



## **Making Connections: Anti-racist Pedagogy and Social Justice Teacher Education**

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## Abstract

“Making Connections: Anti-racist Pedagogy and Social Justice Teacher Education” is a chapter in a book we are writing called, Side by Side: The Successes and Challenges of Preparing Urban Educators. Side By Side is a collection of cases written by the faculty of UCLA’s Teacher Education Program. The cases address struggles we faced in our own practice, and struggles we believe others will share. Our hope is that our book will create more national dialogue among teacher educators about the practices of teacher education. The case, “Making Connections,” we share here describes a three-day retreat whose goal was to improve the UCLA Teacher Education Program faculty’s ability to facilitate the “hard conversations” they engage in with their graduate students—conversations about race, class, language and sexual orientation that inevitably bring to surface deeply rooted beliefs and emotions. The retreat’s dual goal was to expand faculty members’ repertoires of facilitation strategies so that they, themselves, could effectively work with their graduate students as difficult issues surfaced. They also wanted this way of negotiating hard topics to serve as a model their students could draw from. Clearly, difficult topics in K-12 classrooms should neither be whitewashed nor ignored, and student teachers need guidance in developing their own skill set.

As the case unfolds, it becomes clear that this enterprise of critical inter-group dialogue isn’t one to be taken for granted and can’t be rushed. What happens when teacher education faculty dedicated to social justice engage in dialogue with their own positionality center stage? What happens when respectful, collegial colleagues meet one another in a way that spotlights the intersection of personal and professional identities? In this case, the story is one of colleagues torn by matters of race and the accompanying issues of positionality and privilege.

# **Making Connections: Anti-racist Pedagogy and Social Justice Teacher Education**

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The faculty of our Teacher Education Program (TEP) is dedicated to leveling the playing field for low-income students of color in Los Angeles schools, to honoring what these students bring with them to the classroom, and to transforming urban schooling. To that end, we work with our own students who are novice teachers. We hope that in the two years we spend with each cohort, our novices will not only gain strong content area teaching skills but will also develop the self-knowledge and courage to become powerful agents of change. As a start, they need to consider their own positionality—including privilege and marginalization—and the differences in their respective positionalities. They need to challenge one another to disregard hegemonic ideas and practices learned in school and at home. And they need to work to eradicate the manifestations of oppression that exist in urban schools.

If the TEP faculty is to lead our novice teachers to such goals, we need to be able to model the process and to facilitate discussion of the issues. In June 2001, we, as TEP faculty, felt under-prepared to facilitate these hard conversations and expressed desire to enhance our skills. In fact, the faculty asked the five colleagues who comprised the

Faculty Development Committee\* to make facilitation of hard conversations the focus of the upcoming three-day retreat.

The Faculty Development Committee took the urgency of this charge to heart. Clearly we all could use help in knowing how to proceed when our students' engagement with issues of race, language, class, gender, or sexual orientation takes unexpected turns. Like when a student simply doesn't return to the second half of the homophobia workshop. Or when a student of color challenges a white student's use of the word "nigger"—even though it is contextualized, clearly not his own phrasing, and spoken as reported speech. And as we spoke of the incidents and issues that emerged during the past year, we realized that while we had often, as a TEP community, discussed issues of racism, sexism and homophobia, these conversations were removed from our personal experiences with injustice. In other words, we had shared stories about incidents between students in our courses, we had read about racism and injustice during inquiry workshops, and we had collectively problem-solved particular dilemmas arising in the course of our work, but we had not deeply engaged in dialogue about our own lived experiences. Charged with shaping a significant three-day retreat, the Faculty Development Committee decided that the first step in engaging in anti-bias, anti-oppression, and anti-racist work necessitated a critical analysis and sharing of our personal experiences with oppression. We would each look at our own positionality in American society and understand how this experience shaped our worldview and influenced our decision to work in a program explicitly about social justice.

What happens when a TEP faculty dedicated to social justice engages in critical dialogue about positionality? Or, in other words, what happens when a Teacher

Education Program meets itself? Our three-day retreat to acquire facilitation skills was not the “practice run” that some of us were expecting. We found that the language and labels that society offers us—like multi-racial, white, Jewish— don’t always serve us well, that they are ambiguous, with unshared connotations. While we didn’t have the label handy at the time, we learned about ethno-racial assignment and identity, and the relationship between the two. We also learned how powerful emotions often can’t be expressed dispassionately, in polite conversations. We found that engaging in dialogue causes disequilibrium, pushes us off balance.

