easy access and a useful setting for my research and professional growth (Glesne, 1999). Using the pool of teacher candidates in the program, I selected three participants from the early childhood cohort, and the program supervisors agreed that I could be their supervisor. The teacher candidates agreed to participate. I selected three who were student teaching in an urban elementary school and had earlier suburban preschool placements.

Three teacher candidates – Cathy, Emily, & Maddie (pseudonym), whom I supervised participated in this study. They were all women. Emily was black (Bermudan) and two were white. Cathy and Emily identified as middle or upper middle class and Maddie as working class. They were placed in a mixture of urban and suburban schools over the 3 quarters of field placements and student teaching. All teacher candidates were required to take either a one-quarter course on diversity and equity or a two-quarter community service learning project at a school 'Mt. Olivet', a primarily African American church. Cathy and Emily took an one-quarter diversity course and Maddie participated in a two-quarter community service learning project.

They shared interesting stories of experiences about their exposure to social and cultural diversity. Bass de Martinez (1988) confirms that diverse experiences are a crucial ingredient of teaching diverse learners: "The teachers who promote the culture and values of the school tend to do that through their own experience" (p. 10). Furthermore, being

positioned on the societal margins such as growing up in a low socio-economic family background like Maddie, Cathy's experiences for the extended period of time in other countries, or being a person of color like Emily, seemed to be a beneficial factor in becoming a social justice educator. However, each participant's experiences with diversity after they entered college were different, their learning from those experiences were different, and the influence of the experiences and learning on future learning to teach were different even though they went through the same teacher preparation program.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

As a researcher and a supervisor, I took advantage of all possible opportunities to listen to their stories and collect multiple data sources including conversations during pre- and post-lesson conferences, individual and group lunch meetings, semi-structured interview questions, telephone and e-mail conversations, their e-portfolio websites, and attending their methods courses. I also collected their autobiographies, reflective journals, lessons, and other documents, and recorded all our conversations. I observed, interacted, and made field notes and gave them on-going feedback on their teaching.

I read the data many times and identified patterns in my participants' practice of teaching for social justice. I asked all three participants to identify which lesson was more justice oriented and they provided me several lessons. I attempted to look at each case and also across the cases to make comparisons. Such a process continued until the end of my participants' student teaching. Afterwards, using those patterns, I created a coding book and a theme chart. The coding system helped me organize, manage, and fine tune the themes (Anderson, & Nihlen, 1994). My research question is: how each teacher candidate participant approached to teach for social justice?

3. Results

3.1 Cathy

Cathy came to the program with mature and caring attitudes and diverse personal and professional experiences. She was assigned field placements where both mentor teachers were well aware of diversities. Her preschool placement classroom was in suburban area where majority of students were white middle/upper middle class, and kindergarten classroom was in an urban area where racially minority students from lower class were dominant. Cathy's mature and positive attitude and the contrasting student teaching contexts provided us lots of stories to discuss. Cathy had a deep understanding of the importance of all diversity areas related to becoming a culturally responsive teacher, but she needed support to make connections between her understanding of those areas and teaching practices.

During our pre- and post-lesson conferences, three-way conferences, and informal lunch and break time conversations, we often discussed how we could diversify instructions so that all different children, especially English as Second Language (ESL) children, could learn better. We talked about how worksheets could be used more meaningfully and effectively especially for her ESL students because she had conflicting thoughts about using them. She felt it was unfair to give ESL children tests without an interpreter, and she wondered how she could supplement those assessments.

In both her student teaching field placements there were multiple sources and materials like children's books representing diverse groups of people, so we started to discuss how such environments could promote all children's learning and how we could move beyond. Throughout the year, she became more open to multiple ways to teach and work with children. The following two scenarios show how her understanding of diverse children's needs was demonstrated in her teaching practice, and how she was examining her assumptions about gender equity.

3.1.1 "Como esta?"

Cathy and I, often with her mentor teacher, discussed what it meant to create a good learning environment that was more socially just: respect who children are, listen to their voices with their needs, viewing each child holistically--as a raced, gendered, emotional, social, cognitive, and physical being. She developed the following teaching behaviors that are reflected in my field notes during her student teaching. My notes show how she responded to individual differences and needs by providing many different kinds of activities and experiences for her students.

