

Starting with Self: Using Self discovery to Prepare Culturally competent Teachers

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Abstract: As the United States diversifies, so too does the student population in schools. To optimally serve our changing multicultural mix, teachers should be well-equipped to address the needs of all students. Teacher preparation might best educate new teachers by providing them with opportunities to explore themselves introspectively before entering schools as professionals. Self discovery is a process of critical self-inquiry by which preservice teachers come to know themselves as multilayered persons in a diverse context. This pedagogical framework, conceptualized by the author, describes teachers' development of sensitivity to classroom, societal, and global diversity by recognizing these four developmental stages: (1) Discussion, (2) Admission, (3) Accommodation, and (4) Proaction. Self discovery illustrates how future teachers might achieve cultural competence, and serves as a framework for implementing a multicultural curriculum in teacher education. Self discovery is an important approach for teacher educators who hope to successfully educate self-reflective practitioners, engage teacher candidates in difficult discussions about diversity, and prepare new teachers for a diverse and changing society.

As demographic shifts in the American population continue to bring culturally diverse students to our society and schools, one of the most valuable contributions teacher education programs can make is to prepare culturally competent teachers for all students. The United States has experienced recent and rapid influxes of more people of color, and these tides of immigration differ drastically from previous, historical waves of Eastern Europeans (Banks, 2005). In fact, it is projected that by the year 2050, Americans of European descent will represent less than half the population, while Americans of color will represent the numerical majority (Henderson, 2000). The implications for our nation's schools are tremendous as more students of color and English language learners (ELLs) join our classrooms. As a direct result: "Becoming a culturally competent teacher is quickly becoming a professional imperative and will increasingly become a basis for hiring. Increasingly, teachers will find themselves working with colleagues and students who are culturally different" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 27). In response to these new demographics, teacher education programs can take the lead in addressing issues of diversity in schools by broaching these important matters with preservice teachers *before* they become full-time educators. Programs that shape the educators of tomorrow can contribute to the success of all children by training teachers who have engaged in dialogue about pluralism and population shifts, and by helping them to achieve cultural competence through Self discovery.

What is Self discovery?

Self discovery is the author's own theory of cultural competence and is a framework for helping preservice teachers to explore, define, and reconstruct themselves in multicultural education courses at the teacher preparatory level. The goal of Self discovery is to prepare teacher candidates who recognize and understand their own multiculturalism enough to view future students with an affirming lens. Self discovery is a four-step metacognitive process and pedagogical framework that prompts teachers to evaluate and reconsider the ways in which they view members of their own culture groups as well as "others" who are unlike themselves (Gomez, 1996). New teachers are likely to teach students who do not share their culture in rapidly diversifying American schools (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Thus, Self discovery encourages teachers to recognize and embrace this reality, and embark on a lifelong journey of self-exploration, reflective teaching, and cultural competence. The stages of Self discovery are:

- (a) Discussion/Invitation to Attack – Teachers begin to engage in dialogue about issues such as race, class, and religious diversity, and are prompted to think about their personal beliefs and experiences regarding these issues. By sharing their beliefs, teachers risk being ideologically "attacked" (disagreed with or judged) by those present to hear.
- (b) Admission/I am Not Immune – Teachers acknowledge, verbalize, and own both their positive and negative forms of bias and erroneous or prejudicial beliefs such as stereotypes. They recognize bias in themselves and all humans, and realize that no one is immune from biased worldviews.
- (c) Accommodation/I Must Change - Teachers learn, absorb, and incorporate new information about "others" from different cultures and use that information to influence their own thinking and to change misconceptions and long-held opinions. Teachers develop attitudes of change and experience the impetus to alter their beliefs.
- (d) Proaction/I Will Do My Part – Teachers understand their role as purveyors of mainstream culture and values, and embrace the goal of educating their future students toward critical thinking, self-reflection, and social change. Teachers commit to "doing their part" as educators to reduce bias, prejudice, and intolerance in P-12 learners.

The Self discovery framework is important for teacher educators because teacher candidates should be given ample opportunity to examine their beliefs, "hidden hurdles" (Pang, 2005), conceptions about their own cultures, and the array of cultures they will encounter as teachers. In each stage of Self discovery, preservice teachers are asked to explore their deepest feelings, values, and opinions about others and "other people's children" (Delpit, 1988). Most importantly, rather than simply contemplating their opinions about others, prospective teachers are asked to identify and take ownership of their beliefs and the impact they will have on students.

The author developed Self discovery based on experiences as a teacher educator at two colleges of education in the South, and from her own teaching in diverse public and private schools. After years of teaching multicultural education to teacher candidates, and having

worked with a variety of teachers at the elementary level, the author has used her insight gained in both settings to formulate a viable theory of how teachers can achieve cultural competence. Self discovery fills an important gap in the current literature about preservice teachers and their acquisition of much needed cultural competency skills in today's schools and society. It is both a theory of cultural competence, as well as a pedagogical framework for guiding teacher educators through courses or programs that aim to educate new teachers who are prepared and equipped to teach students of all backgrounds and abilities.

