

Examining Teacher Candidate Resistance to Diversity: What Can Teacher Educators Learn?

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How teachers interpret and respond to diverse students' cultural identities is critical to students' success. Therefore, teacher educators require candidates to gain experience with multicultural populations during fieldwork as a means of promoting candidates' sociocultural consciousness. What can teacher educators learn from candidate perceptions of these experiences? This study features a case analysis of a candidate's descriptions of multicultural school experiences. The candidate negated the need to be culturally responsive by inaccurately simplifying culture and using the binary constructs of "same" and "different." The article contends that to promote candidates' sociocultural consciousness, educators must provide a framework for deconstructing "same" and "different." The article offers a visual model as a pedagogical discussion tool.

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The documented achievement gap (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) between mainstream and marginalized groups of students makes visible how the complex construct of "culture" affects school learning (Banks, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Hollins, 1996). US census data reveal that school enrollment includes an increasing number of diverse students in the United States (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Therefore, teacher education is charged with the "demographic imperative" (Banks, 1995) to prepare teachers to understand how culture influences student success or lack thereof. As one means of preparation, teacher educators require teacher candidates to participate in field experiences with multicultural populations. Still, candidates sometimes resist the notion that culture matters in the classroom. We shall examine one candidate's resistance to the belief that culture is a relevant issue. Based on this candidate's perceptions, we will propose a visual model of cultural complexity as a pedagogical tool for teacher educators.

Achievement Gap, Cultural Diversity, and Teacher Perceptions

Whereas we acknowledge that “the gap is not an inevitable fact of nature” (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003) and that hegemonic and normalized institutional policies are a significant basis for achievement differences (Cochran-Smith, 2004; House, 1999), we believe that one site of reform is teacher knowledge about and dispositions toward diverse students. Power relations exist in the classroom, and teachers’ actions toward students are influenced by teachers’ perceptions regarding multiple socio-cultural factors (Collins, 2003; Ferguson, 1998). McKown and Weinstein (2008) found significant correlations between lower student achievement and teacher biases based on student ethnicity, particularly African American and Hispanic students. Ladner and Hammons’ (2001) data show that “districts with more white teachers have a greater rate of minority enrollment in special education, particularly for African-American students” (p. 104). Weinstein, Gregory, and Strambler (2004) report that biased teacher perceptions of diverse students could be a consequence of a predominantly White teaching force that acts on common stereotypes. Surprisingly, Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings (2010) noted that many Black teachers also ascribe negative assumptions to African American males, a perception that likely influenced the students’ low achievement rate. The point is that a teacher, from any cultural group, can act on negative assumptions about students. These studies demonstrate that race continues to be a wedge in American schooling.

Institutional racism, or racism “rooted in American institutions, American culture, and concepts of self-identity and group identity” (Lazos Vargas, 2003, p. 2), acts as an invisible force that can promote people’s negative assumptions about people of color. Pollack (2004) suggests that “categories of ‘racial’ difference are central to the most troubling power struggles we have” (p.1). “American race talk” include examples of both “talking and not talking” in an effort to “make things fair” (p. 1). Pollack found that by avoiding racialized discussions, people deny the impact that race has on “everyday institutional relationships” (p. 215). We use the term *race* to describe the labels we employ to categorize people based on physical characteristics, particularly skin color. Although these labels are unscientific human constructions, schools and people use them daily to categorize. According to Pollack, racial categories are “genetic fiction but social realities” (p.214).

Consequently, individual teacher dispositions regarding race and cultural diversity become an issue. Ladson-Billings (1994) reports that teachers are not at ease recognizing student diversity, especially racial diversity, and asserts that teachers assume that they must provide the “same” instruction for students in order to be “equal.” Many teachers use a colorblind approach and maintain that “we are all alike under the skin, aren’t we?” (Landsman, 2009, p. xi).

Multicultural teacher educators counteract these colorblind and negative perceptions of diverse students by promoting culturally responsive teaching—the

concept that teachers must respond differently to students based on diverse cultural identities and learning needs, or be “culturally responsive” (Gay, 2000; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). Gay defines culture as “social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs” (2000, p. 8) that are “dialectic and dynamic” (p. 10). She makes explicit the multidimensional “mitigating variables” and “expressive behaviors” that are culturally-influenced, but not stereotypically predictable that students bring to the classroom. Cultural diversity, therefore, includes the various ways in which the human experience can be diverse, as expressed through race, ethnicity, class, language, religion, ability, gender, and sexual orientation. Thus, we acknowledge that one experiences the world differently based on the cultural groups with which one identifies. We also recognize the multi-faceted nature of human identity since one person is a confluence of each of these diversity factors.