If I [researcher] am lucky enough to be noticed by somebody inside the school through the small wicket on the door, I can enter the school without ringing the bell. If not, I may need to wait at least 5 or 10 minutes after 3 or 4 times bell ringing. This inner city school with steadfastly-locked-red-brick-colored-door often reminds me the movie "Lean on me."

However, as soon as I enter the school, my stereotypical image of urban schools quickly disappears and all my six senses come alive with curiosity, 'what will the kids be doing today?' Until I get close to the kindergarten classroom and even as I enter the room, I can hardly hear any sound.

Cathy, a teacher candidate, checks attendance sitting close to the door, and greets the kids in English and

Spanish. “Como esta?” “Good morning.” With a smile, a girl who seems very shy responds to her and they have a short conversation in Spanish. Cathy’s mentor teacher looks busy finding materials and papers. On the carpet, a pair and a small group of the children do puzzles. In the book corner, three kids look at the book together. Next to the book corner, two kids play with play-dough. By the sensory table, two kids pour water into each other’s cups and containers. In the ‘house keeping’ area, four kids are busy playing. There are giggling and whispering everywhere.

Checking the time, Cathy lowers her body and gathers heads together, just like sharing some secrets, and tells the kids to get ready for the morning work. She approaches to a boy who is acting silly and whispers to his ear. She quietly starts to sing a clean-up song. A Somalian kid who has been in the classroom and in the U.S. only for a month and who hardly has spoken or understood English sings the clean-up song very loudly. Cathy, with a big smile, says “You are the best singer for our clean-up song”. The boy responds to Cathy with a big smile. (Field notes, April 2004)

Perhaps because of this ‘safe environment’ where the children’s different languages are valued and their voices are heard, their strengths were recognized, their different interests were explored with diversified activities within connected relations with others. They were not humiliated in public about their misbehaviors. The children in this organized joyful chaos could optimize their learning. According to Adams’ (1997) definition, classroom safety is interrelated with respect and the expression of emotion. This valuing of differences, and emotions especially connected and cared feelings will lead our education to social justice.

3.1.2 “Are you guys washing the dishes?”

Social justice educators can start to question social norms and values by making the inequity issues explicit and by discussing and negotiating with children the values and norms they have constructed. In the following example in Cathy’s classroom, it is evident that various gender roles were freely experienced by these kindergarten children:

There are four boys in the house keeping area. Two boys are sitting on the table and waiting to be served, and two boys are busy setting up the table and preparing the foods. Soon after they all pretend to eat, they start to clean up and to wash the dishes. “The boys play in the housekeeping area.” I said. “Yes, they like to play there”. There are fire fighter stuffs, too”. Cathy responded. Cathy puts the attendance sheet in the folder and goes to the boys in the housekeeping area. “Are you guys washing the dishes?” “Yep!” “I always ask guy friends to do the dishes”. “Do you have kids?” “No.” She looks at me and smiles.

After they cleaned everything, they started to wear a fire fighter helmet and take measuring tapes out. Two boys measure the dining table and say 12 inches. Cathy announces one minute remaining. Three boys put the costumes and measuring tapes away but one boy still tries to wear the helmet. (Field notes, May 2004)

It is difficult for many teachers and me to move out of our comfort zone to examine these issues. During the previous year of my supervision of teacher candidates, I decided to carefully look at whether gender inequity really existed in U.S. classrooms. During a classroom observation the previous year, I sat with a teacher candidate who was working in a small group and wrote down her interactive comments. Surprisingly, she made more positive comments and supportive comments to the boys than the girls. I shared this story with Cathy. Cathy recalls:

Because I didn’t have many gender inequity experiences of my own when I was young, the gender issue was not in my attention. I don’t know. I didn’t think much about gender equity until you raised the issue and shared the other teacher candidate’s story. I thought unlike race and language that gender equity was already there. Since then, I have tried to make a conscious effort like opening the housekeeping area more often, and encouraging the kids to explore multiple roles that anybody regardless of his/her gender can have by making concrete comments and asking critical questions about gender equity. (Post lesson conference, May 2004)

Cathy described how she consciously made equitable gender issue explicit to increase the children’s awareness of such issue. According to Cochran-Smith (2004), in order to teach for social justice teachers need to help students “name and deal with individual instances of prejudice as well as structural and institutional inequities by making these issues discussable in school” (p. 77). Teachers who model gender equity in the classroom and mediate appropriately to counteract gender bias recognize these actions as essential steps in celebrating the self-worth, abilities, and potential of all children (Fleming et al., 1997).

