

## **Going Backstage: Enhancing Communicative Competence for Pre-Service Teachers**

**By William T. Pink**

It is often noted that the vast majority of students in pre-service teacher preparation programs may be poorly equipped to teach in urban schools because, in great part, they are disproportionately white, female and middle-class (Darling-Hammond, 1997 and 2001; Delpit, 1995; Sleeter, 2001). Typically, these students arrive at the university with life experiences aggregated from suburban or rural living. Their contact with urban living and people of color is limited at best and frequently non-existent. The majority of students in the teacher education program at Marquette University fit this profile.

While the education faculty at Marquette recognized this limited experience of students entering the teacher education program, we have systematically and purposefully revised both the individual courses and the program with three key goals in mind. First, we carefully framed these revisions around preparing teachers for urban schools, second we made social justice a

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major theme that was threaded throughout the program and lastly we emphasized the role of the teacher as a leader and change agent in their school and district. Throughout this two-year revision process, we had extensive discussions about the meaning of race in a society dominated by the privileges of Whiteness (both for students of color *and* for ourselves as a predominately White faculty), as well as the possibility of framing future school reforms within a commitment to social justice.

What we recognized early on in these deliberations was the importance of moving the student from who they were when they entered the program, to someone different when they graduated from the program. In short, we reasoned that in order for the program to be successful in its goal of preparing teachers to teach effectively in urban schools, faculty must assist students change the ways they talked and thought about urban education: the result of this change being that at graduation, the student was ready, willing and able to be an effective teacher in urban schools. In this paper I want to interrogate the role of a required foundational course (048) entitled, “Inquiry into Contemporary Educational Issues: Developing a Knowledge-Base for Teaching in a Diverse Society,” that was specifically designed to trouble students’ thinking about key issues confronting schools. The central point that I want to argue here is that realizing such a shift in student thinking and action is possible when using an appropriate conceptual framework and pedagogical strategy.

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### **A Sociology of Knowledge Perspective**

The conceptual framework used in this course is the sociology of knowledge. Drawing from several sources (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bowers, 1984; Schutz, 1962) key assumptions can be articulated about social reality, truth and the role that teachers and schools play in the socialization of students. I’ll briefly detail six assumptions that I make from this framework and then show how I use them to structure the course experience for students:

1. Through socialization, those naturally occurring events often unconsciously experienced, individuals “receive” the functional knowledge that permits them to move in a non-problematic way through a range of events in their life. In effect, then, via socialization we learn the normative expectations of the culture(s) in which we live. Thus, individuals internalize the expectations of significant others: through trial and error our own thinking and behaviors are shaped in culturally congruent ways.
2. Language is the carrier of this functional knowledge that is learned and internalized so effectively via socialization. Encoded in this received language, however, are the values, beliefs and taken-for-granted of the culture. Thus, as individuals construct social reality through this shared language this, in turn, permits them to not only understand and give meaning to activities around them, but also to think. In short, individuals construct reality and truth statements as and because they learn a (shared) language.

3. The received nature of this socialization, resulting as it does in the taken-for-grantedness remaining largely unconscious and unexamined, frequently sustains the reification of both the cultural beliefs and the organization of the institutions that themselves both mirror and reinforce these taken-for-grantedness. Both are seen as the “natural order of things,” thus masking the human authorship of these beliefs, values and assumptions: this reification makes it difficult for the individual to think that these beliefs, values and assumptions can be changed. What is problematic here, of course, is that the very language that enables the individual to think and communicate, also constrains how the individual can think about things. This tension exists because this language that we must use to think and communicate with is itself an amalgam of metaphors, idiomatic phrases, beliefs, values and assumptions of the society. This raises the question of whether we can actually think in new or unconstrained ways: put another way, if the language we use to think is received rather than constructed by the individual, in what ways can we think about the individual as creating original thought?

4. Reality, then, is socially constructed. The received and largely uninterrogated language is the primary means of representing and defining this reality both to ourselves, as well as to others. Although it is argued that reality is constantly being (re)constructed, individuals develop a stake in maintaining the reality that they have constructed to make sense of the world from their own perspective. Consequently, identity and belief maintenance become major tasks for the individual. In short, individuals are constantly resisting challenges to their current world view.