Because of the complexity of culture, there are challenges in translating “culturally responsive teaching” for teacher candidates. First, there is the problem of guiding candidates to acquire a deep, not shallow, understanding about a “cultural group” (Hollins, 1996) and to have some understanding about a cultural group’s funds of knowledge (Moll, 1990). Second, if a teacher candidate gains some understanding of a “cultural group,” the candidate must resist stereotyping and then teaching “prescriptively according to broad, under-examined generalities about groups” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p.20). Third, teachers must see students as members of multiple cultural groups rather than one cultural group such as race or ethnicity. Fourth, teacher candidates sometimes state that it is impossible to respond to cultural differences because of the multiple cultures represented in one classroom (Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell, & Middleton, 1999). Finally, candidates must understand that one’s cultural identity positions a person to experience various forms of oppression and privilege due to hegemonic and institutional power dynamics (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Simultaneous to leading candidates to a more complex understanding of culture and people, multicultural teacher educators assert that candidates must examine their own socio-cultural history. Such an examination will promote candidates’ cognizance of their own complex cultural identities and influence their perceptions of others. Through this study of culture and self, candidates can develop a socio-cultural consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) or “see with a cultural eye” (Irvine, 2003), a lens through which teachers can perceive and understand the socio-cultural, political, and economic influences on diverse groups’ access to education. This sociocultural consciousness becomes the foundation for all culturally responsive teaching.

To this end, some teacher educators make multicultural tenets central to their curriculum (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay 2000). Research reveals that teacher educators encounter resistance from candidates to such a multicultural emphasis (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Irvine 2003). Many candidates have little experience in considering how cultural identity can create inequitable circumstances for diverse people (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Irvine, 2003; McIntosh, 1992). Consequently, teacher educators continue to search for pedagogies that promote such a socio-cultural consciousness in all candidates. One pedagogy is to require fieldwork in multicultural settings.

In a meta-synthesis of multicultural teacher education research, Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) reported that from six empirical studies on teacher education programs including both course and field work experiences, these programs had only slight and inconsistent effects on future teachers' perceptions about diversity. These scholars also reported that whereas they found many teacher educator self-studies of university students' responses to coursework, they found only 10 empirical studies of future teachers as they practiced in diverse settings.

Thus, the outcome of teacher education pedagogies is a continual source of study for researchers. Since field experiences are an integral part of preparation programs, teacher educators need to garner more thorough understandings of how candidates interpret experiences in multicultural schools. It is the authors' intent to forward this multicultural teacher education agenda.

Methods

This empirical qualitative study was designed to investigate teacher candidates' perceptions of cultural diversity during their student teaching experience in a multicultural school. The research questions included:

- How do student teachers describe their experiences in a multicultural school?
- What do these descriptions reveal about their sociocultural consciousness and their understanding of people from diverse identities?
- How can these descriptions inform teacher education's goal of preparing culturally responsive teachers?

Researchers, Participants, and Context

As the primary researcher, I (Dana) planned a semester-long multiple case study of student teachers' experiences in a multicultural school. Ann acted as a consultant and respondent throughout the study. Together, we identified four candidates who were scheduled to student-teach during Spring Semester 2005. All four were enrolled in a 5-year teacher preparation program in a research university in the Southeastern region of the United States. The preparation program culminated in a master's degree with elementary teaching licensure. Multicultural topics were infused into university courses, including courses such as a freshman seminar with an emphasis on diversity, social justice, and personal cultural awareness; a social foundations course; and a multicultural course that included experiences tutoring African American students. Finally, two semesters of fieldwork were required, one in a rural setting and one in an urban multicultural school (Potts, Triplett, & Rose, 2008).

Since our purpose was to gather student teachers' in-depth responses to their field experiences, we asked these four as a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002), their purpose being determined by their openness to discussion that Ann had witnessed through previous contact with them during coursework. There was no attempt to select participants based on particular dispositions toward diversity. All four agreed to participate and signed IRB approved consent forms prior to beginning their student teaching. This "bounded entity" became a multiple case study (Merriam, 1998). I was not a professor or supervisor for any of the four participants. As part of my doctoral research that examined student teacher responses in a multicultural school (Rose, 2005), I had become a participant-observer by acting as if I were a student teacher and assisting a third grade teacher in the same multicultural school for most of the academic year. My goal was to study the four participants' responses, as well as my own responses, to the multicultural setting. This article is a case study of one of the four participants, Susan (pseudonym).