Even though Cathy needed to broaden her perspectives and practices of social justice education, her sensitivity and responsiveness toward diversity, and her positive attitude to see race, gender, foreign languages as differences rather than as deficiency seemed to benefit the diverse learners in her classroom.

3.2 Emily

Emily is from Bermuda and wants to be identified as a black. She was assigned two very different student teaching placements. She was the only black in her preschool placement where teachers and families didn't seem to be active in achieving social justice but "open to everything" (Conversation, October 2003). Emily quickly built a close relationship with her preschool mentor teacher who was a white female and had an African American adopted son. She was a very supportive mentor for Emily.

She also built a good relationship with all the three and four year old children in the preschool but she expressed feeling uncomfortable interacting with some of the parents. Emily said she was very interested in issues of diversity and equity and she liked the preschool classroom because the teachers were conscious about gender equity. "When boys wear skirts, nobody makes a fun of it, but they were rather positively commented" (Post lesson conference, December 2003). She expressed that she was not familiar with such incidences.

This supportive environment seemed to facilitate Emily to incorporate diversities and equity. The following scenario in my field notes described a lesson she led about racial differences which emerged from the children's question.

3.2.1 I am black. Why? You Have Brown Skin.

I [the author] left my apartment early today because I wanted to talk with Emily before the children came. As soon as I finished greetings, she excitedly showed two books *Shades of Black* and *Kaleidoscope* that she was going to use for the activity. Emily explained what she was going to do. She couldn't clearly remember how their conversation earlier had led to talking about her race. During small group play, Emily described herself as a black person, and children poured out the questions about why she was black even though she had brown skin. She turned the children's question into a lesson which she was going to teach using these two books.

She starts the lesson by saying "Look at your hands and my hands, and tell me what color they are." "Mine's peach." "No, pink." "Yours are brown" "Dark brown" Children put their hands together to compare with each other. Considering the children's understanding but not doubting their potential to learn, Emily asks "Are they all same?" "People who have skin like mine are called black or African American and people of color." "Would you like to hear what these books say?" When she begins to read a book, all eyes were on her. After finishing the book, she asks the kids whether they have comments and questions, and then she introduces an art activity, making a mask with different skin color. (Field notes, December 2003)

She seemed to be comfortable talking about race related to different skin color with white children and teachers. After this activity, she reflected:

Emily: I think this activity helped me reduce my fear. I honestly worried about their reaction.

Young Ah: What do you think made you worry the most?

Emily: They are young and white. They might have misunderstanding about what I said. It is sensitive issue. But I think it went well. Don't you think?

Young Ah: I think you did a wonderful job, and I hope you can continue to do that. But one thing I want to talk about your lesson is maybe you could have specifically mentioned about difference doesn't mean wrong.

Emily: Yeah, I couldn't think that far. (Post lesson conference, January 2003)

Emily's interests and understandings about diversity and equity seemed to more easily apply to her teaching practices in her preschool setting but her attempts gradually transferred to the elementary setting during her student teaching.

3.2.2 You Are a Scientist!

Emily was comfortable working with the first grade children in an urban school, but less comfortable with her mentor teacher. One reason, among others, that we had more active conversation and a more relaxing atmosphere in the preschool was her different attitude toward the children compared to her mentor teacher. Emily explains:

It was mid-October and the first graders were sitting quietly working on a writing assignment concerning pumpkins. One of the students walked up to my mentor teacher who I will call Ms. P, and said, "Can I use it?" Ms. P. looked up at him looking irritated and snapped, "Use what!?" You say, 'May I use the restroom?' She told him to go ahead and then looked at me and said, "I can't stand when they say that. Why can't they say they need to use the restroom, not can I use "it." That drives me crazy."

