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Critical Reflection, Dialogue, and Supervision: Culturally Relevant Teaching and Adult Learners in a Transition to Teaching Program

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Critical Reflection, Dialogue, and Supervision: Culturally Relevant Teaching and Adult Learners in a Transition to Teaching Program

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Abstract

This project examines the supervisory roles and clinical experiences in a School of Education program that offers multiple pathways to licensure, including the Transition to Teaching (T2T) alternative route to certification program. Through our reflective supervisory and instructional experiences within this program, we explore the unique challenges in supervising non-traditional adult learners entering into teaching after experience in various professional disciplines. We use a Critical Whiteness Studies lens to create a composite narrative of these experiences as an approach to 1) better understand adult learner dispositions; 2) contribute to research pertaining to the field of educational supervision and clinical experiences in an the under-researched area of alternative certification programs; and 3) provide field-based social justice-oriented practices grounded in critical reflection, discussion, and praxis for supervisors who work with adult learners in urban elementary contexts.

Keywords

alternative route to certification programs; culturally relevant pedagogy; critical reflection; critical whiteness studies

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Introduction

This project examines the supervisory roles and clinical experiences in a School of Education program that offer multiple pathways to licensure, including the Transition to Teaching (T2T), a route to alternative teaching certification program. Through our reflective supervisory and instructional experiences within this program, we are particularly interested in exploring the unique challenges in supervising non-traditional adult students³ entering teaching after experience in various professional disciplines. Situated within our own supervisory roles, we explore the characteristics that adult learners seeking alternative pathways to teaching with professional experiences in other disciplines bring to the student teaching experience as well as the professional disposition non-traditional adult interns exhibit once in the classroom. We also discuss how teacher placement may impact non-traditional adult student teaching interns deleteriously through higher incidence of anxiety, inflexibility, cynicism, and deficit-based notions of urban students and classrooms when compared to student teaching interns in traditional programs.

When discussing “urban students” and “urban classrooms,” we draw upon Milner’s (2012a) definition of an “urban emergent,” which are educational institutions that geographically and sociologically have “some connections to the people who live and attend school [within in a given] social context, the characteristics of those people, as well as the surrounding community realities where the school is situated” (p. 558). We also use the term “urban students” to refer to students who attend the above-described schools. However, as Milner points out, teachers and administrators tend, instead, to racially codify “urban schools” and “urban students” as schools that serve black and brown bodies of low socioeconomic status. Because “urban” experiences often reinforce deficit thinking and stereotyping of students, schools and communities, we feel it is important to provide context of the discourse used moving forward.

Finally, both authors engaged in a critical self-reflective analysis through an examination of our roles as clinical supervisors and the multiple and complex ways we engaged adult learners in both field and student teaching experiences. As a result, we created a composite of these experiences as an approach to 1) better understand adult learner dispositions; 2) contribute to research pertaining to the field of educational supervision and clinical experiences in an under-researched area of alternative certification programs; and 3) provide field-based social justice-oriented practices that are grounded in critical reflection, discussion, and praxis for supervisors who work with adult learners in urban elementary contexts.

Purpose

As previously mentioned, this paper serves as a critical reflection and analysis of supervisory and instructional experiences in a university alternative certification program with an urban, social justice mission and vision that promotes culturally relevant and culturally sustaining practices in teaching and learning. Critical self-reflection, according to Butler (2005), allows for the authors to recognize “social and historical constructions . . . representing particular discourses that

³ We use ‘non-traditional adult students’ to describe an individual who had another career prior to seeking an educator license.

maintain as isolated, solitary, and segmented the learning and teaching processes and interactions of children and teachers” (p. 162) within the T2T program and the T2T students’ field experiences. Gorski and Dalton (2020) go one step further, stating that some scholars define critical reflection as a practice that “helps prepare [teachers] reflecting to advocate for social justice and social reconstruction” (p. 359). Such reflection is essential to creating anti-racist educators (Matias & Mackey, 2016) who ardently argue that all pre-service teachers must “self-reflect on their emotional journey of understanding race—inclusive of whiteness” (p. 42), as they advance their cognitive and emotional development. Furthermore, such reflection allows for pre-service teachers to work through and utilize “pedagogical strategies [while also] modeling how we humanize counternarratives” (p. 43).

Additionally, Frankenberg (1995) found in her examination of white women’s understanding of race and whiteness, that stressing the utter importance of critical self-reflection allows both the researcher and the subjects to realize how racial understanding was “historically situated” and based on the education of the women thus leading to a society teeming with structural racism (p. 145). Pillow (2003) further illustrates this point by addressing the importance of reflection and research within the practices used or taught to others to reflect. The author stresses that reflection itself cannot stand alone, unbiased. Instead, reflection is an article of the method used to engage in that reflection, either by the self or asked to do so by another party. Alternatively, as Pillow and Mayo (2012) state, the act of constant reflexivity is “not only about investigating the power embedded in one’s research but also about doing research [and reflection] differently” (pp. 196-197).

Thus, we contend that critical self-reflection is key to our growth and development as supervisors teaching pre-service teachers in clinical placements in K-12 schools. As we also engaged in these critical self-reflections, we intended to understand the nuances of adult learners. Notably, we wanted to understand these adult learners’ reflections within their elementary clinical placements to better support the needs of non-traditional adult students enrolled in alternative certification programs while improving teaching and learning outcomes for the marginalized students they serve in this program. Nonetheless, Gorski and Dalton (2020) do caution, however, that while there is a massive need and push for such critical reflection to “deepen more ‘liberal’ multicultural objectives such as examining personal bias or learning to appreciate diversity” (p. 358), there is also a lack of agreement about what critical reflection looks like in practice. Therefore, we hope to contribute to critically reflective teaching practices by advancing equitable and culturally relevant pedagogies within alternative routes to teaching certification with non-traditional adult students. In this way, we are engaging an approach that facilitates theory, critical reflection, and practice—praxis—when issues of deficit and/or racist mindsets (for example) arise during practicum experiences.