5. Such an ego investment by the individual in their own definition of reality and, therefore, in the taken-for-grantedness that support this reality, works to further reify rather than problematize key aspects of their reality.

6. Schools constitute a major arena in which students are socialized into internalizing the taken-for-grantedness of the culture. Again, students learn via socialization/language acquisition, together with a prolonged subordination to the teachers’ worldview, not only the culturally required functional knowledge (e.g., normative conduct, expectations and ways of presenting the self), but also the culturally required symbolic knowledge (e.g., the valued ways of thinking about “high status” disciplinary areas such as mathematics and science). In short, it is in the formal and informal settings of the school that students learn to define themselves not only through the eyes of significant others, but also against the beliefs, values and taken-for-grantedness that are encoded in the language that they must use to think and communicate.

This sociology of knowledge perspective is helpful in a number of ways to an analysis of the ways in which pre-service teachers’ taken-for-grantedness are formulated and sustained. It is also helpful in suggesting what we must focus on in order to change these taken-for-grantedness in ways that will enable them to be effective teachers in urban schools. Using this perspective, for example, we can suggest that

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to the degree that white, female and middle class students are frequently socialized in settings that deprive them of contact with people of color and that they internalize cultural assumptions about the superiority of both their own race and class, it should come as no surprise that they arrive at the university with taken-for-granted assumptions that equip them poorly to be teachers in urban schools. By equipped poorly I mean that they typically carry negative stereotypes about the “Other,” and perhaps more importantly, without the ability to recognize or decode the wide range of hegemonic messages that they receive which work to sustain these negative stereotypes.

Our responsibility as instructors in foundations classes, I would argue, is to problematize these taken-for-granted, as we also assist students to reconceptualize their thinking and become engaged in praxis. Stated in another way, our tasks are (a) to surface students’ tacit assumptions that were forged via prior socialization, (b) to support them as they work to identify and re-align ideological distortions in their thinking that are constantly being reinforced by cultural hegemony and (c) to sustain them, over time, as they subsequently engage in social action in their role as a teacher in urban schools. While I readily acknowledge that this is a tall order for instructors teaching foundations courses, an order frequently made that much more difficult because many instructors who teach content or methods courses often ignore critical questions about the beliefs, values and assumptions that both shape and drive this content and practice, nevertheless it must be positioned as the centerpiece of our instruction. I want to suggest that by placing the enhancement of communicative competence as our first priority in the preparation of pre-service teachers, we can be successful in graduating the majority of our White, female and middle class education students with the insight and skills to become effective teachers in urban schools.

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### **Communicative Competence and the Trip Backstage**

Simply stated, communicative competence is the ability to “read” the culture, to understand the “language game,” in such a way that the individual can (a) “see” the origins of their taken-for-granted, and perhaps most importantly (b) play an active role in reshaping those taken-for-granted when they find them distorted or dysfunctional (Bowers, 1964). Thus, the role of the instructor in teaching foundations classes should be as a facilitator to enhance the communicative competence of their pre-service students. As I will argue later, this doesn’t mean replacing the distorted or dysfunctional taken-for-granted that the pre-service student brings to class, with the instructor’s (presumed more authentic and undistorted ) alternative set of taken-for-granted. Rather, the engagement of pre-service students in this search for communicative competence should lead to the self-empowerment of the student, not the mindless adoption by the student of the beliefs, values and assumptions of the facilitator of this search. While it is evident that this searching

and subsequent transformation is inevitably problematic, if only because of the high level of commitment that individuals have to their current taken-for-granted assumptions, I want to argue that it offers us the best strategy for preparing White, female and middle class teachers to teach effectively in urban schools.

In practical terms for the pre-service program at Marquette University, this means that the instructor must make problematic normative thinking and practices in schools. The intent here is to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions in key areas and to ask the pre-service student to reflect on the implications of these assumptions and their attendant practices, within a social justice framework. This is done in 048, for example, by systematically interrogating the social, political, cultural and economic implications of normative thinking about key factors such as race, class, gender, intelligence, tracking/ability grouping and the organization of schools. Moreover, as we do this the student is pressed to connect these cultural and school level assumptions and practices with their own taken-for-granted assumptions about teachers and schools. The goal, of course, is to surface both normative thinking and practice that is incompatible with the social justice themes of fairness, equity and excellence. The result of such problematizing, I would argue, is the re-formulation of taken-for-granted and the subsequent engagement in actions that maximize social justice for all students in urban schools.