At the time I did not understand why Ms. P. was so upset. I clearly understood what the child was asking. When the children ask me to use the restroom in that manner I think nothing of it.The way Ms. P. responded to the student makes me believe that either she is unaware of this cultural incongruence or she is aware and feels it is her job to bring her students up to her middle class norms. Either way, I believe my cooperating teacher is being insensitive to important cultural issues in her classroom. By her responding in the

manner that she did, it tells the child, 'How you talk at home and in your culture is not acceptable. Fix it!'

Through individuals' daily living patterns and language the oppressed remain in the same state. I believe I see this going on in my mentor teacher. I think she has good intentions. She has been teaching at this school and with the same types of children for seventeen years. I just believe she has been so socialized into believing that the ways of life, from the largest aspects to the smallest, of the dominant culture is the standard and no matter what culture her students are from, they should conform.

I wonder if the reason many students may not be succeeding at the level that Ms. P. expects them has to do with the major incongruence between the cultures. This incongruence and student-teacher interactions may be sending implicit messages that the students are not good enough due to their way of life and communication tactics. Therefore, this feeling of inferiority carries over in their schoolwork. (Diversity story for a course assignment, December 2003)

Emily asked important questions related to the social justice issues in her elementary classroom and the differences between her ideas and her mentor teacher stimulated some of these questions. Emily gradually developed a constructive relationship with her elementary school mentor teacher. Her mentor teacher reflected:

I really want to have another teacher candidate. I learned a lot from her and enjoyed working with her. I have been teaching in this school for almost 17 years, and I have been doing same things for years. She brings all great ideas that I have never thought about. The biggest learning for me was her attitude toward these kids. She is very patient and optimistic. And the kids' attitude toward her was different. (Conversation, June 2004)

While she was working on building a professional relationship with her mentor teacher, she kept her own beliefs and interests. She developed her understandings about multicultural education and equity, and made an effort to implement her knowledge. The scenario I will present is one example of many that shows how she communicated 'high expectation' for all children and that is different from how her mentor teacher precedes her lesson.

"We are going to explore, today." "Explore?" "Do you know what explore means?" "Do you know what research means?" The questions Emily asks sound a little bit challenging but they were challenging enough to promote the children's thinking. Smiling at the crowd of raised hands, she tells them the limits for sharing. "I only need two volunteers".

After explaining the definitions of explore and research with age appropriate words, she hands out worksheets she created with the title: 'Scientist's Report'. The worksheet is divided by several big blank rectangles and includes research question, prediction, observation, results, and the conclusion on the match between prediction and conclusion.

"All of you are now scientists". [The students respond:] "We are?" "Our research question is what causes the four seasons to happen." "The moon follows the sun." "Oh, that is an interesting idea." "What made you think that way?" After sharing some of the kids' ideas in order to explain how the four seasons happen, she tries to make a connection with animation which is popular with the kids by asking "Have you ever seen Dexter?" They all are eager to talk about the animation. Emily tells the kids to do pair share with an intention to give all children an opportunity to voice their opinions. And then, with Emily's signal for silence they return to her.

Their motivation to learn about the four seasons is already ignited and they seem ready to absorb everything. As if the kids don't want to miss anything from what the teacher says, with their sparkling eyes, they paid attention to Emily's explanation about the science activity. She doesn't forget to remind the kids to work together by saying "Scientists always work together and help each other. If you need a little bit of help, please raise your hand".

The children start to do the experiment with a flash light and Emily walks around the room and checks how they are doing and asks whether they have questions or they need help. One girl comes to Emily and shows Emily her scientist report, and says "I am a scientist." "Yes, you are. You are a great scientist." She smiles and goes back to her seat. (Field notes, February 2004)

For this scenario, I would like to point out two major features related to social justice. First, social justice educators are able to see their students as a whole with great potential. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that "teachers with culturally relevant practices see teaching as digging knowledge out of students" (p. 52). While they are at school or outside of school, I believe children continuously construct knowledge with teachers, peers, and the world. Holding high expectations means holding expectations for the students' cognitive ability but also for the child's holistic development, which start from the children's ideas and questions. Emily developed this lesson because she believed 'they could do it.' She both encouraged them and challenged them. Furthermore, she saw teaching as interactive. That is, she listened to what the child said, started from the children's responses, and guided them to move further.