Theoretical Framework

We use Critical Whiteness Studies as a theoretical frame to guide this project. It is important to encapsulate and further the discussion surrounding the use of Critical Whiteness Studies within supervision and the broader context of education (e.g., Cabrera, et. al., 2017). Critical Whiteness Studies emerged from a significant body of work by scholars of color whose research demonstrated how race and racism are embedded in American society and schooling (e.g.,

Alexander, 2012; Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Collins, 2009; Fanon, 1967; Feagin, 2010; hooks, 1994). However, as Matias and Mackey (2016) state, Critical Whiteness Theory “provides a framework to deconstruct how whites accumulate racial privilege” (p. 34). Applebaum (2016) agrees, stating that the entire theory of Critical Whiteness Studies has a collective goal to “reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege” (para 2). Additionally, we use Critical Whiteness Studies to locate, identify, and confront the “often-employed rhetoric of whiteness, such as colorblind discourse, whiteness as natural and normal, difference being about non-whites and not of whites themselves, affirmative action assumptions, etc..” (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p. 40) within our classrooms and supervisory spaces.

As previously mentioned, racism is still a prevalent issue in American society, including in the university and the schools in which pre-service teachers will teach (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Whiteness Studies uses an ecological framework with critical self-reflection and dialogue to increase teachers’ capacity to confront and interrogate whiteness as a construct within broader context education. Often, white teachers’ teacher preparation and practicum experiences reinforce “their normative beliefs of how race and racism is a non-white problem” (Matias, et al., 2014, p. 299). Consequently, these contributing factors often blind white teachers from their deficit-based assumptions, providing them with no opportunities to critically self-reflect on their beliefs around whiteness and hegemony. Thus, to disrupt practicum experiences that superficially engage with race and schooling by using critical reflection and reflexivity in our observations and seminars, we aim to depict how our experience with non-traditional adult students reflects a Critical Whiteness lens as we situate ourselves within the structures of racial privilege. Finally, as white supervisors working with white teachers, we also interrogate our own sociocultural construction, biases, and privilege using reflexive practices as supervisors in this project.

Literature Review

Nationally, alternative routes to certification programs (ACPs) were developed in the 1980s with the primary goal of increasing the overall quality and quantity of teachers (Linek et. al., 2012) while also attracting career-changers, diversifying the workforce (The Education Alliance, 2008). They also sought to retain and train unlicensed educators employed in schools (NEA, 2020). Since 2007, one-third of teachers are licensed through ACPs (Locascio et al., 2016) and these programs are consistently on the rise in urban high-needs schools (Barclay et. al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1996). Further, the rise of non-traditional teacher education programs alongside the recent global events causing a shift to an increased amount of online education (e.g., COVID-19), many universities are now capitalizing on the creation of ACPs as a mainstay of their course offerings and recruitments (Partelow, 2019). As the face of pre-service teacher preparation programs continue to change, as well as the increasing number of alternative licensures being sought by candidates since 2010, the options for alternative licensure now range from college-recommending programs, to online learning, and early entry programs (Partelow, 2019).

As a result of this diverse range of programmatic types reviewed in the literature, studies that are cited below include both alternative routes to certification programs run by business entities or non-profit organizations (e.g., Teach for America) and by universities who have adapted to the

current political and educational landscape by implementing their own in-house transition to teaching programs.⁴ The studies touch on similar topics and results and as such, both types of programs are discussed together within the literature review section. Further, there is a deeply contrasting body of academic literature as to the effectiveness of alternative teaching certification programs, the differing structures of these programs, and the effectiveness of the teachers that they produce. A number of studies have provided evidence that alternative licensing has resulted in a higher population of students that perform on par with their traditional counterparts (e.g., Hawk & Schmidt, 1989). For example, Shuls and Trivitt (2015) completed an analysis of an alternative certification program from Arkansas, finding that there is “little difference in terms of quality between traditionally and alternatively certified teachers” (p. 648).

Other researchers, such as Tournaki et al. (2009), in a study that utilized Danielson’s Observation Scale and Gibson and Dembo’s Teacher Efficacy Scale, found that alternatively licensed teachers showed no significant difference in the quality of education they offered when compared with their traditionally educated counterparts. This was not the norm, however. Jelmberg (1996) came to the conclusion that alternative licensing programs produced candidates that were not as prepared as their traditionally licensed counterparts, had less career motivation to remain in the educational field, and had weaker academic credentials. Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) found, as a result of a large quantitative study, that traditionally certified teachers in Texas outperformed alternatively licensed counterparts, specifically noting that traditionally licensed teachers:

completed specific courses in the content area(s) to be taught as well as coursework in teaching and learning; instructional methods and strategies; classroom management; curriculum; measurement and evaluation of student learning; human growth and development; multicultural education; the education of special needs students; legal and ethical aspects of teaching; organization of schools; technology; and the teaching of reading (p. 20)

Consequently, there is no single opinion that points to a clear direction forward for the field. However, one common thing was noticed throughout this body of research: a lack of interrogation of multicultural practices within alternative licensing programs.