### **Theoretical Frame: Positionality and Critical Inter-group Dialogue**

#### **Positionality**

The term positionality, borrowed from feminist scholarship, refers to how one is socially located, or positioned, in relation to others given background factors such as race, class, and gender. Our position relates to the extent to which we are privileged, resourceful, powerful, and thus able to navigate and succeed within the dominant social structure. Lacking power and privilege relegates us to a subordinate status and makes it more likely that we will encounter oppression and exploitation (Banks, 1996b; Cooper, forthcoming; Maher & Tetreault, 1993; Martin & Van Gunten, 2002). Together, our life circumstances and multiple identities converge to create our positionality—which then shapes how we make meaning of the world (Collins, 1990). Recognizing that every individual has a distinct position means accepting the idea that truth and knowledge are situated, partial, and influenced by many contexts, rather than being universally shared (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991; Rose, 1997). Heeding this literature, we, the committee, understood that exploring and identifying one’s positionality is a key part of engaging in

anti-bias education. Since the personal is deeply connected to the professional, the positionality of teachers and teacher educators greatly influences how they construct knowledge and what knowledge they deem to be relevant and meaningful.

In light of these points, we worked to design professional development activities for our faculty that accomplished three main objectives. Faculty members would participate in a range of activities and dialogue that would help them identify their positionality, recognize the transformative power of anti-bias pedagogy and develop the courage and skills to engage in difficult issues related to privilege, oppression, and positionality in the classroom.

### **Critical Inter-group Dialogue**

According to Vella (1997) dialogue, translated from its Latin roots, can be defined as the word between us: dia means “between;” logos means “word.” The simplest definition for the word “dialogue” is a two-way communicative process, a conversation or social discourse between two or more individuals. The basic assumption is that learning occurs when two people exchange thoughts, ideas, and words through dialogue (Vella, 1997, p.3). As we become involved in dialogue we can agree with one another, we can disagree, or we can simply contribute new points to one another’s perspectives as long as new knowledge is created for all involved.

When we speak of intergroup dialogue, we add to this basic definition. Intergroup dialogue is “sustained and meaningful intergroup contact” that requires its participants to consider issues that create conflict and to promote the “just” educational practices that dismantle bias, inequity, and racism (Zuñiga, 1998). According to Zuñiga, intergroup

dialogue engages a diverse group of participants in a process that “encourages sustained conversations, exploration of both conflict and common ground, and action to improve cross-group relations and address social injustice” (pp. 1-2). Zuñiga believes that intergroup dialogue allows participants “to challenge misconceptions, biases and stereotypes” (p. 2). As participants learn to ask difficult questions of one another, they realize that “not all people from this particular group” fit their preconceptions of that group. Participants also develop an awareness of themselves as members of a social identity group and examine the impact of social identities such as gender, race, or sexual orientation upon status in society.

Because the UCLA TEP faculty is also engaged in the process of effecting change in oppressive and unequal school settings, we wish to challenge our students not only to talk about racial injustice, bias, and oppression, but also to do something about it. In recognizing the need to move beyond the social discourse into the realm of political and ideological inquiry and from inquiry into political and social action, we add the concept of critical dialogue to intergroup dialogue. As Macedo puts it, “dialogue as conversation about individuals’ lived experience does not constitute dialogue” (Freire & Macedo, 1999, p. 203). Freire asserts that true dialogue requires “subjects in dialogue to learn and grow by confronting their differences” (p. 73). If the participants are not transformed by the experience, do not acknowledge that the differences in lived experiences are a part of social construct, or do not engage in the dialogue for the purpose of constructing a new more equitable society, then no dialogue occurs.

Dialogue from a critical standpoint is an emancipatory process; it assumes that all those engaged in the dialogue are committed to learning about what is unfamiliar,

unspoken, hidden, or silenced. In essence, when engaging in dialogue, participants seek to understand ideas or concepts from as many different perspectives as possible, creating a complete and collective understanding of a social problem or issue. Dialogue presumes that the unfamiliar is often what is hidden or that which the status quo wishes would remain unseen and unchanged, such as the silencing of those who are disenfranchised or oppressed. By engaging in dialogue, participants wish to understand an idea or concept that may not mirror their own social realities. We dialogue in order to better understand one another's perspectives on a particular issue or topic, to understand the experiences of the other and to create the conditions for all to construct a better society from a collective view on the issue.

### **The Faculty Development Committee Plans**

The five faculty members who served on the Faculty Development Committee self identified as Chicana, Jewish, White, African-American and Asian-American. Since only one of us had facilitated previous anti-bias education professional development workshops, and since the UCLA TEP faculty had not participated in any type of diversity or anti-bias education as a group, we were a little nervous about proceeding without outside expertise. Given the sensitive nature of the professional development, we decided to bring in an individual who was not directly connected to the program. After reviewing resumes, we hired an experienced outside consultant who was an acknowledged and respected diversity trainer, and a woman of color.

We informed the consultant of our goals and proceeded to identify activities and readings for the session. The goals of the retreat were to: 1) develop faculty confidence



and skills in managing hard conversations among TEP students, particularly when racially sensitive or biased behavior is exhibited; 2) develop the ability to anticipate student reactions and intervene appropriately to identify events that might trigger strong reactions; 3) increase faculty knowledge of diversity and social justice and develop understanding of self in those contexts; and 4) develop a shared understanding of the issues and definitions of social justice and diversity.