The analogy I like to use for students as I begin to teach the 048 class is to describe this strategy to enhance communicative competence as the backstage visit to the theatre. Life, I argue, is like sitting in the stalls at the theatre. Most of it is passive and we come to internalize reality as that which is presented to us up on the stage. We have all been socialized to act appropriately at the theatre (think Life). We can talk and socialize quite freely until the lights go down and the curtain rises. It is that at that point, as we have learned through socialization, that we must stop interacting with others and settle in to willingly allow the play to capture us, to draw us into the plot line and the characters that act out in front of us. If we fail to conform to these expectations we must be prepared to suffer the consequences of either being reprimanded by those sitting around us, or being forcefully removed from the theatre. In effect, we literally suspend our belief to the reality of the action presented to us. The better the play the more we are drawn in. Now, in some cases we are also asked to further suspend our disbelief in what we see on stage because the play violates some taken-for-granted norms that had been internalized through our prior socialization. This is the case, for example, in a Christmas Carol (where we are told that unless we understand that Marley is dead then nothing in the play makes sense), or in A Midsummer Night's Dream (where we are told that we must understand that faerie creatures do inhabit dark, forested areas). My point here is that the play (think Life) is presented to us as it appears on stage with the intent of making us think that this is the way things really are. Thus, by inviting students backstage to watch a performance it reveals how what appears natural, or reality, from the stalls is nothing more than theatrical artifice. Marley isn't a ghost, but rather an actor in wild make-

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up and fake chains, whilst Puck doesn't really fly, he is merely hauled around by two men working a harness. What this repositioning does from a conceptual standpoint is to permit the student to see how things actually work, rather than be overwhelmed by the artifice of the performance as viewed from the stalls. Having seen, for example, that David Copperfield, the magician, doesn't actually make the 747 disappear from the stage, the student now has a better insight into the ways that the audience in the stalls is manipulated, or hoodwinked, into believing that what they "saw," the 747 disappear, did in fact happen. As instructors, we make the same trip behind the stage with students as we invite them to examine their taken-for-granted assumptions: in short, we can help them "see" how their beliefs, values and assumptions have been manufactured and sustained by their socialization experiences and the language that they use to think and communicate. I would argue that once the student has been taken backstage and experienced first-hand how the play in the theatre has been staged to present a certain "constructed" reality, a reality that is manufactured and contrived to be theatre and not real life, then those same students can never return to the stalls and see the play (read *Life*) in the same way ever again. In the insightful words of The Who, "We Won't Get Fooled Again."

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### **The Invitation Backstage in a Foundations Class**

I don't want to make too much of either the structure or content of this 048 foundations class in which pre-service teachers are invited backstage. The course lasts for only sixteen weeks of the semester and we should not expect too much change in this timeframe. I'll argue later, for example, that the power of this pedagogical approach is best realized towards the end of the program when (a) the students have been engaged in repeated backstage visits, *and* (b) they have enjoyed an extended period in which to interrogate and re-construct their conceptual understanding of the hegemony which shapes schooling and their own potential role in enhancing the communicative competence of their students. The more important message that I want to offer is that this trip can be successfully undertaken with freshmen and sophomore pre-service education students. The full title of the course in question is, "Inquiry into Contemporary Educational Issues: Developing a Knowledge-base for Teaching in a Diverse Society." It is typically taken by freshmen or sophomores and is the second course in the pre-service teacher education sequence. The focus of the course is stated as, "Teachers as Agents of Critical Inquiry, Social Justice and Activism," and it is structured around the interrogation of several contested themes, i.e., critical pedagogy, culture and schooling, racism and schooling, class relations and schooling, gender and sexual diversity in schools, stratification in schools, bilingual education and inclusive education. Throughout the course students do extensive readings, engage in classroom discussion, research issues and make group presentations on the themes, write an individual research paper on a single theme, and explore the integration

of technology into group presentations. Again, I think that it is important to emphasize that it not so much which authors and texts are read, or which specific themes students are required to explore, as it is to emphasize the importance of the conceptualization of the pedagogic strategy to systematically surface the taken-for-granted assumptions of students and the extended invitation to “see” from the backstage vantage point, that can result in dramatic shifts both in student thinking about urban education and their growing sense of self-efficacy to become an effective teacher in urban schools. In short, the focus on enhancing communicative competence empowers students to see themselves as capable of critical inquiry and as future activists for social justice.