Alternative Certification Programs and Culturally Relevant Coursework

These alternative licensing programs are designed with the goal of meeting the needs of adult, non-traditional, or Transition to Teaching (T2T) students, to earn their teaching licenses in a form that traditional pre-service students do not have access to. With an abbreviated timeline for ACPs students--due to the type of degree being offered and/or abbreviated coursework most often mandated by the state-- (NEA, 2020), many programs have had to sacrifice field and diversity-based coursework compared to traditional preparation programs. As Zeichner and Bier

⁴ Within the state that both authors live, as of April 2020, there were at least 23 alternative routes to certification programs. Most of these programs are university-based programs and require a bachelor’s degree in an area outside of education (NEA, 2020).

(2015) note, these changes have resulted in opportunities for alternatively prepared teachers to enter into clinical experiences with less culturally relevant theoretical and pedagogical preparation than traditional undergraduate social justice-oriented college preparation programs. With a number of modern pre-service teacher education curricula centered around a social justice mindset with an anti-racist focus (e.g., Sleeter, 2013; Gay, 2018), there is a distinct need for all teachers to be taught and then embody culturally relevant pedagogy.

However, relating educational theory to practice is often challenging when schools emphasize more technical approaches and mastery of teaching skills in place of social foundations of education and multicultural education. These components of teacher education are often reduced or completely eliminated in ACP settings (Zeichner and Bier, 2015; Zeichner, 2014). Further, ACP students are often placed in clinical experiences where teaching to the test is the priority and what may be taught in university coursework is not practiced in the field (Zeichner and Bier, 2015). This approach to a pre-service teaching curriculum is antithetical toward the creation of culturally responsive curricula and culturally relevant teachers, something Sleeter (2008) parallels as she suggests deficit thinking in field experiences, left unchecked, will only re-enforce racist attitudes toward students of color. Both Adler (2008) and Zeichner (1999) state that this is an issue in terms of colleges that wish to impart a social justice framework to any of their students, pre-service or ACP, as the lack of this training or education will be eroded the moment the students leave the college classroom and enter schools for the first time. This point is further exacerbated in alternative certification programs due to the enormous breadth of information covered in such a short amount of time (Linek et. al., 2012).

Alternative Certification Program Student Characteristics

While there is very little national data concerning the students who enter all alternative routes to certification programs, several scholars have worked to at least create a composite from data available from multiple ACPs. Zeichner (2016) notes that the data in his study specifically emerges from programs that “are not university based,” but do “provide most or all of the candidates’ preparation” (p. 3), while Humphrey et al. (2008) gathered demographic data from a number of state-based initiatives, including from individuals who entered the Teach for America program. As a result, we created a composite of what characterizes a traditional “alternative certification teacher candidate.”

According to Humphrey et al. (2008), the traditional alternative certification candidate closely resembles the rest of the American teacher population. In fact, the authors stress that “alternative certification teachers in our sample are not very different demographically from traditional route teachers” (p. 6). However, from their sample of seven different programs, they did find that alternative certification candidates tend to be slightly older than traditional pre-service teachers, were “more likely to have graduated from competitive universities than from less competitive ones” (p. 7), were more than likely a full-time student and not an individual looking to switch careers, and had some form of “teaching experience prior to entering their program” (p. 8). Zeichner (2016) continues, supporting a point brought up by the other authors, stating that alternative certification programs work to “seek and admit candidates who appear philosophically aligned with their respective missions” (p. 14). As for how these students are prepared to teach, both Humphrey et al. (2008) and Zeichner (2016) argue that each program is

wholly unique in how they prepare and deliver their content within their programs, with Zeichner even discussing that some of the national programs do not “employ more than a few traditionally doctorally prepared university teacher educators as instructors” (p. 14). Hence, these programs, and the colleges that have begun to offer alternative route to certification programs, have vastly different approaches and curricula for preparing their teachers. Hence, it is difficult to illustrate what a “traditional alternative certification” candidate’s teaching philosophy or practices should be. However, most importantly, we stress that these individual programs are, themselves, unique and should not be extrapolated to national norms.

Neoliberalism and the Rise of ACPs. It is important here to note that the rise of these alternative routes to certification programs and the various groups and philosophies that govern the training of new teachers is deeply affected by the neoliberal reform efforts of conservative private groups that have entered the educational sphere in the years following the George W. Bush presidency (Sleeter, 2013). In order to counter the neoliberal push into educative spheres, Sleeter (2013) stressed that teacher educators and social actors must understand the transformative power of neoliberalism on schools and society, that teacher education programs should continually mandate courses orienting from a critical social justice standpoint, and that students should be taught a proper democratic education.

Conversely, neoliberal ideology has worked to actively change what is taught in schools as well as how teaching is defined and what it means to be successful. Teachers’ work has become more controlled and structured: what previously constituted good teaching practices have been restructured such that teachers often now feel constrained to follow a specified curriculum and pedagogical method (Buchanan, 2015). Beginning with the passage of the No Child Left Behind act, schools were directed to begin “Following models of business management” with “clear, high standards . . . to align curriculum to them and teachers are to teach to them and test student mastery of them” (Sleeter, 2013, p. 21). With business-like accountability came a business-centric curriculum instituted by pressure from the members of the business community’s elite. Instead of a curriculum that emphasizes the development of students, “neoliberalism emphasizes education as preparation for work, and market-based education reform” (p. 47). This has transformed schools from centers of democratic learning into “businesses designed to turn out workers for the new global economy, and as venues for profiteering” (p. 146). These for-profit alternative certification programs work to do the same thing by attracting and educating teachers to advance neoliberal ideologies of accountability.

