

Chapter 39

A Pedagogy of Promise: Critical Service–Learning as Praxis in Community–Engaged, Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter details an innovative teacher education paradigm that privileges community-engagement and critical service-learning in the development of culturally responsive teachers. Candidates are removed from campus and immersed in a low-income, African-American neighborhood for an entire semester's coursework, where they participate in critical service-learning alongside community mentors and members of the neighborhood community council. Differentiated from more traditional models of university service learning characterized by "doing for," and which tend to favor those who serve over those being served, candidates participate with and alongside residents in projects identified by members of the neighborhood as integral to community vitality. The chapter details examples of critical service-learning that have been co-enacted in the eight-year history in the neighborhood. Candidate and community member reflections on their co-participation are privileged in the rich description of how this partnership is instrumental in the development of culturally responsive teachers.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to first examine the project of public education, problematizing the extent to which it has emerged as a force of social, cultural, and economic reproduction, and examining its historical and persistent indices of inequity. We argue that traditional programs of educator preparation are complicit in this equation, and call for repositioning the context in which we develop future teachers

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to more authentic, situated spaces in which candidates can develop the contextual cognizance required to effectively reach and teach *all* children. Specifically, we examine a program of community-engaged teacher preparation that prioritizes the wisdom and expertise of community members in the development of culturally responsive teachers. Toward this end, this chapter elevates critical service learning, alongside members of the community, as a pedagogy of promise in the development of equity-focused, socially-just, future teachers.

BACKGROUND

Formal institutions in the United States of America have developed based upon the White, Anglo-Saxon principles under which they were founded, and public education is no exception. In fact, the project of public education has arguably been as much about social and cultural assimilation as it has been about learning (Spring, 2004). Ample evidence exists of education for cultural assimilation with the intentional stripping away of children's identities sanctioned by government policy—the history of boarding schools for Native American children perhaps one of the most egregious examples (Spring, 2010). In this fashion “young people would be immersed in the values and practical knowledge of the dominant American society while also being kept away from any influences imparted by their traditionally-minded relatives” (Marr, 2015, para. 1). The plight of native children is not isolated, as there are abundant historical examples of policies instituted to remedy the presumed cultural deficits of black and brown children throughout United States history (Center for Racial Justice Innovation, 2006; Spring, 2007; Whiteman, Thorius, Skelton, & Kyser, 2015).

Schools, as middle class institutions, have consistently been shown to reward the values and social and cultural capital of middle class students, while denigrating those of the working class and poor (Bourdieu, 1984; Delpit, 1988; Lareau, 2003; Rist, 1970; Willis, 1977). “As sites for the transmission of class interests and ideologies, schools sort and select students by rewarding the cultural capital of the dominant classes” (Proweller, 1998, p. 5), an assertion that certainly bears out when we look at suspension rates, special education classifications, and representation in advanced coursework (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015). Given this, it is unsurprising that race- and class-based achievement gaps persist (Carter & Welner, 2013; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Drowley, 2006; Reardon et al., 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Trueba, 1988; Valencia, 1997).

Scholars attribute many factors to the perpetuation of the achievement gap, including a discontinuity between home, community, and school (Graybill, 1997; Rothstein, 2004). This discontinuity merits particular attention, given that the student population is growing increasingly racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse while the teaching force remains overwhelmingly White, middle-class, female, and monolingual (Center for Public Education, 2012). Research supports, thus, that many teachers privilege not only middle class values, but white middle class values (Wildhagen, 2011), compromising “other” children's access to a culture of high expectations, and therefore reinforcing an achievement divide (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1988; Howard, 2010). Without greater understanding of their own identities and the power and privilege inherent to them, teachers and schools serve to reproduce the very inequality many set out to eradicate.

Scholars in the latter portion of the 20th century issued a call for congruency between children's lived experience and the content and pedagogy in schools (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Emdin, 2016; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Gay, 2002; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mohatt &

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