At the first meeting of the class I make the case that teaching cannot be conceptualized as merely transmitting high status knowledge to students: this, of course, is the vision of teaching that most of them have from their own schooling experience in taking predominately honors and AP classes. I go on to develop an alternative vision of teaching that requires the teacher to develop both a variety of curriculum and pedagogical strategies that are appropriate for all rather than some students, *and* to become activists around issues of social justice in the schools and communities in which they live. It is here, for example, that we talk about the idea of culturally responsive teaching and how we might develop it if we are White and are teaching students of color (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2000; Zeichner, 1996). I also tell them that by the end of the semester I am going to change how they think: I warn them, in effect, that they will be different people by the end of the semester than they are now. I tell them that I’m basing this claim on my expectation that after we have walked backstage together, they will be challenged to reformulate their distorted and inappropriate taken-for-granted assumptions that emerge from this different vantage point. I confess to them that my pedagogical technique for enhancing their communicative competence will be much like that depicted in the opening of the Monty Python Flying Circus TV show, where the top of a head is cut away so that I can get my hands in there to massage their gray matter, thus helping them to think differently: I do remind them that this is only a cartoon depiction. They laugh, of course, at least those who know about Monty Python do, while many look at me very skeptically. Some, however, shake their heads as if to offer me the direct challenge that it will be impossible for me to mess with them in such a way. Again, while my expectations are not that they will change so dramatically within the timeframe of the one semester course that their parents wouldn’t recognize them, my expectations are they will think differently than they did on entering the class and, in particular, that they will have a much sharper critical capacity to interrogate the current thinking and practice of schooling.

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### **Tracking the Emergence of Communicative Competence**

I will use data from two sections of 048 that I taught at Marquette University

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to illustrate both the type and scope of change I have found in student thinking. In the second week of class I ask students to respond to the following journal prompt:

Journal 1: “When I think about becoming an activist for social justice in Education, I . . .”

The following three statements from white, female and middle class students are typical of the responses that I received to this journal prompt (I have changed all the names):

Peggy: Growing up in a middle class suburb, I had always assumed that everyone had roughly the same opportunities at education and success. In my eyes everyone could obtain the level of education they wanted to as long as they worked hard enough. In my neighborhood, students came from the same class and ethnic background. Growing up in this type of school system made me naïve to the struggles others endured while trying to obtain an education. . . I realized how fortunate I was as a child to grow up in a well-funded school district that motivated me to work hard and perform. . . Beginning in grade school, my class was filled with predominantly white students. In my community, race was never much of an issue due to the lack of diversity. My classes rarely discussed such issues, and I didn’t understand the importance of multicultural education. I used to feel that education was about learning facts and data, areas that were very straightforward.

Ruth: I went to private schools all my life, where the majority of students were white and only a few were not. It is when we talk about race that I sometimes feel like I missed out on a lot in living in this all-white community my whole life. I feel like I have been sheltered and took the “color-blind” view rather than facing reality. . . Before coming to Marquette University, I really didn’t know a lot about teaching in a diverse community. I never really thought about that option for some reason. I always just assumed I would grow up and teach in a private school, just like the ones I went to.

Jane: Most of my life I have grown up in white suburbia. Until about two years ago I can’t recall seeing any African-American families in my community. Since then my community has become slightly more culturally diverse. I have never felt hatred towards those who are different than me, but I can always remember feeling a certain curiosity. . . Since I’ve come to Marquette. . . I have had opportunities to get off campus in all directions. To the north and west the population is predominately Black. To the south the population is largely Hispanic. To the east towards the lake are a lot of affluent white families. I have learned that there is a large correlation between segregation and social class. . . Growing up, I was always afraid of Milwaukee because I associated it with crime. Then, when driving through it I saw the large Black population and came to associate Black people with crime. Our society is one perpetuated by fear. . . Living downtown I’ve been exposed to many races and have become comfortable in a diverse society. Experiencing such a change, I have come to believe that segregation and ignorance cause racism.