Nonetheless, when teachers enter into the profession, they are the most likely to fill teaching vacancies created in large urban centers when experienced teachers leave the urban public schools and migrate to higher paying jobs in many major city suburbs (Lankford et al., 2002). Thus, in an effort to think about supervisory experiences and the need to retain skilled teachers in urban areas through alternative certification that focuses on adult learners, it is necessary to recognize the dispositions of these pre-service teachers in an effort to further promote equity and access for students and communities in which they work. Finally, we use Gordon’s (1999) definition of disposition as the beliefs, expectations, ethics, and professional attitude of teachers that relate to the ability of all students to learn and succeed. It is that entire embodiment of those ethics and values that make up a professional, socially just, teaching disposition.

Disposition in the Alternative Preparation Route

Interestingly, when examining the existing body of academic literature for anything discussing the disposition of teachers emerging from alternative licensing programs, specifically from a Critical Whiteness Studies lens, the literature is extremely lacking. What does exist, however, does not reflect positively upon alternately certified educators. The existing body of literature showcases a number of T2T programs that produce teacher candidates who have deeply biased sensibilities and dispositions towards students of color, especially pertaining to the notion of deficit thinking. For example, Linek et. al. (2012) found that a number of alternatively licensed teachers completing their course and field work at their university began blaming students for a number of issues that occurred in the classroom. Thus, instead of working to differentiate instruction from individual students, many alternatively licensed teachers attempted to shift the discourse in order to make sure that the “blame is placed on students” (p. 78) and not their own lack of pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, teachers in this program were ineffective in developing positive relationships with their students, resulting in a number of behavior management issues and, when the students refused to “comply . . . [the] teachers shifted the responsibility to the school administrators” to address what was perceived as deviant behavior (p. 79).

Further, Humphrey & Wechsler (2007) suggest ACP student disposition may impact the best designed programs. Thus, as students learn from both formal and informal contexts of the schools in which they will teach, and although the programs may have strong components, the “practice may not accurately reflect the learning opportunities students experience . . . In most programs, this learning exists beyond the control of the alternative certification program” (p. 29). Thus, a key component that is often overlooked in alternative certification programs is the training and resources of both mentors and supervisors to meet the needs of ACP students in field experiences (Humphrey et al., 2008). As we witnessed our white T2T students embody and enact wholesale all of the negative attributes as mentioned in the literature above during our observations and coaching, we felt that this would be the best approach to our study.

Alternative Certification Programs and Supervision

Literature regarding the effectiveness of teacher supervision and supervisors of teachers in alternative certification programs again vary regarding the analysis of which alternative certification programs are examined. For instance, in their meta-analysis of alternative teacher certification literature, Whitford et al. (2018) found that alternative certification programs tend to “provide in-service teachers with full access to teaching students, with minimal supervision” while traditional undergraduate teacher education programs “provide pre-service teachers with scheduled access to teaching students, with continuous supervision” (p. 672). These findings are echoed in both Boyd et al.’s (2007) analysis of alternative certification programs and Shuls and Trivitt’s (2015) work on alternative certification and teacher effectiveness. Humphrey et al. (2008) found similar results, noting that the analysis of the alternative certification programs in their study had a “good deal of variation from one program to another with regard to the frequency with which participants were observed by their programs . . . and the value being placed on it” (p. 11). Zeichner’s (2016) analysis went one step further, where he found that the five alternative certification programs within his analysis typically relied on past graduates of the

program to provide mentoring or supervision of the new teacher candidates, as they themselves embody the practices taught to them by said programs. One program even went so far as to utilize “student consultants” to “provide regular observations of and feedback of interns’ teaching” instead of university-trained supervisors (p. 14). Regardless, the fact remains that this literature may not be fully transferable across national norms, as all of the research suggests the differences employed by each different program within their individual analyses are crucial to the understanding of alternative certification supervision practices.

Nonetheless, while preparing urban teachers in any type of program, Hollins (2015) suggests “teaching perspectives are embedded within frames of practice that inform approaches to facilitating student learning” (p. 133) and clinical rotations are organized accordingly. This approach also includes the examination of both teachers and students’ cultural and experiential backgrounds as well as the social dynamics at play. Linton and Gordon (2015) suggest a clinical experience grounded in focused inquiry and direct observation where supervisors provide “guided practice for the planning, enactment, observation, interpretation and translation of the lesson” (p. 149). Finally, supervisors must pay attention to the needs of the mentee in terms of developing a coaching model that promotes the desire to see the mentee be successful as well as establishing expectations of a professional working relationship between the mentor and mentee (Bullough, 2005; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009).

Methodology

We set out to examine and explore the unique challenges in supervising adult learners entering teaching after experience in various professional disciplines within a large, Midwestern university’s School of Education. In addition, one of the authors had teaching loads split between the elementary T2T program and the traditional pre-service teacher education program within the same semester, showing a contrast in materials taught and learned between the two programs. The other author was the coordinator of field placements and the university supervisors. In addition to working with all supervisors and the unique perspective of working with students from both traditional and alternative preparation programs, we were interested in how the professional experiences T2T students had before entering the teaching profession (dispositions, habits of mind, professional behaviors) impacted their student teaching experiences and how, ultimately, their professional dispositions impacted students in urban elementary classrooms.

Our study consisted of a shared observation and teaching of a total of 15 students (12 female and three male) within the Transition to Teaching Program (T2T)⁵ program at a large, Midwestern public school of education. The students were all located in an urban, public elementary school that served predominately Latinx and Black students. There were over thirty languages spoken at this school. All of the student teaching interns identified as white, and only two interns had classroom experience beyond their former schooling experiences. The majority of the T2T students had business and/or corporate professional experience, while others had terminal degrees in the liberal arts or journalism. Two of the students also had years of experience within the military. We include these details in our analysis as Humphrey et al. (2008) suggest that

⁵ Within the national context we use the term Alternative Route to Certification Programs (ACP) as generally used in the literature. Within the state this study took place all ACPs are referred to as Transition to Teaching Programs (T2T). Thus we use T2T when referring to the state and local context.

clarifying who participates in alternative certification programs in a more detailed manner is important in determining the characteristics of effective programs.