Prior to designing the retreat, we administered a needs assessment to determine the skill, personal knowledge, and comfort level that each faculty member had in facilitating critical dialogue on topics of anti-bias and social justice. Using the findings from this assessment, we held two meetings with the diversity consultant and then devoted a full weekend to the selection of activities and readings for use during the professional development seminar. We read several articles, participated in simulations, watched films, and decided to select activities that would raise issues of race, cultural identity, homophobia and gender bias.

The idea was to create a context where TEP faculty could participate in a series of professional development seminars that focused on different forms of bias. The committee chose activities that would draw upon each person's experience with race, class, sexual orientation, culture, and language oppression. We selected and designed activities which would allow faculty to examine their own cultural identities, learn about the cultural identities of others, examine and critique racism and practice leading student dialogues on issues related to linguicism and homophobia. We did not intend to focus only on one specific form of oppression, but to address as many manifestations of oppression as was possible in three days. However, we understood that a focus on

cultural identity would raise questions about the diversity of experiences of the UCLA TEP faculty, thereby raising questions of positionality within our own ranks. After thoughtful discussion, we decided that within this professional development, the process of dialogue would help the TEP faculty create a better understanding of the concept of positionality. The committee proceeded to develop activities that would facilitate reflection on how positionality has colored our individual perceptions of what it means to be a “social justice educator,” and how our individual positionalities contribute to our collective vision of social justice education in UCLA TEP.

We anticipated that the first three-day professional development session for our faculty would continue throughout the year with follow-up meetings and additional professional development. The three-day retreat was held in one of our partnership schools. It was not an overnight retreat and faculty members were free to attend all or part of the professional development, but we strongly encouraged them to attend all three days in their entirety. Seventeen faculty members, including our program director, participated. An additional seven of us facilitated and participated actively in all three days of the retreat. Eight of the other participants attended all three days. The majority of our faculty attended at least two days of the retreat, but a few had prior commitments and could not attend the entire retreat. One person boycotted the third day, for reasons we later explain.

In terms of race/ethnicity, the 17 faculty self-identified as follows: 1 Italian, 1 African-American/Hawaiian, 1 Chinese/White, 3 Jewish, 4 Latino/a, 1 Chicana, 6 White. For 15 faculty members, the home language was English; for two it was Spanish.

Fourteen women and three men participated. Two had engaged in anti-racist work in the past; fifteen had not.

One of the original members of the faculty development committee left the group after the October 2001 retreat to join another committee for reasons unrelated to the retreat. Three faculty members joined the committee after the three-day retreat. One joined in Fall 2001, and two in Fall 2002. The faculty development committee who collected and analyzed data and wrote this case study consisted of 1 Chicana, 1 Latina, 1 African-American, 2 Jewish and 2 White members. Five had English as their home language; two had Spanish. All were women; two had engaged in prior anti-racist work.

The retreat provided us with a rare opportunity to collect rich data for our case. We took fieldnotes throughout the three days and audio taped the majority of our discussions, to which our entire faculty consented. Audiotapes were fully transcribed and then analyzed by all committee members. We also reviewed and analyzed the fieldnotes and studied drawings and notes that we charted on paper during discussions among the faculty. From October 2001 to December 2002, we incorporated our data review, analysis and case writing into our bi-monthly committee meetings. Together, we identified recurring themes and tensions in the data, engaged in deep dialogue about their meaning, and reached agreement about our results and implications. In addition, we pinpointed key areas that would require continued professional development for our faculty. Committee members also talked at length with selected faculty advisors and the retreat's professional development consultant in order to assess the participants' perspectives about their retreat experience.

## **From Planning to Action**

The faculty development committee designed the professional development along a continuum that began with activities designed to raise TEP faculty awareness of our similarities and differences and permit us to hear the cultural stories of our peers. We planned to focus the first day and a half on identity and anti-racist identity development. By anti-racist identity development, we mean that race is a part of an individual's socially constructed identity; it is the "process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group" (Tatum, 2002, p. 16). According to Carter (2000), "racial identity offers a way to understand the multiple ways in which race is expressed as well as the various types of internal and external factors that influence its expression" (p. 207).

During the second day, the committee intended to create an opportunity for deeper dialogue on what the faculty defined as "hard issues" and focus on racism and homophobia. We included activities and opportunities to discuss racial identity development and planned to view the film "Stolen Ground" as part of our efforts to create a forum to discuss race openly and honestly. In addition, we planned to dialogue on complexities and multiplicities of privilege and oppression; therefore, we included a brief lecture on defining privilege and oppression, a simulation activity referred to as a "power scatter" (in which participants walk forward or backward depending on the sentence read), and the reading of Peggy McIntosh's (2002) article on white privilege. By "privilege," we mean that those in privileged positions define the societal norm, can rely on that privilege to avoid objecting to oppression and often do not recognize the privilege (Grillo and Wildman, 2000, p. 92). The second day was to conclude with introspection

on the power of faculty over students, and we anticipated working together to develop protocols on facilitating “hard conversations.” We hoped to devote the third day to practicing facilitating these “hard conversations” with our students. The term “hard conversations” emerged from an inquiry group, where one of the TEP faculty members characterized discussions on issues related to race and homophobia this way.