These experiences described here appear to be typical of students coming into the pre-service teacher education program at Marquette University. They clearly

reflect a process of socialization that can be characterized as suburban or rural mid-western. Moreover, they show not only attendance at largely Catholic and predominantly white, middle class schools, but specifically a notable absence of contact with students or adult of color. Based on these data, a case could be made that such students should not teach in urban schools. Specifically, it could be argued that their experiences and dispositions are ill-suited for teaching students of color. Not surprisingly, on entering the pre-service teacher preparation program, the expectation of many of these students is to return to the types of schools from which they graduated. This is an interesting finding because, as noted above, beginning two years ago the program was completely revised and all the literature was rewritten to reflect an emphasis on the preparation of teachers for urban schools with a focus on social justice. I suspect that the meaning of this message is somewhat lost, however, because most of the students seek out Marquette because it is a Jesuit university that emphasizes “Men and Women in Service to Others.” That is to say, students come to Marquette expecting to engage in a variety of service learning activities that will engage them with the underserved and marginalized. I should note, however, that our teacher education program is different from the typical service learning orientation, where a professional lends their expertise to those less fortunate for a single project (e.g., neighborhood clean-up, or even Habitat for Humanity) and where, in many cases, those involved with the service learning do things for rather than with those receiving the service. At Marquette, by contrast, service learning in the School of Education requires students to surface and rethink their taken-for-granted assumptions and then move into social action to work alongside their peers with the intent of changing the current thinking and practices in schools and connecting institutions. Given this big difference in the focus of service learning activities, together with the seeming mismatch between the stated goals of the program and the prior experiences of most students, we might expect that students would resist both the requirement that they engage in the interrogation of their taken-for-granted *and* the expectation that they embrace the role that they as teachers must play in re-socializing their students to problematize normative ways of thinking and behaving. As I will show later, this proved not to be the case with the students in these two classes.

I suggested earlier that as an instructor I would be setting myself up for failure if I expected to see dramatic changes in students across a single semester in a single course. I also suggested, however, that if students were successfully engaged in a process that took them backstage and worked in a systematic way to enhance their communicative competence, then it would be reasonable to expect that we could see changes in the way that students think about key issues in education and that these same students would begin to see themselves as important actors with respect to social activism. To test this assumption, I asked my last class (spring 2004) to respond to a writing prompt at their last class meeting (I should add that this was solicited after they had completed their evaluation of the course!):

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Please answer *either* question 1 or 2. Do not put your name on the paper.

1. I am a different person now than I was in January (when 048 started). I am different in the following ways:
2. I don't think I am any different now, so I will note two things that I will do this summer:

Perhaps the most surprising thing that I discovered is that the responses tallied 28 to 1 for responding to question one. In short, almost to a person students volunteered that they saw themselves differently now than they had four months earlier (even the lone student who said that they were not any different now volunteered that they "learned a lot about other peoples opinions," and ended by saying that "I'm now more sure that I want to be a teacher.>"). This ratio of 28:1 I see as an important statement about the efficacy of the trip backstage for the students in this pre-service teacher education program. While I cannot include all of their statements and insights here, I think it would be informative to offer several in order to show the ways in which they believe that their thinking has changed (I have changed all the names):

Peggy: I have learned so much about other races it is amazing. Before this class I had a mind set that everyone should fend for themselves. It probably is how I was raised and my parents influence. But now I realize that there are institutionalized boundaries that need to be broken. Not only for different races and social classes, but also for genders and people with disabilities, etc. I almost blessed that I was able to open my mind to see what it is behind the curtain. If I never took this class I would have remained ignorant. Now it's like I want to tell other people about it so they can understand too.

Jane: I am different in the way that I look at both the world and myself. I always realized that there were problems with the current school system, but I never realized how deep and complex they were. I guess the biggest way I changed is in my new found motivation to take action. I'm ready to answer that bugle call whenever it sounds. I feel that if I'm going to be a teacher I'm going to be the best I can be. I no longer picture myself just standing in front of a class and teaching. I now see myself inspiring my students to take action. I see myself involved in the community and actually working for social justice. As corny as this may sound, this class has made me want to become a better person.