The majority of the data was collected from fieldnotes, student assignments, email correspondence, notes from student conversations, and other documents, such as student improvement plans obtained from all 15 of the T2T students, and the university's standard field observation protocol. We both cataloged over forty collective hours of field observations of multiple T2T students in their elementary school placements to see how they navigated their teaching and their curriculum (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010), recorded numerous fieldnotes from each observation filled with "thick description" of the observed events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and reflected upon notes taken from both formal and informal interviews with each T2T teacher candidate.

We used an inductive analytic approach through triangulated reflexive inquiry (Patton, 2002) of data to draw out salient themes from the shared examination process (Creswell, 2007). Finally, during our analysis of the data, we engaged in reflexive questions, such as, "How have my perceptions and my background affected the data I have collected and my analysis of those data?" Based on these observations and reflections, we engaged in critically reflective practices to better inform our own supervisory roles with the T2T student interns, and in an effort to think about supervision differently, we developed a composite of a T2T student interns that depicts many of the implicit and overt actions we saw from our students through a Critical Whiteness Studies lens.

A Composite Narrative

Scarlet serves as a composite narrative of our observations, fieldnotes, student assignments, email correspondence, recorded conversations, and other documents, such as the aforementioned performance plans. In her research, Willis (2019) highlights the benefits of composite narratives, expressing that these narratives allow for complex, situated accounts (see Riessman, 2008). Composite narrative accounts also "allows for contextualized stories, without resorting to fiction," (Willis, 2019, p. 477) and allow for anonymity. Deconstructing whiteness and recognizing white supremacy is a process, and therefore, instead of risking the recognizable quotations from the students, we grounded the composite in the empirical data. We contextualized the narrative composite in social situations that were also "grounded in real life, not fiction" to best illustrate the pervasiveness of whiteness and how we (and eventually, they) addressed this behavior in our capacity as college educators and teacher supervisors (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). Finally, composite narratives also bridge the gap between theory to practice. Willis (2019) suggests this methodology is more accessible for K-12 administrators and teachers (for example) and provide "personalized accounts that are situated within the social world, an explicit ethical stance and aim for intervention, rather than just description or analysis" (p. 477).

Scarlet

Thus, our composite narrative of Scarlet is the embodiment of the interactions we have worked with as supervisors of hite female student teaching interns with placements in urban elementary

schools. Although the university's T2T program's foundational principles were grounded in social justice, there is often a disconnect between university coursework and its implementation in the field (Hollins, 2015). Further, as is the case with Scarlet, we observed implicit biases manifest with students when they felt uncomfortable or challenged in the classroom and depicted a "struggling student intern lacking self-confidence⁶ and a lack of commitment to utilizing the pedagogical tools taught through her coursework⁷." This was particularly true when classroom management issues arose. On rare occasions, students such as Scarlet overtly challenged their coursework, the advice and instruction of their mentor, and the feedback and guidance from their supervisors. Thus, our composite below encompasses both overt and explicit challenges of implementing a culturally responsive theoretical and pedagogical approach in both Scarlet's coursework and teaching.

Scarlet entered the program after spending some time at a marketing job that she found to be "incompatible with her future occupational goals⁸." After a stint as a substitute teacher in a suburban school district, she enrolled in and entered the Transition to Teaching program, bringing along with it a great deal of emotional, personal, and financial issues she was dealing with at the time. Thus, this greatly impacted the fast-paced two-year program to earn her degree, and she struggled to address coursework and connect theory to practice (as many students do). Scarlet also struggled in her other classes, especially around teaching methods, yet she was able to complete the minimal amount of coursework to enroll in her student teaching experience. Consequently, she started her student teaching experience with a negative perception of the program.

On the first day of student teaching, having spent less than eight hours with her students, Scarlet was overheard angrily discussing her placement with other T2T students in the school building before their methodology seminar, calling her sixth grade students, all of whom were students of color, "thugs" who "don't understand respect."⁹ From that moment, she began her student teaching experience through victimization (DiAngelo, 2018), to see her students in opposition to herself, fostering a "them vs. me" mentality in the classroom. She blamed her struggles to connect and teach her students on the assumed deficits of their moral character or upbringing and not on the lack of empathy, training, or ability to connect with her students (Valencia, 2010). Nor did Scarlet think of any structural issues of inequity and oppression (previous experiences with teachers in the school, very crowded classrooms, older teaching facilities) that led to the actions of her students "disrespecting" her position as their teacher on her first day within her placement (e.g., Feagin, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Milner, 2012b). In addition, Scarlet dismissed more than a year of training in culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, which were embedded in the social justice oriented T2T program.

Instead, Scarlet reverted to a model of "banking education," lecturing to and reading at students for an hour at a time, providing an approach that appeared to be instructional, but lacked any differentiation for her students, forcing the students to believe that she is the single bearer of

⁶ Mentor teacher email correspondence

⁷ Supervisor fieldnotes

⁸ Comment made in seminar class

⁹ Comment made in seminar class.

knowledge in the learning space (Freire, 2005). Even with feedback and suggestions from multiple supervisors (university and school-based), as well as support developing pedagogical approaches and innovative ways to get students engaged, she was unwilling to make any changes to her lessons. Even more concerning was Scarlet's outright refusal to accept any constructive criticism concerning her teaching or actions. The supervising teacher was uncomfortable addressing her concerns with Scarlet, knowing the conversation would end in defensiveness, and sometimes, tears. Consequently, the university supervisors increased formal and informal visits to several times a week (as opposed to the standard once-a-week observations for the other student teachers). Despite carving out time to have both informal and formal debriefing sessions with Scarlet alone and with her host teacher, sharing observational notes, and offering additional ideas and readings outside of the methods taught in the seminars, Scarlet stood steadfast that her authoritative teaching and direct instruction gave her the maximum amount of student control. Although all feedback suggested otherwise as students were never on task, she consistently expressed that what she learned from university coursework did not work at "this" school.