Susan was placed in a third grade classroom in Gilmer Park Elementary, a school located in Oakland City, a mid-size city in Southeastern United States. (All names are pseudonyms as a condition of research approval from the school system.) Susan had chosen the city for her student teaching placement, as all the candidates had the opportunity to request their placement from a choice of an "urban" or "rural" location. Gilmer Park was situated in a "changing" neighborhood (from mostly White to mostly African American) as documented by the changing demographics across time. Immigration patterns had also altered the school population in recent years. Gilmer Park's demographic statistics included the following racial categories: 62% African American, 29% White, 6% Hispanic students, and 2% Asian. Approximately 10% of the students were new English language-learner immigrants with ethnic identities deriving from Bosnia, Columbia, Cambodia, Liberia, Sudan, Bosnia, Mexico, and Vietnam. At Gilmer Park, a total of 70% of the enrollment qualified for free and reduced-price lunch.

Data Collection and Analysis

After the study began, Susan's case became particularly interesting because of how she described herself as "resistant" to the idea that responding to students' cultural identities was relevant. Data sources for Susan's experiences included transcribed tapes from three interviews (beginning, middle, and end of the semester), transcribed tapes from two group interviews with the other three candidates, and my field notes from individual conversations with Susan.

I conducted all interviews from a research perspective that "the best interviews become a conversation between two engaged people" (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, p. 210). I did not add my own perspectives during these interview-conversations since I did not want to influence Susan's responses. Qualitative research of this type relies on the underlying relationship between the interviewer and the participant. Susan saw me frequently in my own classroom, which was next door to hers. Therefore, I was familiar

to Susan, and we had some commonalities by virtue of our immersion in our classrooms. During interviews, my intention was to further develop a relationship of trust with her by attempting to exhibit a neutral response to her ideas and by responding with genuine interest. By using open-ended, conversational style questions, within this context of trust, I hoped that Susan would feel safe to describe what she was thinking. Example questions included: “Do you have any stories to share about your students or the school?” “Tell me a story about something that’s happened in your classroom that you don’t think would have happened if the school was not multicultural.” “How would you describe the school?” When we met, Susan seemed eager to talk. She told me at the end of the semester, “You’re very non-judgmental, and so you make it so I can tell you these things, even though I know you feel different—and not make me feel awkward.”

Susan’s case became a “sociocultural analysis of a unit of study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 14) because we were interested in how she expressed her socio-cultural perspectives. Our belief in the nexus of language to reveal one’s “cultural values and personal subjectivities” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. x) was central to the research methodology. Therefore, narrative approaches informed our analysis process. We believed that an examination of Susan’s narratives would give us a more “nuanced portrait” (Moss, 2003, p. 16). As we read Susan’s descriptions and stories, it was easy to locate those stories in which she explained her perspectives on cultural diversity. With those stories foregrounded, we examined her uses of “referential” language, or the way in which she referred to people and events, and her “evaluative” language, or the way in which she explained why she was telling the story (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). We further examine how her language became an expression of her socio-cultural consciousness.

Case Study Analysis

During the first interview, Susan stated that she was a White female who had grown up in a working or middle-class family that consisted of her mother, siblings, and Susan. She had attended public schools in a nearby city, and she sometimes visited her father in another city in a more upper-class neighborhood. When I asked Susan to describe her previous experiences with diversity in school, she replied, “Oh, nothing.” She added that all of the schools in her town were “pretty much White. It was a shock coming here [Gilmer Park Elementary School] and seeing the visual difference. We had maybe five Black students in our entire school.... But they came from the same area, and personality-wise they were very similar to all of the other students.” Susan explained that at her high school, “Everybody really was kind of alike.” She based this judgment on her perception that the students were alike in their “interests and attitudes.”

Whereas Susan was not recruited as a representative of a candidate who discounted the significance of culture in the classroom, she emerged as “resistant” when I heard and later re-read her transcribed responses. Throughout the interviews,

Susan explained that she did not agree with the university's emphasis on diversity. For example, in the first interview, Susan summarized much of her position on "culture" and "diversity" in this statement in response to my question about Susan's early perceptions.

It's definitely not what I am used to, but I look at the students, and they don't seem different to me from each other. They are different from other students I have been with because of the area; I feel like that is their defining cultural background. I don't feel like they are different because they are Black and White, and I have never been able to understand what the professors talk about when they said, "Oh, you need to make all of these modifications for diversity because your students are Black or culturally Asian." I would be like, "That doesn't make any sense to me because that is not who they are." Their skin color doesn't tell me anything about their personality and what they need.