The goals of the first few activities, then, were to provide opportunities for sharing our cultural identities, for beginning the conversation on race, and for examining privilege and positionality. During the first activity, we shared personal histories, including how we each developed our understanding of social justice issues. At the activity's conclusion, colleagues understood more about one another's roots, their sources of nourishment, their values, and their activism. Everyone's story was unique and we learned a great deal about people which we had worked with for years. It seemed that the group felt we now had access to parts of one another's lives that we would not have been able to imagine on our own. In some cases, we acknowledged the poverty experienced by some faculty and discovered that no one “grew up with a silver spoon.”

We believed that by starting with our personal stories we would then somehow be able to come together as a community ready to deal with the anti-bias agenda of our retreat. For the most part, the personal history activity was a very positive experience for the faculty. One member commented:

Speaking about these things with the people we work with is something I've never experienced before. I always felt issues like what we talked about stayed at home and kept separate from work. There's a professional part to your work and your personal part. You never bring up things like

this, let alone speak about it honestly and publicly in front of people you work with. I think it's wonderful that we have done this. I think everyone felt really good for this opportunity.

Sharing our stories also helped us see the assumptions we had made about one another:

I loved hearing everyone's story. I did not realize how many assumptions I had made about the folks in this room until people were talking. And I feel really bad because I have known you all for — this is my third year with you all. I just have to think, gosh, I am sorry I didn't get a chance to talk to you all sooner.

### **Being “just white” and Privileging Color**

While the first day began on a positive note, over the course of the three day retreat, several reactions to the planned activities surprised us. A number of the activities designed to help explore power dynamics created tensions for both white faculty and faculty of color. Three events occurred that sparked this tension: the group's participation in reflecting on the sharing of personal histories, a power scatter activity, and race-based discussion groups. Below, we discuss how these events caused friction.

After lunch and an intense and exhilarating first morning, the facilitator began the afternoon by asking us to respond to three questions:

- 1) How did it feel to tell your identity and social justice story and to hear other people's stories?
- 2) In what ways have knowing your students' stories helped you as faculty advisors (UCLA TEP faculty)?
- 3) In what ways might it be important as a faculty advisor to understand the identity backgrounds of your students? Why?

During a whole-group sharing of reflections, one of our faculty of color expressed her difficulty in shaping her story:

You know it felt really frustrating to me to tell my story... It's more difficult for me to tell my story because I think, I am multi-ethnic and so it adds a level of complexity to it that in a lot of ways, if you're just white — well I don't want to say 'just' — but if you're white that gives you a line of stability, so to speak, it's like your anchor. You're white, and then all these other things happen to you. But if you're multiethnic, you've got all of these minds and depending upon your situation, all of these things that are happening to you — you end up a basket case. So it was really hard for me. It was hard for me and when I thought about this, after having spoken, I realized they really know nothing about me, because I can't think of my identity in any linear way.

It is important to note that none of us had any idea that the activity designed to be the relatively “easy piece” had caused such discomfort. There was no anticipation that bi-racial advisors find the labels that society has offered us inadequate and frustrating. In

retrospect, we understand that, as Tatum (2000) notes, there are “particular challenges associated with a biracial identity [that] must be negotiated.”

One such challenge is embodied in the frequently asked question, ‘What are you?’ While the question may be prompted by the individual’s sometimes racially ambiguous appearance, the insistence with which the question is often asked represents society’s need to classify its members racially (p. 175). Tatum continues to explain that the question also pushes individuals to choose sides—or to take a stand—and emphasizes that this kind of identity development is often a lifelong process.

The faculty member who spoke did so with animation, emotion and a combination of anger and distress in tone—most likely the only way she could speak. She showed the courage and trust to go ahead with sharing a confusion deeply set. Her only point was to convey her struggle with considering her various ethnic identities. Perhaps the group was focusing on her affect more than her words, perhaps they thought she was angry at them, because, rather than hearing the message spoken, several of the white faculty focused on the “just white” portion of her statement.

In fact, throughout the retreat, white faculty members referenced this comment in several different contexts. One white faculty member commented to the facilitator that she was particularly upset by the remark. The issue remained unresolved throughout the retreat and was exacerbated by the facilitator allowing the person who made the comment a point of clarification, without response on the part of the white TEP faculty. That faculty member of color said,

About the comment that I made yesterday about being ‘just white’—  
while I can see how that comment would offend some people, depending



upon how they thought I was using the word ‘just,’ I used it to mean you are one cultural background as opposed to being bicultural or multi-cultural. And the first time I heard that ‘just’ used, I think [colleague's name] said it, ‘just white’, and we were sitting over there, I laughed it off. The second or third time it became more and more difficult to hear because come on, give me a break, you knew what I meant. And for me it’s not funny anymore because I know that beneath that joke you were really hurt by that and if you’re hurt by that, then I would appreciate you telling me so that I can apologize to you for being insensitive, basically. So I would appreciate if everybody would stop with the ‘just white’ joke.