Second, “pedagogy for social justice means providing opportunities for all students to engage in significant intellectual work” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 68) by using multiple ways such as making connections with animation, giving positive encouragement, designing appropriate levels of challenge for the task, and constructing hands-on activities.

Emily strived to help the students engage in learning. She had difficulties making equity and social justice issues concrete and explicit and in incorporating social justice into her teaching. By her student teaching, however, she was becoming more confident, which reflected changes in her understandings.

I have a better understanding of social justice. When you mentioned it at the beginning of the year, I was like, “What is social justice?” but now I have a better understanding of it. It is more like inclusive education, I think. Social justice education is more than just celebrating different holidays. It is all related to the actual ins and outs of everyday lives, understandings how the kids think, how they learn, how they interact, social interaction, how they talk. (Interview, February 2004)

Emily demonstrated her ability to empower children by designing lessons and activities guided by children’s interests and questions. Giving the power to the children’s ideas, I believe, is important in teaching for social justice. Most importantly, Emily’s and also Cathy’s awareness that social justice is significant to teach all children learn better and live better seemed to make difference in the learning atmosphere of their classrooms.

3.3 Maddie

Classroom management is the most popular topic or concern among teacher candidates especially at the beginning of their student teaching. Although all teacher candidates start with similar concerns about classroom management, for my participants, their learning and practice about classroom management evolved differently depending on the individual teacher candidate’s personality, the characteristics of their students, the relationships with their mentor teacher, and the culture of the school and classroom culture.

Maddie was a white female assigned to an urban kindergarten classroom with 80% African American children from low-income families and a suburban preschool with dominantly white middle/upper middle class children. She also volunteered to join in the community service learning project offered by one of the professors in the M.Ed. program. For Maddie, classroom management in an urban school was her biggest challenge.

“Michele (Pseudonym), go sit on the chair.” “Larry (pseudonym), you come sit by me.” The large group time interrupted by some kids resumes after rearrangement of seats. All children read alphabets out loud: “a, a, apple, b, b, ball” “J, leave her hair alone.” One girl starts to cry because she didn’t get a turn to say the word. Maddie ignores her and continues the alphabet. She keeps looking at me seeming to check my signal about whether she is doing right. I sent her a smile. Maddie’s mentor teacher accosts to me and says “I don’t think she can see what everybody is doing during large group time. Look at that boy (lying on the carpet turning against Maddie and playing with string pulled out from the carpet). Could you talk with her about it? She is wonderful, but, ...” With a frown her face, Maddie comes to me and says “Today, everybody is so wild. I don’t know why.” “I don’t think I did well”. (Field notes, December 2003)

This is one incident from my field notes, but during most of my visits for the first two quarters, similar incidents happened frequently, and Maddie made the same kinds of negative comments about the children’s behaviors and her classroom management. As if she would lose control if she smiled, she rarely smiled and often verbally expressed negative feelings like “Not again”, “I don’t know why they are doing this to me.” “He is like that all the time.”

Sleeter (1994) reported that a teaching force that is predominately white will likely make academic decisions through the lenses of the experiences and belief systems of white individuals, what Kincheloe, et al. (1998) call a “white interpretative filter” (p. 78). Often teachers see the color of children using stereotypes or don’t see color at all, they attempt to be color-blind. These attitudes of teachers often stem from implicit, personal racism and/or institutional racism, and often result in teachers’ low expectations for the potential and the academic achievement levels of students of color.

In the social studies class one week before Thanksgiving, when celebrating holidays became the topic of the class discussion, Maddie raised her hand and shared her opinion about her mentor teacher’s large group lesson about Thanksgiving in the elementary classroom:

My mentor teacher asked the kids what they do during Thanksgiving Day. Some kids said they eat pizza, chicken, and hamburger [interestingly nobody said turkey, the author’s observation]. Ignoring children’s answer, she said we eat turkey and watch football. And she asked again “What do we do?” and the children answered “We eat turkey and watch football.” (Discussion in the university class, November 2003)

On the day Maddie’s mentor teacher did the Thanksgiving Day lesson, I wrote down exactly what her mentor teacher

said and wrote a question for Maddie asking her to think about what her teacher did in this lesson and what she might do differently. She seemed to be able to make some critical assessment of the lesson in class, but Maddie didn't subsequently do anything differently about the next holiday 'Christmas'. She merely followed her mentor teacher's activities: making and coloring a dittoed outline of snowmen, Christmas trees, and Santa Clauses as fragmented activities void of any learning content.