She both describes the students (referential language) but explains the purposes of her description (evaluative language) when she summarizes her reactions to the tenet that teachers should be culturally responsive. She also stated, "I have a very hard time when all of the professors are talking about culture." Therefore, she knew that her opinion conflicted with what she believed her professors promoted.

As a researcher, I was concerned that Susan had agreed to be a participant in a study about her multicultural school experiences and that she might not want to continue as a participant if she realized now that she was participating in a study about "diversity." Therefore, during the second interview, I asked Susan how she felt about answering questions on this topic. She answered:

It's more in our classes and stuff because this is their big thing...diversity and racial diversity.... I feel like raising my hand and saying, "No, I don't feel like I'm supposed to be doing this.... I feel like every time they bring it up, it makes me more resistant.... I feel like I should be open to anything, and I feel like the more they keep trying to drill this into me, the more I'm saying, "No, I don't want to do it...."

Susan has labeled herself as "resistant." She inaccurately perceived that her professors thought that teachers should make "grand gestures" with multicultural education lessons. Susan disagreed and preferred "embedding it in our daily practice" and including multicultural topics "just in little ways with books and examples." For some reason, she did not understand that such practices would also be considered culturally responsive teaching.

Analysis of Susan's Stories

Throughout the semester, Susan described her perceptions of the students' cultural identities (referential language). Her purpose in telling us her stories (evaluative language) seemed to be to confirm her beliefs and discount her professors' beliefs. Susan's evaluative language included justifications for her resistance to being culturally

responsive. We interpreted her justifications to include: 1) it is valuable to be colorblind and believe that all students are the “same” and only “different” based on personality; 2) race is not a significant factor since there is not a direct cause-effect relationship between race and a person’s culture; 3) the most significant cultural factor is where a child lives and experiences life. The following stories document her descriptions and evaluative language.

Resistance: Colorblind “Sameness”

Susan resisted the value of recognizing students’ diversity by insisting that the students at Gilmer Park were the “same,” even though the school was demographically diverse. She repeatedly used her colorblind observations of the students’ “sameness” to substantiate her belief that culture did not matter. She was only willing to confirm “difference” between the students in terms of human individuality and “personality.” Her repeated variations of referential language to describe the children as “same” and “different” became intriguing.

I see them all the *same*, as in terms of the class or group of kids, but then of course, they’re all individually as *different* as the next one.

It’s definitely not what I am used to [students at Gilmer Park], but I look at the students and they don’t seem *different* to me from each other. They are *different* from other students I have been with because of the area; I feel like that is their defining cultural background. I don’t feel like they are *different* because they are Black and White. [italics added]

As a follow-up question, I responded, “[You] don’t see the Black students in your class being different from the White students in your class?” and Susan replied, “Yes, I look at the way they act, and there are small differences. I think the Black students are more—I want to say almost energetic, but that is it.”

Once, Susan used the constructs of “same” and “different” in her denial of the significance of the historical mistreatment of people.

I feel like in order for us all to be equal, we need to stop talking about all the *differences*...and all the ways that we are mistreated a hundred years ago and just say right from this point on—we’re going to start saying we’re all the *same*. You know, we’re all as *different* as the next person, but as a group, we’re the *same*. [italics added]

Susan’s referential language becomes evaluative language because she explains her reasons for using “same” and “different”—her belief that providing an equitable education is dependent on everyone being considered the “same.” She has noted that we are very individually different.

Resistance: Race Doesn't Matter

Susan particularly resisted the idea that race mattered in the classroom. According to her responses, she thought her professors wanted her to believe that the most powerful cultural factor was “race” and that she should create lesson plans based on “Black and White.” She continually claimed that students’ “skin color doesn’t tell me anything about what they need.” Susan said that at Gilmer Park race is “such a normal part of their lives...it’s perfectly normal to them, and I thought that before hand, but they definitely showed that to be true.” Therefore, Susan perceived that since racial diversity was “normal” to the students, race was not relevant and should therefore not matter to teachers.

In another explanation, Susan said that “skin color doesn’t tell me anything about personality; it is not who they are.” She later provided a specific example that she thought confirmed that race didn’t determine anything relevant about a student. Susan shared a set of students’ work that “proved” that race didn’t matter and that revealed Susan’s construction of the concept of “race.” She shared three students’ papers entitled “Home Culture,” an assignment that Susan had designed for a required multicultural lesson plan. The students wrote descriptions of their home culture, including special occasions. The student work belonged to Isom and Jared (both African American males who had grown up in the community) and Sina (Black female who had immigrated from a west African country). All would have been identified as racially “Black,” yet they obviously had different life experiences. Susan told me that their work samples were “perfect little examples of culture despite race.”