At least one of the white faculty members was still angry and hurt even after the clarification had been allowed. During the third and final day of the retreat, this white faculty member revealed her feelings about the comment:

No one really was given the opportunity to answer it, to talk about it. I think that again there was no acknowledgement that maybe this comment might cause pain to people or might have upset people. I felt hurt by the statement. I felt targeted by the statement. What was the statement from yesterday? “Just white” and the explanation of what just white was.

A few faculty members felt that the focus on the “just white” comment was an attempt to circumvent the real issue raised by the faculty of color, namely the experience of growing up biracial. Those few expressed concern that the

white faculty's focus on the comment was an example of how white people exercise their white privilege by insisting their issues take priority in the dialogue.

### **The Hard Work of Acknowledging Positionality and Privilege: A Power Scatter**

The faculty development committee had also wanted the TEP faculty to examine issues related to individual positionality and privilege. Since the activities on the scales of anti-racist identity development (based on the work of Robert Carter, Beverly Daniel Tatum, and Louise Derman-Sparks) and the forced corners activity (based on activities from Los Angeles Unified School District Focus on the Multicultural Classroom, Los Angeles County E Pluribus Unum, and National Conference of Community and Justice) had gone smoothly, the facilitators believed that TEP faculty were ready to engage in activities that might point more to our differences than to our similarities.

On day two, the faculty development committee facilitated the “power scatter” activity. The “power scatter” is an activity loosely based on the work of Peggy McIntosh, but it included an equal number of points on language, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. The intent of this activity is to produce a powerful visual representation of differences due to privilege.

For the power scatter, we went outside in the schoolyard, held hands in a horizontal line, and then either moved forward or backward in response to a question that probed our subordinate or dominant status in terms of race, language and class. Those who had more privilege moved forward, while those who did not moved back. For example, one question posed was: “Were you ever ashamed to speak your home language in school?” If your answer was “no,” you took a step forward; if it was “yes,” you took a step back. By the end of the ten questions, our once united group was now

scattered throughout the school playground. Four faculty members—one white male and three white females—were at the front, a few of the white and faculty of color were in the middle, and the rest were in the rear. The facilitator had asked each of us to crouch down and position our bodies as if we were running a race. We crouched and what became particularly acute and disturbing to many was the large number of faculty of color scattered at the rear. Immediately after the power scatter, we participated in a second activity, intended to reverse the trend. For example, one question was: “Do you speak more than one language?” But, instead of helping to soothe feelings and hurt experienced by those in the rear of the line, this activity exacerbated the situation.

At the conclusion of the activity, it was evident that the activity had mixed reactions from the participants and that the faculty of color were hurt and angry by their experience in the activity. The white faculty who were at the front of the line had different reactions. One member of the faculty, a white male, said he knew from the start that he had more privilege than the others did. So during the activity he took giant steps forward, which he thought would signal that he was NOT going to deny the existence of his privilege. Another said, “I anticipated the activity and was clearly of the opinion that I was going to be up front, and I feel like I kind of have to apologize to all you guys, but more than that, I hope that in about 65 years, that people will not feel like they have to apologize.” Another member of the white faculty was amazed, disbelieving, and embarrassed by her privilege. She explained that she had grown up working class, her father had left school in the eighth grade, she was Jewish, and she typically had “less” than her friends and extended family. She had never thought of herself as privileged. She shared her feelings that something must be wrong. Another said, “I felt very

uncomfortable being in the front; I felt isolated from people who I respect and like and feel totally equal to. You know, I realize I've gained a lot and I didn't want to be in that position.”

Other members of the white faculty chose not to talk about the first “power scatter” focused on privilege, and instead talked about the second version, which included questions that pointed to the enriching aspects of non-dominant cultures. The intention was to provide opportunities for the people in the back to engage in some forward movement. One white faculty member commented, “I felt sad, because I missed all those wonderful experiences, and realized that, while I'm ‘just white,’ as someone called us, even though I have privilege, there are a lot of things that I couldn't have.”