Maddie expressed conflicting attitudes about discovery learning with hands-on experience: she was certain that children can learn better with hands-on experiences, especially for science, and yet, she feared planning and implementing hands-on activities because she assumed that the students would make a mess and the lesson would become chaotic. In December, she tried her first hands-on experience and is surprised at how well it went.

I was really scared with this project but it worked out well. I get caught up in the discipline issues. I forget what I am saying because I need a slow it down, relax on that, and so for me to write this [the sequence of the lesson with reminder of the words she will say to the children] out – it went really well. I asked them, because I told them the first rule is to only hold the ice cubes when I ask you to and when I ask you to put them in a cup you need to put them in the cup or I will just automatically take the cup from you and I am not going to tell you again and I want you to all participate. I tried to write as many details as possible. This stage I think you need to just kind of detail lesson plans. Yeah, because I figured they are going to put them in their mouth. They're going to put them on other people. They're going to swallow them. It could be just total chaos. And I actually had to dump the ice cubes in the container and just fill it with water because they didn't all melt. It took longer than I expected. They [the children] didn't know the difference. (Post lesson conference, December 2003)

In her preschool placement, where teachers incorporated diversities such as teaching the children sign language and different cultures, Maddie seemed to make more efforts to do something about diversity. A few days before the lesson about Korea for the letter K, Maddie called me to help her about this lesson. She asked me to write the children's name in Korean. I encouraged her by saying that was a great idea and I was willing to help her with anything she needed. However, right before the day of the lesson she called me again and said:

I felt frustrated because some of those kids are three and I am thinking how. I guess I don't have enough training to know how to, because I really want to do that cultural unit on Korea. I wanted to do that, especially since I found out the one little girl is from Korea. The more I thought about it, I thought they're not going to get this, especially like [children's names] and some of those young, young ones. They're not going to get that. Maybe a couple of them would kind of understand it but I thought maybe social justice would work best by just having them equally participate in games and me being a fair teacher and I thought that was the best way for me to relate social justice and I think I was taking the wrong and picking okay, cultural equality and I am thinking that's just too big of a concept, especially for the way that it was designed there where you have a question you could talk about. (Phone conversation, January 2004)

My observations and conversations with her led me to attribute Maddie's negative attitude toward the children in her elementary school field placement as related to race. It seems that Maddie's attitude toward the African American principal was also quite negative in the beginning. She thought the principal was not friendly or supportive. When I suggested that she go and talk with the principal, she seemed hesitate and her negativity continued. It seemed to me that her negative feelings and attitudes may have been associated with her fear of teaching different cultures and the mismatch and lack of understanding of her own race/ethnicity and that of her children. Teachers who are products of their own socialization into a particular culture decide what to teach and how to teach through the understandings gained from that socialization (Carpenter-LaGattuta, 2002). These understandings are gained through an enculturation process that results in implicit attitudes and understandings. In cases where teachers and their students are from different cultural backgrounds, and where teachers don't know explicitly who they are as cultural persons and who they teach, even when a common language is shared, communication and learning may be thwarted. In such situations, many teachers, especially white teachers don't relate the problems to their race and/or to the racial mismatch (Landsman, 2001); they blame the victims who are usually students and their parents rather than seeing their own cultural perspective as putting limits on their expectations for and understandings of their students.

When her full time student teaching started and after the burden of overwhelming demands from course work and field placements teaching reduced a little, I decided to focus on helping her change her view of children of color or children in general. Every time I visited her, in order to help her see children holistically rather than see them as only knowledge receiver, I asked her to describe different children using as many aspects as possible such as his/her home culture, emotional development, friendship, and Maddie's relationship with particular students.

Maddie's attitude dramatically changed during the last month of her full time student teaching. I am not sure whether it

was the experiences of describing individual children, the experiences in her community service learning with African American students at a local church (she mentioned that she learned a lot from the experience in this community church and she differences she saw), or being released from the demands of M.Ed. courses. She commented on her principal's attitude toward her "Our principal visited me today. And she watched my lesson for a while and gave me a really positive feedback" (Conversation, May 2004). The change was also evident in a typical comment she made to her students:

Maddie: I know you are getting smarter and smarter, so I decided to trick you with the most difficult question in this world. Are you ready?