On the assignment, Sina had included a family wedding custom as an example of a special occasion. Sina had written, “My dad paid two cows for my uncle’s wife” and had explained that buying cows was her homeland’s wedding tradition. Susan expressed an evaluative statement that explained why this story was a significant example: “I think it’s a wonderful example of diversity right there from what we are used to.” In contrast, Isom and Jared had given “typical responses.... You know—I go to church; we eat—it’s holidays—it’s all of that.” Susan said that she “got a kick out of Jared’s response because it was so ‘Americanized’.” Jared had written, “We go to Walmart” and “Education is important.” Susan said that “if you think about American culture—this is what you think about.”

Susan said that the student work “showed incredibly different cultures—they showed distinct culture, but they’re all Black kids.” She explained that while all three of the students were “Black,” they did not write similar examples for “Home Culture.” Susan believed that she had proof that all Black people would not have the same culture or traditions. Therefore, since race could not “cause” culture, race was not a significant cultural factor. While this observation demonstrates Susan’s laudable ability to acknowledge cultural differences and to not stereotype people based on skin color, she further used her interpretations to deny the significance of race’s effects on people’s lives altogether.

Resistance: Culture as Area

While Susan was steadfastly resistant to the belief that race was significant, Susan's corollary assumption was that the students' culture was defined by the "area" or where they lived. She claimed that the students were alike as a group because of their common experiences in the "area" and were different from students from other "areas." Susan compared the students at Gilmer Park to her students in her previous rural school placement. She claimed that "in the country, the kids come in late because they had to milk the cows. And here...they come in late because they can't get a ride to school."

In her third interview, Susan detailed more of her perception of the students' "same" experiences in the "area." She stated that the students' "parents probably have similar jobs or at least in a similar range as each other. They're used to the same surroundings. They have the same basic things in their life." Here Susan uses "area" as a reference to socio-economic class since we associate "class" with "similar jobs." Consequently, she does use the cultural construct of "class" and "area" as a factor in explaining what makes the students "alike" or part of a cultural group. She also believes that their group "sameness" would make them "different" from groups from other "areas." Therefore, Susan expresses some understanding of how common practices and experiences can create cultural group likeness. However, Susan's premise that "area" was the students' defining cultural characteristic became another evaluative justification for her notion that culture was not significant.

The Paradox: "Small" Differences

Susan eventually acknowledged "small" differences in the teachers and students based on their interaction styles. In her third interview, Susan conveyed that she had enjoyed observing the teachers' interactions with the students. She stated:

Just being around so many Black teachers.... It's interesting to see the different way that Black teachers and white teachers react towards their students, and how the students act towards the teachers.... But Ms. Butler [African American female] especially—the innovation and the attitude and all of that—I couldn't talk like that if I tried [Susan is smiling while she talks here on the tape].

Susan also described differences between how the students interacted differently based on "Black or White." I had asked Susan to tell a story that would not "have happened in a school that was not multicultural."

Susan: These kids—Black kids and White kids—there are going to be some obvious differences—and White kids will never act a certain way or speak a certain way.... So, like some of the responses that you get...the outrageous shocks and the way that they speak to you.

Author 1: When you say “outrageous,” give me an example.

Susan: Like telling Lamar (African American male) to stop talking, and he yells back at you in this shocked and offended voice, “I wasn’t talking!” [loud voice]—I’ve never in my life known a White boy to speak that way—and argue back with you—not like that—not in the offended kind of—“You’ve just accused me of doing something that’s horrible”....

Author 1: In other words he’s defending himself?

Susan: He’s defending himself at a level that I would not expect—the accusation of just talking out in class...’cause most of the time he is doing what he’s been accused of doing. He just has a problem with automatically saying, “I didn’t do it”.... So just getting used to interacting with these kids in a different way other than what I grew up with....

Author 1: Okay, so interacting differently.

Susan: And I can’t respond to their personalities in the same way I would respond to someone like Charlene [White female].

Author 1: How do you think you learned how to respond differently?

Susan: Well, I think it’s one of those—I’m not responding based on Black or White or boy or girl, but just on an individual child level...you know, because I made so many mistakes in the beginning ‘cause I didn’t know their personalities.