Roger: In January, when you told us we would be different people at the end of the semester, I didn't think it was possible. Now, I realize that I did learn a lot from this class, which has made me a much different person than I was a few months ago. I think I changed the most when we did group presentation on the different issues in education. Learning about these issues made me realize what a large impact I can have on the student's lives. This realization changed my perspective a great deal. Also, I feel that I am more aware of political issues that involve schools, which makes me a different person because I can now form my own opinions on these important issues.

Ruth: I think that I am different because through this class I have learned how to look

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at things from more and different perspectives. I had never really thought before about the idea of “going backstage” and really questioning and challenging the system and how it has functioned. I really honestly do think that I have begun to think differently and am a different person after this class. Now, every time an issue comes up I always think about the “normal” way it is handled and how I need to think about alternative ways of doing things—once I learned this it is hard to forget that a lot of what we do is unjust. . . I cannot live with the guilt knowing that there is a better and more fair way to do things. I think that I have discovered a lot of my ignorance and for that I’m grateful. Now I can begin to learn more with this new perspective in mind.

Alice: This class has opened my eyes to the responsibility I will one day have as a teacher. Before this class I was unaware of how much education extended beyond math, science, reading, etc. I have also learned the variety of differences my future students will have, such as gender, race, class, culture, and level of achievement. I have come to understand that treating all of my students the same is not treating them equally. I have come to focus more on the importance of social justice/activism and hope to incorporate these issues into my classroom.

Frank: I think that I am different in that I now look at schools and life much differently. I have learned a lot about our society and all of the factors that go into a good school and a good teacher. There are so many things that I now realize that I need to learn about and to prepare for before I head into a classroom, if I hope to be effective. I see that being a teacher involves way more than I thought, in that a teacher needs to be ready to adapt to any situation and to be able to teach *all* students, not just those who fit into the dominant group.

Amanda: I look at things more critically like the hidden ways that people stereotype due to factors like race, class, gender, religion and sexual orientation. . . It will be up to me as a teacher to help all my students be prepared for academics after high school and to become social activists. This course has definitely changed my opinions on how I thought a class should be taught. I now realize that there is much more to teaching than the book material, it has just as much to do with making a difference in student’s lives and in the community.

What these journal entries from White, middle class and both male and female students clearly demonstrate is that a course which focuses specifically on the development of communicative competence of students in a pre-service teacher education program, can significantly impact how those students think about teaching, schools and their own efficacy as a teacher. I have included two male responses here to demonstrate that the few males in the pre-service teacher education program offer very similar comments regarding the 048 backstage experience as do their female peers. Again, I would note that this is a single course experience and would suggest that the full the impact of such a pedagogical strategy should be further enhanced when this same strategy is used throughout the entire preparation program. Here, however, it is clear that as a consequence of visiting backstage, students have begun to surface and rethink (a) the social, political and educational implications of factors such as race, class, gender and disability, as well as (b) their

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socialized taken-for-granted and to project them into their own classrooms. I should emphasize that this examination of taken-for-granted was encouraged within a very supportive and non-threatening setting. Frankly, both conflict and angst were welcomed in this setting: college, is, after all the place where we invite students to experiment with and try on different ideas. It's interesting to note that not one single student complained that such an examination of their taken-for-granted assumptions was inappropriate, even when they acknowledged that this was frequently a difficult and sometimes painful thing to do. As promising as these shifts in thinking are, I want to emphasize that I'm not suggesting that our work is done by offering a single course such as 048. Neither am I suggesting that these shifts in thinking signal that these students will be successful teachers in urban schools. Clearly, we have much more to do. What I am suggesting, however, is that the focus on enhancing communicative competence appears to be a promising strategy for preparing white teachers to teach in urban schools.