Some faculty members of color were upset. Perhaps the intent of the second version was too transparent. And power scatter, in general, dramatized a fact that they understood all too well—that they and their families were in subordinate positions in our society. These differences in experiences were further emphasized in the following exchange between two faculty members, one white and one Chicana. The white faculty member believed that “privilege” was personally constructed; the Chicana argued that the opposite was true. The white faculty member argued, “I think privilege constructs your identity;” she defended her point by demonstrating how the Chicana had attained some privileges, namely education and income and implied that she was able to do so because of her ability to reconstruct her own social reality. Her colleague responded:

I do think that a lot of it is attributed to struggle and resistance. But it's not struggle, it's not like, “pull yourself from the bootstraps.” I think that,

what I have gained is because other people have struggled so I could attain it, other people have fought and struggled and marched and died so I could be one of the few that gained those things. Not because I personally have this gift or this brilliance or this persistence, or what people call resilience to gain it, but that others really fought for me to do that.

Other faculty advisors of color emphasized that they had worked hard to be where they are now; they all had doctorates and were middle class. But this realization didn't help. Rather, it evoked guilt—so many in their family and so many old friends lived a different reality. The facilitator, picking up on the tension, tried to soothe hard feelings by saying the following, “So part of it might be persistence, but part of it is also your position in society, and what that means in terms of privilege and disadvantages.”

### **Attempts to Create Safe Spaces: Race-alike Groups**

In fact, throughout the debriefing of the power scatter, the facilitator tried to ensure that all had an opportunity to discuss their reactions and feelings. Despite this sharing, some of the faculty of color remained shaken. Without stopping to address these feelings, we continued with our planned activity of viewing the film “Stolen Ground” which focuses on Asian-American males discussing issues of race and discrimination. This film contributed to the distress of the whole group and prompted one faculty of color to walk out of the room; another was in tears.

Given the level of anxiety faculty were experiencing, the facilitator considered alternative formats for engaging in dialogue on the film. After a brief check with members of the faculty development committee, the decision was made to form “race

alike” groups to “create an environment where free and honest sharing can occur by lessening the fear of hurting others’ feelings or evoking anger or defensive denial” (Derman-Sparks & Brunson, 1997, p.70). The rationale, then, was that faculty of color, in particular, needed a safe space to discuss their feelings about positionality and racism, and that this would be best accomplished without the presence of their white colleagues.

This division into two groups, one comprised of faculty of color and the other of white faculty, caused a stir among the white faculty. The reaction on the part of at least half of the white group was dramatic. One Jewish faculty member considered herself part of the group of color. She remained in the room where the faculty members of color were regrouping, until our outside facilitator—who would stay and facilitate the dialogue among the faculty of color—asked someone in the group if there were anyone present that should not be in the room. The person asked said, “Yes.” The facilitator asked the woman in question to leave the group. This, of course, was an on-the-spot decision, a reaction to an unanticipated situation. Clearly, this decision was problematic—disconcerting in the abruptness and inconsistent in the change from inviting self-identification to demanding assignment. As this Jewish advisor joined colleagues in the white group, she questioned in anger, “Who were they to tell me what group I belong to? How could they know?”

Two other Jewish advisors identified themselves as Jewish rather than white. One talked in depth about the kind of discrimination and persecution her family experienced and pointed to the terrors of the Holocaust. Being Jewish was its own category, she felt. Another Jewish advisor was surprised at the reactions of these colleagues and felt that while “X” years ago, Jews were considered to be of color, that

was a long time ago. She explained that she was white, and clearly Jewish, yet being Jewish was more of a key identifier 65 years ago in Nazi Germany and one hundred years ago in the Russian countryside when her grandmother's family was killed in the pogroms — whiteness wasn't a savior then. She acknowledged, however, that in her lifetime whiteness has become an unearned advantage, giving her the benefit of the doubt and greater access and privilege.

Brodkin (2000) sheds light on American Jews' ethno-racial status as she traces the history of Jews' place on the binary of black and white. In the 1920s and 1930s Jews were not considered white—both their assignment and identity was non-white. It was only after World War II that powerful social barriers were removed and Jews were granted institutional privileges. Brodkin poses the question, “Is Jewish identity a white identity now that Jews' ethno-racial assignment is white?” (p. 171) The answer: it varies from generation to generation—and within generations. For many there is ambivalence—“yes” and “no”—Jewish and white. While the assignment is white, many Jews identify with “the social justice underdog,” that is, those who are not white.

The other reactions of the white group to the race-alike groups varied. One advisor who had grown up poor and had battled gender stereotyping and discrimination was furious. She asserted that she viewed herself as a social justice educator, as an activist in several areas, and thought that being assigned to the white group was insulting and divisive. She chose not to attend the third day of the retreat. The others in the white group, one male and two females, were surprised at the vehement reaction of their white colleagues, noting that we were always dividing into groups for one reason or another; this was just one other configuration.

Kivel (2002) and Derman-Sparks and Brunson-Phillips (1997) point out that although whites are almost always resistant to the formation of race alike groups, they can benefit from participating in them. If placed in mixed groups, whites focus on the issues of people of color. In white only groups, whites are also “forced to look at what it means to be white in the context of racism” (Derman-Spark and Brunson-Phillips, 1997, p. 71). Also, whites “benefit from the opportunity to talk to other whites about racism, about being white, and about working for racial justice” (Kivel, 2002, p. 92). According to Kivel, whites are not often given an opportunity to talk about racism and whites need this time. Because of the anger and frustration in the white group, the act of looking at whiteness in the context of racism did not occur. While two of the group were members of the faculty development committee, they were as new to these types of dialogues as the rest of the participants. The group, then, had no real facilitator. The benefits of an engaged white race-alike group did not materialize during our first retreat.