I responded by telling Susan that perhaps Lamar did express himself through his own cultural interaction style. Susan responded, “Yes...I don’t feel like it makes them—makes who they are different necessarily...but there’s definitely the whole way of speaking and the way of carrying themselves.” Then Susan expressed curiosity about what causes Lamar’s interaction style.

But I really wonder what that comes from since...kids who kind of act that way...I refuse to believe that it’s solely based on race. But I wonder; it seems like a family thing. It’s just the way you grow with your family and what you’re used to. So, I don’t think it’s solely race, and I don’t think it’s solely economic status. I think both of those have a lot to do with it. It has to be something else. It can’t just be those two.

Susan’s interpretations are paradoxical. First, she describes through her referential language the “differences” in both Black teacher and student interaction styles and stated that “Black kids and White kids—there are going to be some obvious differences and White kids will never act a certain way or speak a certain way.” Then, Susan said, “I’ve never in my life known a White boy to speak that way” (a stereotype). She essentially described interaction styles as being related to a racial identity. Next, she describes Lamar’s defense of himself as problematic (“outrageous”), rather than considering a less judgmental explanation for his response. After first identifying these

interaction styles as racial, Susan discusses how she must respond differently to students based on their interaction styles, but then she describes interaction style as “personality” and “individual child,” so she avoids race and reverts to her belief in the power of personality differences. Finally, Susan questions what “causes” a Black student’s interaction style, and she considers multiple cultural influences, such as family and economics. In so doing, she unknowingly affirms the social construction of interaction style: “It’s just the way you grow with your family and what you’re used to.” Consequently, Susan randomly uses and rejects racial stereotypes in her thinking all the while explaining why this story is a justification for her denial that race is relevant.

Trustworthiness

After analyzing Susan’s interviews, we sent Susan the document and asked for her to verify if she agreed with the representations of her interviews. Although this article includes only a piece of the whole analysis (see Rose, 2005), this analysis is coherent with the whole case study. Susan emailed her response to our analysis:

Well, I was able to access the paper, and I finished reading it.... I don’t know how you made sense out of all of your information. I think that you appropriately portrayed my opinions and experiences. Good luck with finishing it all! (email, Susan, 8-13-05)

Discussion and Recommendations

Susan had an agenda to discount her professors’ emphasis on diversity and culturally responsive teaching. She became another example of candidates cited in the literature that “resist” the notion that culture matters in the classroom (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Irvine 2003). What can we learn from another candidate who is an example of resistance? We understand the limitations of examining one case, and we do not intend for her stories to represent all teacher candidates. However, we found the nuances in Susan’s story to be intriguing. After analyzing answers to our research questions, we will map forward to a proposal for teacher education. We believe we can learn from Susan’s stories.

How did Susan describe her experiences in a multicultural school? What do Susan’s descriptions reveal about her sociocultural consciousness and her understanding of people of diverse identities?

Susan persistently used the binary terms “same” and “different” to refer to the students’ identities. Susan stated that the students were the “same” because they were

alike as people and they lived in the same “area;” the students were “different” because of their personalities and interaction style. We view her use of these binaries as an unconscious act of simplification that negated the complexity of culture. We suspect that Susan was attempting to be unbiased, just as Gay (2000) described how many teachers believe that providing the “same” instruction to all is equitable. Susan’s case is a well-articulated example of some teacher candidates’ use of such simplifications and binary references as a means of discounting the relevance of culturally responsive teaching.

Susan’s descriptions mirror many of the difficulties noted earlier about understanding cultural complexity. Only a limited number of Susan’s referential language expressed any understanding of complex cultural identities. Notably, when Susan discussed “area,” she recognized that “area” represented socio-economic class as well as specific urban and rural funds of knowledge (Moll, 1990). She questioned the multiple influences on and social construction of interaction styles. However, she did not “see” the value of understanding how differences between the students—language, gender, socio-economics, ethnicity, religion, and race—could influence teacher perceptions and students’ needs.

Susan confirmed the problem that people do not want to acknowledge the relevance of race (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pollack, 2004), yet Susan referred to race over and over again, perhaps in her evaluative attempt to prove her beliefs. Her descriptions also revealed her efforts not to racially stereotype. Since teaching prescriptively based on a stereotype is another noted problem (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), Susan’s efforts are laudable. However, her language made no reference to any cultural group sameness based on race except during her discussion of interaction styles when she paradoxically included stereotypical descriptions for Black and White students’ interaction styles. Susan never acknowledged that race could act as a “powerful determinant” to one’s life chances (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003, p. 2).