For example, Scarlet was observed monotonously reading from a novel that had nothing to do with her supervising teacher's curriculum for the entire period, refusing to engage her students. Although she was given ample support and pedagogical tools to develop more culturally relevant practices, including teacher as the facilitator, student-centered instruction, or drawing upon asset-based background knowledge of students (Gay, 2018), she was unwilling to implement any of the suggestions made by the university supervisors or her supervising teacher. Finally, she was either entirely passive with her classroom management, silently standing in the corner of the classroom as students talked and grew more and more off task, or overly punitive, sending students out to the principal's office for the most minor of infractions. Overt defiance, in particular, was clearly a trigger point for her. Although she received feedback (university observation protocols, scheduled debriefing meetings, emails with observation feedback) and support throughout this process from multiple school and university supervisors, Scarlet created a toxic teaching environment for her and her students.

At this point, there was concern about whether Scarlet could continue her student teaching placement. School of Education faculty, the supervising teacher, the principal, and the university supervisors developed an improvement plan that required Scarlet to engage in a critically reflective practice by examining her teaching and personal values in regard to her students and her disposition. The meeting was contentious, with Scarlet stating that our criticisms of her teaching and suggestions for improvement were unfounded, and the problem itself was with her students. The meeting ended with Scarlet in tears, an action that both Accapadi (2007) and DiAngelo (2018) stress is a common tactic white women tend to use to avoid being confronted by others for their racist behavior, after which she begrudgingly accepted to abide by the multi-step improvement plan. For her the stakes were high. If she had not agreed to follow the plan, she would have been asked to leave the program. The improvement plan centered on an increase in daily supervision by multiple parties. Each observation would have a formal debrief, directly address her deficit perspective of the students, a weekly examination of her lesson planning before she taught each lesson, and a weekly critical reflective journal to get Scarlet to begin to address the ways in which her privilege and white hegemonic space in the classroom deleteriously impacts her students. After Scarlet was put on an improvement plan, there was a slow growth in Scarlet's critical reflection and her willingness to accept critique about her

teaching. Additionally, classroom observations reflected that slow growth. Scarlet began learning student names, engaged in multicultural and collaborative classroom practices, worked to develop genuine relationships with her students of color, and the increased supervision and interaction with her mentors established a new layer of trust and willingness to work towards the necessary improvement and accepting of positive criticism. While she did complete her student teaching and received the credits to graduate, the authors felt that the necessary intervention could have been instituted earlier, resulting in a longer period of positive gains and personal realization for Scarlet.

Discussion

As a result of this composite of multiple experiences with T2T students in an urban elementary education program, we found that understanding their backgrounds also contributes to strengths and/or weaknesses they may bring to their student teaching experience. Overall, and although research differs on this notion (e.g., Blair & Hoy, 2006; Bland 2003; Hsu et al., 2015), we have found our adult learners often thrive with good communication and accurate feedback, especially when given time to have extended formal and informal debriefing sessions where we were able to dive into our notes and observations. The majority of T2T student interns remarked that this form of feedback and communication helped improve their understanding of theory and their own teaching. Although positive and negative critique is valuable regarding adult learners' abilities (Midwestern University's T2T Student Teaching Handbook)¹⁰, theory and pedagogy pertaining to cultural competency, critical conversation, critical self-reflection and the requisite enactment in the classroom become particularly important in training alternative certification teachers to recognize spaces of white privilege in urban schools.

Further, we suggest, particularly in urban contexts (again, referring to Milner as cited above), that the current model of clinical experiences makes it difficult for T2T students to have a "clear sense of the social, political, community and cultural contexts in which they work to build and sustain strong relationships . . . that go beyond specific teaching and classroom practices" (Hollins, 2015, p. 38). Thus, as result of this work, we engaged in critical self-reflection and discussion, highlighting both the need for T2T students to receive anti-racist and multicultural pedagogy as well as a strategy of offering early and targeted intervention to T2T students within their field experiences to push back against deficit thoughts and practices. As a whole, this experience changed our approach to clinical supervision and the ways in which supervision in alternative routes to certification programs may promote culturally relevant clinical experiences that draw upon critical dialogue, critical reflection, and culturally relevant pedagogical practices grounded in sociocultural and political contexts. This is a practice that allows for critical engagement and self- introspection that many pre-service teacher education programs (especially alternative licensing programs) do not include within their framework (e.g., Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Marx, 2006; Sleeter, 2013).

Unconscious Bias and Overt Racist Behavior

¹⁰ Citation censored for purpose of anonymity.