Some faculty members of color were also initially apprehensive about the race-alike group format and shared their guilt about leaving friends. Another said that until recently he had not considered himself a person of color. However, after a few minutes, the faculty of color—in a dialogue facilitated by the outside facilitator—quickly engaged in animated conversation. One member of the faculty tearfully shared her experiences on campus with racism, while others empathized and shared their own experiences on and off campus. Another talked about how good it felt to not have to explain her feelings or worry about her comments being misinterpreted. A member of the faculty who was gay and Latino shared his experiences with racism and homophobia. It was a powerful



moment for these members of the UCLA TEP faculty who seemed to treasure the opportunity for a camaraderie not experienced before.

## **Reconsidering Our Focus**

The UCLA TEP faculty development committee started this work with the goal of being better teachers for our graduate students. The committee had hoped that our first professional development session, one focused on critical dialogue and infused with skill development activities from anti-bias and multicultural education, would enable us to lead our students in their development as social justice educators. During the initial stages of our retreat planning, we thought that if we could just find out what the optimum strategies for facilitating hard conversations about what anti-bias looked like and get these strategies down, we would do fine as teacher educators. UCLA TEP was, after all, a social justice program committed to challenging all forms of bias, prejudice and injustice. Surely, we could engage in critical dialogue on white privilege and racism.

This is what the faculty development committee originally believed when the power scatter activity was included in the professional development. The committee thought the activities would advance TEP's efforts to raise our group awareness of white privilege. The idea was that a faculty as progressive as we were could effectively engage in an honest dialogue about the impact of racism and other biases—the only issue was a need to develop facilitation skills. However, the committee learned that facilitating these activities proved to be more complex and contested than we planned. As Derman-Sparks (1997) notes: “When the perspective of the subordinate group is shared directly, an image is reflected to members of the dominant group that is disconcerting” (p. 14). We

discovered that our diverse faculty struggled with “hard conversations” on topics of race and privilege.

As a result of the tensions which surfaced during the retreat, the faculty development committee felt responsible for having turned a previously cordial and cooperative faculty into a group of faculty who were angry at one another. Many of the faculty blamed the facilitator and the committee for creating tension where it was previously non-existent or at least unacknowledged. A few of the white faculty advisors refused to engage in future discussions on race and racism. The faculty development committee wondered whether the few white faculty who refused to engage in critical dialogue mirrored the “culture of silence” described by Tatum (2002, p. 116). Was the silence due to ignorance; fear of saying something wrong and offending a colleague of color? Was the anger demonstrated by white colleagues aimed at a professional development seminar that created more tension than unity? Or, was this silence due to “little experience engaging in dialogue about racial issues?” (Tatum, p. 117).

In addition, a few of the faculty advisors of color became so angry with their colleagues that they openly spoke of not wanting to engage in anti-racist work in TEP. The committee wondered whether the frustration these advisors of color experienced because of some white colleagues’ resistance would prohibit them from wanting to engage in future dialogue.

## Trying to Understand the Tensions

As we began to analyze our retreat data, we realized that the conversations that took place during the three-day retreat had less to do with our students and more to do with our own struggles with racism. From the data, we concluded that:

1. Although we are all social justice educators, we have not had the same experiences with oppression and privilege. While we all share the same profession, we don't all come from the same place. Furthermore, we are not aware of how one another's life experiences have shaped our individual social justice philosophies.
2. Many of the white faculty struggle with acknowledging their whiteness and positionality. They have difficulty in accepting the inherent privilege of being white in America. They become angry and resist continuing the dialogue around race.
3. The resistance demonstrated by white colleagues frustrated many of the faculty of color. They questioned whether it is their responsibility to educate whites about racism.
4. While this work is incredibly challenging, our faculty remain committed to engaging in professional development that continues our exploration of these issues.

## **Centralizing Racism**

Issues confronting our program at the present time are not so different from those impacting other teacher education programs. In fact, in comparing our retreat to a self-study around social justice done by the faculty members of the Department of Teacher Education at Boston College (Cochran-Smith, 1999), we found that we had similar experiences. They, like us, found the activity of sharing personal journeys and constructions of social justice to be difficult and complex. As Cochran-Smith (1999) explained, when recounting her work with the Boston College faculty:

But honest talk is complicated. Our individual past experiences and socially constructed subjectivities meant that some of us talked more than others about certain issues, some of us talked far more personally, and almost all of us said some things we feared would expose our ignorance, prejudice or suppressed anger, even rage (p. 245).