In juxtaposition to her rejection of the significance of race, Susan proceeded to describe all the students as the “same” because of the area, surreptitiously essentializing them based on another cultural factor. Additionally, she continually said that the children were only different based on “personality.” We consider her attention to individual differences as meritorious student-centered teaching; such teaching would be considered culturally responsive if she could take into account individual complex cultural differences. She did consider the social construction of cultural identities when she wondered how multiple factors (“similar jobs,” “family,” “the way you grow up”) could influence one’s experiences in the “area” or an interaction style.

These examples demonstrate that Susan has not developed an understanding that people are each a confluence of multiple cultural identities. Therefore, we suggest that Susan had a limited socio-cultural consciousness and a lack of understanding regarding the socio-cultural, political, and economic influences that affect cultural groups’ and individual’s life circumstances (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Consequently, Susan’s perplexing referential language and paradoxical stereotypes substantiate multicultural scholars’ premise that teacher educators must develop pedagogies that impart more complex understandings of culture (Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996). Without a

deeper understanding of cultural complexity, candidates will continue to reify their own simplistic, sometimes colorblind perceptions of culture and reject culturally responsive teaching as a means of meeting diverse students' needs.

How can Susan's descriptions inform teacher education's goal to prepare culturally responsive teachers?

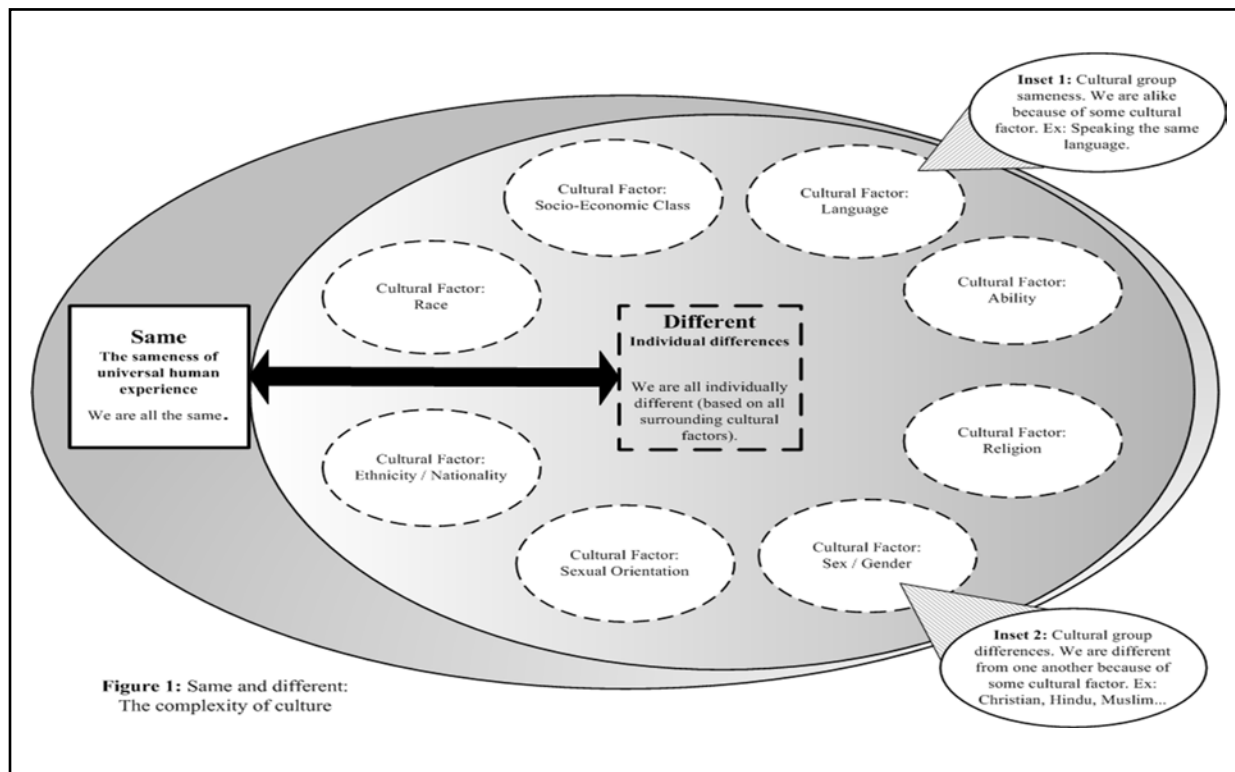
We compared Susan's lack of socio-cultural consciousness and use of binary terms to our more complex definition of culture. There was a gap. Boler states that "our identities are precariously constructed in relation to one another" (1999, p. 198). Susan did describe her students in relation to one another, but using only two terms. Becker maintains that "all terms describing people are relational - that is, that they only have meaning when they are considered as part of a system of terms" (1998, p. 132). We realized that Susan's referential terms, "same" and "different," both expressed and forced a simplification of culture rather than expressing a system of terms that represented the complexity of culture.