Thus, as a result of extended classroom observations, field notes, and informal interviews, we found that teacher placement may impact adult student teaching interns deleteriously through higher incidence of anxiety, inflexibility, cynicism, and deficit-based notions of urban students and classrooms when compared to undergraduate student-teaching interns. Further, one of the themes to emerge from our analysis was the demonstration of racist behavior (both implicit and outright) by the T2T students in their teaching placements and within the college classroom. Outside of their teaching placements, students demonstrated their dispositions toward students of color by the topics raised in conversation and lecture, some often displaying mindsets that had unconscious biases toward their students of color. By unconscious bias, we utilize Benson and Fiarman's (2020) theory of unconscious bias being the process where people, in their daily lives "absorb and internalize prejudices that influence our automatic actions and beliefs" (p. 6). These unconscious biases would influence how Scarlet would first interact with her students in her classroom before then discussing her actions in seminar with us and her classmates. Classroom discussions resulted in Scarlet blaming the families of students regarding their ability to learn due to the "values" of the parents at home, the refusal of the parents to teach their children how to adhere to the expectation of the white cultural social norms that govern their classrooms, and how many of these teacher's ideal jobs would be to teach students in suburban and rural classroom environments. Additionally, Scarlet did not embody the professional teaching disposition put forth by Gordon (1999) and others that reflect the qualities necessary of successful teachers.

Professional Disposition and Adult Learners

Professional disposition also played an important role in the effectiveness of alternative programs in teacher training. Overall, this study found that students were very devoted to their coursework, but when they began their internships, Scarlet suffered from a lack of confidence and was inundated with feelings of unpreparedness. Although these feelings are not unusual, they paralyzed Scarlet in ways that directly impacted the students she taught. Furthermore, we found that the adult learners often thrived with good communication and accurate feedback. This is echoed by research in the medical field that found that such effective feedback and communication "plays a critical role in helping adult learners achieve their educational goals and reach their maximum potential" (Sachdeva, 2009, p. 106).

Nonetheless, issues pertaining to cultural competency, critical conversation, and critical self-reflection become particularly important in training alternative certification teachers to recognize spaces of privilege in urban schools. Numerous displays of racism, including the discussion of improper parenting and the dehumanization of children, were just some of the defensive reactions T2T students had when they felt overwhelmed by the clinical experience. However, if these teachers were to reflect upon these actions after having been openly discussed and analyzed in class by their professors or by their peers, there is an opportunity to understand the emotions behind these thoughts and dispositions. This is a difficult, but critically important task for supervisors to have their students engage in, as Matias (2013) states that such reflection around actions and dialogue in urban classrooms, especially those around "race . . . becomes an arduous task, despite the overwhelming possibilities it has for creating humanizing projects of race" (p. 189). Additionally, it allows the university supervisors an opportunity to conduct a true Socratic discussion concerning personal bias, racism, and dispositions (for example) while also allowing

for the creation of individual performance plans for students that the supervisors think need additional teaching and direction in regard to cultural disposition and anti-racist pedagogical work.

Perhaps having students and supervisors keep a running journal of their thoughts and actions, a journal that is shared during seminars or debriefs, or having the supervisors posing anonymous situations that were observed in classrooms to the group to discuss could lead to that deeper, necessary reflection. However, for this to occur, the supervisors have to be a constant presence in the classrooms of their students, build trust, and find time to confront uncomfortable situations in a positive manner. Furthering the issue at hand, however, is that this requires a necessary willingness for supervisors to engage in a reflective examination of both their teaching and their deeply held values. While Linek et. al. (2012) suggest students did not wish to engage in critical reflection in their alternative licensure program, as “reflection and sharing [w]as a waste of time” (p. 79), it is imperative both university supervisors and supervising teachers are pivotal in modeling these approaches for and with student interns. Thus, there is a need to push past just seminar and theory in a single school classroom. Discussion, critical reflection, and training for supervisors to develop a critical lens and willingness to address deficit and racist thinking with student interns (and with themselves) will be crucial to developing more critically minded T2T teachers within the shortened duration of these programs.

Self-Direction and Adult Learners

In particular, adults in a learning setting need experiences which reveal gaps between where they are and where they want to be. Because we found adult T2T candidates draw from a greater depth and breadth of experience than younger learners, this often promotes slower and more cautious acceptance of new ideas. Further, the authors noticed that these adult T2T students define themselves by experiences they have had, and, unlike younger individuals, they do not derive self-definition from external sources, parents, and peers. They also have vast internal resources for learning. This reinforces the need for providing experiential opportunity. Thus, experiential learning for adult learners in alternative certification programs should be grounded in constructive critique, reflection, self-direction, but they also need to be consistently challenged on the cynicism and even prejudice that encompasses the student teaching experience (Midwestern University’s T2T Student Teaching Handbook).¹¹ To do so, we suggest social-justice oriented practices in clinical experiences to address whiteness and approach foster culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies in urban elementary T2T programs.

Implications for Social Justice Oriented Supervisory Practices

As was discussed throughout our paper, critical social justice work must engage in the practices we have outlined: critical dialogue between supervisors and students (especially those who have displayed deficit thinking and racist thoughts), critical reflection of alternative certification students to work through their deficit mindsets and implement culturally relevant teaching practice and pedagogy. To implement these practices, it is necessary to understand the

¹¹ Citation censored for purposes of anonymity.

importance of and influence that the supervisor has on the T2T student's field experiences. By becoming an active member of this experience, teacher supervisors are able to develop relationships with their T2T students, promote critical reflection, and understand student experiences just as social justice educator preparation programs suggest teachers support their young students. Accordingly, these same practices and philosophies can be integrated into the weekly assignments/duties of the pre-service teacher and of the teacher supervisor.