In a later reflection Cochran-Smith (2000) also asserted:

Compelling personal stories often evoke a strong sense of empathy for others, a false sense that all of us have experienced hurt and frustration varying in degree but not in kind, that all of us underneath have the same issues, that all of us can understand racism as personal struggle, as individual instances of cruelty, discrete moment of shame, outrage or fear (p.174).

The UCLA TEP retreat dialogue confirmed that not all our faculty considers that they have had the same “kinds” of experience with prejudice. Our faculty of

color were adamant that their race-related struggles are different. One advisor explained: “You (white people) can decide when you feel like you want to deal with racism. But for people of color there’s no choice. You get to deal with it every day whether you like it or not.” The other advisors of color agreed that structural racism and the importance of visible differences among people when defining access must be acknowledged—as a starting point.

But some of the white faculty had another starting point in mind—that of listening to and recognizing their stories of oppression related to being poor, female and/or Jewish. One colleague stated:

I want to say that I think the feelings of the people in the white group are being reduced by this discussion. I think there was more to being upset than being grouped by race. I think there were additional issues that occurred because of that, and I wanted to bring them up. One of them was that our concerns were not met.

We feel that this issue of “starting points” is significant, and we don’t want to lose track of it. At the same time, we want to continue to explore the reluctance of some white faculty to identifying with being white. As Paul Kivel (2001) points out, many whites “don’t want to be white” because it presents the possibility of being labeled a racist, feeling guilty, shamed or embarrassed (p. 8). In order to develop an anti-racist identity, however, it is important that whites acknowledge their whiteness and remain “open to engaging in on-going self-examination of their participation in racism” (Tatum

1995, as quoted in Derman-Sparks and Brunson-Phillips, 1997, p. 3). Clearly, it is necessary to challenge their privilege because, as Wise notes,

. . . if we recognize our privileges, yet fail to challenge them, what good is our insight? If we intuit discrimination, yet fail to speak against it, what have we done to rectify the injustice? And that's the hard part, because privilege tastes good and we're loath to relinquish it. Or even if willing, we often wonder how to resist: how to attack unfairness and make a difference" (Wise, 2002, p. 93)

## **Conclusion & Implications**

In retrospect, we could lament what we wish we had known ahead of time. While our faculty completed a needs assessment prior to our three-day retreat, the faculty development committee didn't really understand where we were on the trajectory of personal understanding of positionality. Our outside facilitator, though clearly skilled in many ways, might have done a better job of mediating the "just white" comment, nipping it in the bud, allowing time for everyone to speak, clearing up an issue that was a non-issue, essentially. In addition, the facilitator's abrupt banishment of the ostensibly white faculty advisor from the group of color was problematic. Finally, while most faculty members attended all three days of the retreat, everyone needed to be there.

At the same time, we know this list, and it is an incomplete one, is long enough for us to understand that there always will be surprises, always on-the-spot decisions to be made. The ways that we can be better prepared are many, but key is keeping ourselves open to dialogue, expecting the unexpected, and paying attention to the

particular issues that our group brings up. At the same time, even though we feel a sense of urgency to proceed, the proceeding may not be the quick circuit-training imagined.

We need to slow down, to listen hard, and, certainly, to speak up.

Our efforts to construct and maintain a social justice program are a work in progress. We consider the dialogue on race of particular importance and note that many teacher education programs are beginning to adopt social justice frameworks. Such a framework calls upon future teachers to become change agents who possess the political and ideological clarity necessary to challenge educational injustice (Bartolomé and Trueba, 2000, Freire, 1998, Zeichner, 1998). The struggle for educational equity and democracy implies a linkage between social justice education and the eradication of racist structures in our schools. As teacher educators in a social justice teacher education program, we have learned that those involved in the struggle for social justice do not always prioritize racism.

Also, if conversations about educational injustice with our students are a mandatory part of a social justice program and the faculty cannot engage in its own dialogue, what does this mean for TEP? We conclude that our program has "unfinished business" as it relates to participating in critical inter-group dialogue on race. The majority of the faculty has agreed to continue the work and our committee has identified two areas for continued professional development:

1. We must continue to challenge racism in ourselves and among our students, specifically issues of white privilege, progressive racism, and resistance.

2. We must move beyond the dialogue and into anti-racist work by making anti-racist pedagogy an explicit part of our social justice agenda and must also act to change racist policies in our partnership school districts.

In addition, our faculty has committed to examining our program, adapting our curriculum, considering faculty hiring and retention trends, and planning future faculty development opportunities that align with our new anti-racist pedagogy goals.

We hope our work will inspire our colleagues, both at our institution and in other teacher education programs, to engage in critical dialogue pertaining to the value of centralizing race and racism. As a teacher education program with a heterogeneous yet predominately white faculty, we believe that we have taken the first steps in centralizing race in our program. We encourage other educators to join us in a “journey inward,” an essential step if we are to know how to help all of our own students teach for social justice.



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