We asked ourselves, "When teacher educators set up a discourse about "diversity," does our emphasis on "difference" or "diversity" and our silence about "sameness" influence our students' opposition to "diversity?" Would Susan acknowledge students' diversity if teacher education provided a platform for examining the relationship between individuals and cultural groups? Could such a discussion help deconstruct candidates' colorblind stance by promoting the idea that cultural identities are socially constructed, and people can be both "same" and "different?"

These questions compelled us to develop a concrete way to express the complexity of culture. We created a visual tool that represents a system of terms that express the multidimensional relationship between group and individual identities that are "constructed in relation to one another" (Boler, 1999, p. 132). This model represents cultural variables that are "dialectic and dynamic." We offer a visual model (Figure 1) that includes the *language* binaries of "same" and "different," but *not* as *conceptual* binaries. Rather, this graphic organizer shows that being the "same" and "different" are identity concepts that are layered and not opposites. The figure acknowledges "same," the universality of human experience, while simultaneously featuring "different," the many ways people can be different.

Figure 1 begins with a large oval that represents how humans have common human needs and characteristics and are thus the "same" (the sameness of universal human experience). Inside this first large oval is a mid-size oval that represents the differences within human experience. The term "Different" (Individual cultural differences) appears in a rectangle to represent one individual. However, the mid-size oval also includes small ovals that represent multiple cultural factors such as race, ethnicity/nationality, language, gender, religion, ableness, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class. Each of these cultural factors can influence how humans are culturally "different." In this model, "same" and "different" are related as language binaries at

opposite ends of a “line,” but the constructs are layered on top of each other and exist as co-constructed identities. Being the “same” as humans does not rule out the possibility of being “different” as cultural individuals. Therefore, we can be both “same” and “different.”



Each Cultural Factor (small ovals) represents a cultural group identity. Gay states that cultural groups “share some core cultural characteristics” (2000, p. 10). In other words, if we presume that cultural groups exist, there must be some kind of group “sameness” in order for the group to be identified as a cultural group (Inset 1. Cultural group sameness). For example, students who are identified as White are a cultural group because they experience the world through the privilege of Whiteness. A group of Spanish-speaking students is alike because they identify as a group through a common language. Yet, if we describe groups as being “different” from another group, we may be referring to a comparison *between* group cultural factors (Inset 2. Cultural group differences). For example, a group of students that identify religiously as Christian is “different” from a group of students that identify religiously as Muslim. So there are a myriad number of cultural “groups” within any cultural factor. Our model uses dotted lines for Cultural Factors to represent the fluid and dynamic nature of cultural group identities and expression, thus demonstrating the futility of stereotyping one person based on one Cultural Factor.

Finally, we look again at the rectangle entitled “Different” and see that each individual is completely different since the individual is socially constructed by the infinite number of Cultural Factors possible that can influence a person’s complex identity. This model makes visual how group and individual cultural expressions cannot

be essentialized but become complex “repertoires of practice” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Susan’s words remind us of the difficulties of interrogating race. Pollack (2004) states that “we don’t belong to simple race groups but we do” because we socially construct such categories. Yet, she argues that we become “colormute” and avoid racialized discussions. Susan talked about race but dismissed its relevance. We believe teacher educators can reframe the dialogue by engaging in discussions about how humans are both the “same” and “different” and by examining cultural complexity with support from a visual model like Figure 1 that places race equally in the context of other cultural factors. The model addresses the social reality of racial categories but can scaffold an understanding of the inaccurate boundaries such categories create.

We contend that teachers cannot be culturally responsive if they do not acknowledge cultural differences among students. Many future teachers, like Susan, may use human “sameness” (a colorblind approach) to resist the need to be culturally responsive. We assert that an examination of our simplistic understandings and binary terms through a visual model that contextualizes “same” and “different” may assist candidates in better conceptualizing cultural complexity. Additionally, we believe that a discussion of the relationship between the “sameness” of human experience and cultural factor “differences” (expressed by groups and individuals) could help foster candidates’ socio-cultural consciousness and lead to an understanding that our cultural identities, which are overlaid, flexible, socially constructed, and complex, do affect our life circumstances. Thus, we can deconstruct notions that culture does not matter in the classroom.

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