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### **Some Concluding Thoughts about Communicative Competence**

My intent here was to outline a promising strategy for troubling the ways in which pre-service education students think about schooling and the role that teachers play in schools. Clearly, this initial success needs to be reinforced throughout the teacher preparation program. This would include the kinds of experiences that puts students into extended contact with individuals and communities of color, the variety of observation and student-teaching experiences that students have, as well as the kinds of support networks that we can maintain after they graduate from the program and lead their own classrooms. Taking pre-service students backstage with a view to enhancing their communicative competence, I have argued, is an effective pedagogical practice for making problematic the normative taken-for-granted and practices in schools. I should note here how important it is for teachers (and the administrators who support them) to first achieve communicative competence before they are able to successfully lead their own students to the same destination. Thus, because of the complex nature of achieving communicative competence, it is imperative that we infuse this goal throughout the pre-service teacher preparation program. I will end by taking up three important questions concerning the efficacy of preparing white students to teach in urban schools.

One question that frequently surfaces in the discussion of the implementation of communicative competence is the best time to orchestrate the backstage visits? Some argue that we need to have teachers gain experience in classrooms before we can ask them to think more critically about teaching (Zeichner, 1996). A popular proposal for doing this is to reserve the critique of schooling until the masters level: the logic offered here is that students cannot fully understand the nature of teaching unless that have had their own classroom and have experienced both the joys and frustrations of teaching. My concern here, of course, is that teachers are all too

quickly socialized into the existing practices and organizational patterns of the schools in which they teach. A better strategy, I would argue, is to socialize pre-service teachers into patterns of thinking that problematize these current taken-for-granted institutional practices, while we can assist them develop alternative practices that speak to the social justice mission of schools. In short, I suggest, it would be better for schools to recruit new teachers able to contribute to changing the dysfunctional practices of schools, rather than attempt to resocialize teachers at a later date: the danger here, of course, is that the longer you delay the engagement in a critique of schooling, the greater the likelihood that such a critique will be actively resisted or quickly abandoned, because it is too difficult and painful to surface and subsequently change taken-for-granted in which you have much invested. We cannot lose sight of the fact that if the goal is to enhance the communicative competence of students, then it is imperative that we recruit teachers who have already achieved communicative competence themselves.

A second key question that frequently surfaces is how we can best locate practicing teachers and schools that can support pre-service teachers who have visited backstage and are raising serious questions about the social justice implications of many everyday practices in schools (e.g., tracking and ability grouping and the disproportionate assignment of students of color into special education classes)? This is a problem we face in the program at Marquette. Our short-term solution has been to invest in the professional development of teachers in selected schools with which we have built special relations: these are not professional development schools, but they are schools in which we have faculty visiting on a regular basis and in which we have blocked pre-service students both for visitations and student-teaching. The ideal situation, of course, is where pre-service student-teachers can be paired with a practicing teaching who is currently working to enhance the communicative competence of their students: some have characterized these exemplary teachers as “teaching against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991). In this setting the student-teacher can receive the insight and wisdom of a teacher who is actively engaged in taking the students in their classroom backstage. While we have begun to set this up on a small scale, the difficult question that remains is how we might go about scaling this up from five or six schools to a system. Clearly, we don’t want to be preparing teachers for a world of schooling that doesn’t exist. Rather, we want to prepare teachers to become active in continuing to improve schools in a world where taking students backstage to enhance their communicative competence becomes the typical rather than the atypical practice.

Finally, we must return to the central question first posed namely, what is the probability that our predominantly White, female and middle-class students can teach well in urban schools? In addressing this question we must make note that those who advocate for the power of culturally responsive education as the best strategy for teaching African-American students, also suggest that teachers of color may be best prepared to do this work (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994 and 2001;

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Perry et al., 2003). This position raises a series of questions about the potential efficacy of the predominantly White, female and middle-class teaching cadre to teach students of color, even those teachers who have gained communicative competence. While it is too early to answer this question about efficacy for the students who took 048 at Marquette, my own sense from these data and from my interactions with these students is that they will be well-attuned to the problematics that they are likely to encounter in urban schools and seem well-positioned to teach students of color with distinction. Time, however, will reveal if this hunch of mine is correct. I'm convinced, however, that without such a systematic focus on taking pre-service teachers backstage with the goal to enhance their communicative competence *and* supporting them as they develop an orientation toward social activism, we may be unable to produce teachers capable of teaching any of the nations children, regardless of their race, class or ethnicity, to themselves acquire communicative competence and thus engage in formulating a more just society.

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