Children: [Unanimously] Yes!

Maddie: Here it is.

Children: Oh, that's too easy. Give us more difficult one.

Maddie displayed more difficult question on the board. (Field notes, April 2004)

Maddie smiled and laughed more. She included humor when she taught lessons. She didn't talk so much about controlling children's behavior. She planned and implemented more hands-on activities without worrying about chaos and mess.

Hi, I was hoping you could come to watch my science lesson on animals. I have found a website, National Geographic for Kids. It shows pictures, gives all kinds of stories and provides animal sounds! I'm at the library and can't hear the sounds, but I think the kids would love it! We have computer [lab time on] Wednesdays from 10:00 am - 10:40 am. Maybe I would be allowed to use the overhead to guide the class to discussing different things about animals and listening to their sounds. This would give them a more authentic experience than just looking at photographs! I'm really excited about this! (E-mail, May 2004).

For the animal lesson, Maddie asked individual child to line up one by one. There were some wiggings and whisperings, but it seems okay for Maddie. One boy calls Maddie quietly and whispers something. Widening her eyes, Maddie responds to the boy saying "I know. I watched the lion on TV news, too." "You know what?" "What?" "We are going to see and learn about lion, today." "Really?" The boy responds back to Maddie with smile. (Field notes, May 2004)

Widick, Parker and Knefelkamp (1978) suggest that the formation of identity is fostered by an environment which allows for experimentation with varied roles, the experiencing of choice, meaningful achievement, freedom from excessive anxiety, time for reflection and introspection, interaction with diverse individuals and ideas, receiving feedback and making objective self-assessments, and involvement in activities that foster self-esteem and understanding of one's social and cultural heritage (p.14). It seems that Maddie's willingness to do some experimentation during her student teaching and our conversations about these lessons resulted in an increased awareness of the students and their differences, and her own assumptions and stereotypes. She did not yet get to the point where she could critically question issues of social justice related to these differences, but at least she was moving forward in her recognition of differences and willing to interact in ways that supported higher expectations for her students.

4. Discussion

This research was guided by my understanding that teaching for social justice is complex, fluid, and situated, and by my curiosity about the ways teachers might change their minds while learning to teach. Understandings and practices are continuously constructed and reconstructed individually and collectively. Therefore, the meaning of teaching for social justice must be negotiated, and those who work in teacher preparation should support this accordingly. However, creating contexts where praxis (theory into practice) is possible related to teaching for social justice, it is complicated and not always supportive of helping teacher candidates teach for social justice.

Throughout the program, Cathy and Emily could implement their ideas of social justice into their teaching. Maddie's negative attitude toward African Americans also noticeably changed. Their teaching practices of social justice were not sometimes apparent during their student teaching. There were many reasons for such differences—different understandings, time pressures, and different school contexts with support or lack of support. Also, as teacher candidates, they were not always free to make decisions about curriculum and teaching to match their personal goals. Their goals were sometimes in conflict with the goals of their mentor teachers.

In the teacher education program, the faculty demonstrated a strong emphasis on teaching diverse learners, but they had somewhat different understandings and teaching approaches, and they were more or less explicit about teaching for social justice. The coursework might have had a stronger impact on students' practice of teaching for social justice if the faculty had together constructed more clearly articulated shared goals and a consistent approach in the courses.

Despite their differences in learning to become teachers for social justice, they all expressed the importance of properly teaching all learners, and this was evident in their teaching in different ways. Teaching all learners was a consistent theme throughout the university courses. This was a beginning way to think about social justice, but it doesn't go very far toward considering inequities in society that influence the students they are teaching. Only Cathy and Emily showed evidence of a more justice orientation. Each of these students had had diverse experiences before the program, and their field placements were in diverse classrooms where social justice issues were more apparent. It was not possible to determine whether prior experience, school context, or the program was most influential.

The results from these case studies suggest that teacher educators should incorporate various pedagogical strategies to prepare them to teach for social justice by considering teacher candidates' existing knowledge and values, and the complex influences on their learning to teach. Teacher educators also need to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to discuss and reflect on their experiences.

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