Critical Dialogue and Self-Reflection

Critical dialogue and critical reflection should both be woven into the teaching and debriefing practices of teacher supervisors who wish to engage in anti-racist pedagogy. To do so, the teacher supervisor must either commit themselves to post-observation dialogues that will consist of potentially uncomfortable truth-telling with their supervisees on a regular basis, or have their students produce artifacts that genuinely have them reflect on not only their teaching and its effectiveness, but on their biases and habits of mind. While Gorski and Dalton (2020) do caution about having student teachers engage in critical reflection without guidance, producing products that do little to actually force students to confront deficit and racist attitudes will not lead to liberatory thinking. In fact, the authors stress that any time critical reflection only contains thoughts on the "existence of cultural difference and the meanings of cultural artifacts is insufficient" (p. 366). It must become a reflective practice that challenges deeply held models of thinking that students have had for their entire lives. To get to this necessary level of reflection, teacher supervisors must structure time into their observations and interactions with their T2T students taking time to provide examples and show their teacher candidates how to reflect. Modeling such reflection both in group conversation and in personal journaling shared with the class could lead students to embody the tenets of anti-racist work and actually confront the implicit bias we all carry through dominant hegemonic socialization.

Uncomfortable Confrontation of Whiteness

Additionally, supervisors, when working with any interns that display both overt and implicit racism towards students, must be willing to act against such harmful prejudicial and discriminatory actions towards marginalized students. For teacher candidates like Scarlet, early intervention is critical. It is important to have such students begin reflecting on their practices in-depth for the duration of their clinical practice. If issues persist, it is necessary to show concrete examples of how the deficit and racist thinking is arising in the classroom. Teacher supervisors should conduct multiple direct, focused, and formal observations (particularly with detailed field notes to share with the teacher candidates during extended debriefings) with students that require intervention. These observations must be carried out multiple times, especially if the teacher supervisor and the classroom teacher agree that the actions of the teacher candidate are rooted in their deficit mindsets.

Modeling and Co-Teaching

Furthermore, the supervisor should work to model good culturally responsive pedagogy for all of their supervisees, perhaps within a lecture space if they are able to meet as such, that allows for all teacher candidates to not only test new culturally responsive teaching methods, but to engage

in dialogue with their fellow candidates in a space that is supportive of reflective (and hopefully, transformative) practices. If that is not tenable, then teacher supervisors must work one-on-one with these students, demonstrating how their current actions could not only be harmful to students, but also do not showcase and utilize the teaching practices that are most likely to keep them engaged and learning. The teacher supervisor, if truly committed to this work, must go the extra mile with these students to provide them the opportunity to think, to reflect, and to confront their deficit mindsets. Otherwise, there is little preventing these ideologies from manifesting once the T2T student interns complete the program. This may also include co-teaching with a student intern in areas of struggle for as long as the supervisor's schedule allows.

Modeling for supervisors also requires challenging embedded practices within the neoliberal university. In the same way student teachers experience cognitive dissonance when they are exposed to educational theory and pedagogical practices from a critical social justice lens in their coursework and enter into the field where they are only exposed to high stakes accountability and curricular practices, supervisors also need recognize these same neoliberal structures in the university. Just as we ask them to integrate the foundations of a culturally relevant teaching practice, we must do the same. In other words, how might we remain complicit in our own evaluation tools and prescribed rubrics and protocols that don't prioritize culturally relevant and sustaining teaching and critical self-reflection? We might very well contribute to the cognitive dissonance of our students if we aren't willing to interrogate our supervisory observations and evaluation practices.

Supervisor and Mentor Dispositions

Supervisor and mentor teacher partnerships are central to the success of the student teacher in a clinical placement. Unlike many traditional programs where supervisors are on the periphery of the school and the classroom, anti-racist teaching enlists the support of everyone in the classroom to be trained and enact anti-racist teaching, pedagogy, and ways of being. This is essential to the support, success, and direct confrontation of whiteness as it manifests in clinical experiences. Finally, it is essential for supervisors who wish to engage in this anti-racist work to not let any candidate slip by due to a fear of reprisal from the university. Gorski and Dalton (2020) have stated that a majority of professors who teach social justice courses tend to have "critical orientations, but face challenges that make it difficult to operationalize these orientations" in their teaching and supervisory practices (p. 367). By making critical dialogue and reflection the norm for one's supervisory duties, by taking the time to model and co-teach culturally relevant and anti-racist teaching practices, and by embedding critical reflection as an authentic part of the teaching process, these practices should become core values of the supervisory role in Transition to Teaching programs.

Conclusion

The most pressing of topics to emerge from the data is the necessity to create a mechanism within urban Transition to Teaching programs clinical experience that supports to the unique needs of adult learners. Although the experiences of T2T teachers are complex, this study has shown that reactionary tactics, once a crisis occurs with a student, are much less effective than designing a program that recognizes the spaces from which adult learners enter these programs.

Although students went through a teaching program that promoted a vision of equity and social justice, we found that the cornerstones of equity and diversity need to be more than reiterated and exemplified in a simulated setting once the student teachers began their field placements.

Thus, we view the supervisory role as the conduit between theory and practice. In many ways akin to what we are asking our students to do, the supervisor must fully invest in the student interns, understand their backgrounds--everything they bring with them to teaching--and build relationships with them in order to confront and disrupt the reification of whiteness in classrooms. Supervisors, alongside mentors, must be supported by the university to get the training and develop the skills to have these difficult conversations with student interns. Further, university supervisors must be willing to listen to the criticism and, often, defense mechanisms student teachers will use in order to cope with stressful situations. They must both acknowledge complicity but also advocate for change. And the supervisor must be willing to engage in these same processes themselves. Finally, it is the responsibility of the School of Education and the faculty within to support and train supervisors and mentors and create placements that foster critical dialogue and reflection, instead of scrutiny and disparagement, to prepare future teachers that value the inherent strengths of marginalized students, their families, and the communities in which they will teach.

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