The Importance of Introspection

There is much in the current literature that points to introspection and self-reflection as key elements to successful teaching. Bennet (1993) notes that to be optimally effective with a diverse group of students, teachers should first understand themselves and the influence of personal backgrounds on how they think, operate, perceive the world, and most importantly, teach and transmit knowledge in schools. Nel (1992) also notes that teachers should first be aware that they will interact with students who represent cultures other than their own, and in manners that might affirm or conflict with the students' conception of the world. After caregivers and family, teachers are the next most important purveyors of culture, socialization, and cultural capital in a child's life (Morrow & Torres, 1995). As such, it is crucial that they understand the myriad ways in which their actions, words, nonverbal cues, teaching styles, and expectations for students are translated and received. Teachers, as powerful authority figures and role models for students, should be aware that the positive and negative biases, prejudices, and worldviews shaped by their upbringings, families, and personal life circumstances influence each decision they make as an educator (C. I. Bennett, 2001; Noel, 1999). Howard (2003) describes the difficulty in guiding teachers through a process of uncovering familially-absorbed worldviews with: "An honest and thoughtful reflection on these types of questions often becomes painful because it may result in individuals recognizing that close family members harbored racist and prejudiced notions of racially diverse groups that were passed down from generation to generation. Coming to grips with such unfortunate realities is critical" (pp. 198-199). The personal and often painful nature of uncovering one's view of the world or "cultural knowledge" (Lin & Kinzer, 2003) make introspection, Self discovery, and other reflective processes in teacher education difficult to encourage and implement.

Marshall (2002) observes that "in order for teachers to be successful in their work with culturally diverse students, they must first accept and understand themselves as cultural beings" (p. 64). Similarly, Diller and Moule (2005) mirror that sentiment with: "It is impossible to appreciate the impact of culture on the lives of others, particularly students, if one is out of touch with his or her own cultural background" (p. 15). New teachers in a diverse and changing society, therefore, should demonstrate a rich understanding of precisely how theirs and the cultures of their students agree or collide. All teachers should begin, undergo, and continue the life-long process of discovering themselves and their cultural views in the confines of their teacher education program. As it follows, asking teachers to investigate these underlying elements of their identities *after* they have encountered cultural conflict in the classroom is much too late (Delpit, 1995).

Additionally, student outcomes and the quality of their school experiences are inherently linked to their experiences with teachers (Haycock, 2000 ; Rist, 1970). Fewer students of color graduate, and even in 2006, the long recognized achievement gap between ethnic minorities and their White and Asian contemporaries continues to persist (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). This being true, the need for culturally competent educators who know themselves, seek to know their students, and genuinely care about their interface with students should be placed at the forefront of the teacher preparation agenda (Gay, 2000; Noddings, 1992). Teacher education programs, therefore, should heed the importance of introspective, culturally competent educators by prompting them to consider their deep impact on the emotional and educational outcomes of students through Self discovery.

The Roots of Reflection

Reflection in teacher education is central to the theoretical basis of Self discovery, which emphasizes the foremost importance of self-evaluation, self-understanding, and self-critique as constant practice both before and after teachers enter schools as professionals. The literature on general reflection dates back to Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999), Aristotle defined “phronesis” as a process of truth-grasping and reason concerned with making informed decisions about things that are beneficial or detrimental to human beings. He posited that phronesis, or the continual seeking of how to apply general principles in specific circumstances, was a “unifying and essential habit of mind,” (Birmingham, 2004, p. 314) and that reflection was, interestingly enough, a moral virtue. Although Aristotle did not explicitly name teaching or education as the particular arena in which phronesis was to be used, scholars have extended his reverence for reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987; van Manen, 1991).

One of the earliest and most respected scholars to emphasize the importance of reflection in teaching and teacher preparation was John Dewey. In *How We Think* (1933), Dewey put forth that reflection “converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action” (p. 17) and gave three attitudes conducive to and necessary for reflective thought and action: (a) Open-mindedness, “defined as freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and such other habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and entertain new ideas” (p. 30), (b) Whole-heartedness, which is characterized “[w]hen anyone is thoroughly interested in some object and cause... ‘heartily’ or with a whole heart (p.31), and (c) Responsibility, or “to consider the consequences of a projected step... to be willing to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably from any position already taken” (p. 32). Dewey (1933) goes on to emphasize the importance of the teacher’s important, but often unconscious influence in class, as well as her ability to shape, and forever set in motion a student’s own attitude: “Everything the teacher does, as well as the manner in which he does it, incites the child to respond in some way or other, and each response tends to send the child’s attitude in some way or other” (p. 59). In all this, Dewey (1933) provides the foundation on which many scholars have built their arguments regarding the utmost importance of teacher reflection. Dewey (1933) not only established educators and school practitioners as a child’s primary source of information *and* influence, but emphasized reflection and self-exploration as an educator’s primary resource for effective teaching.

Following Dewey, Schön (1987) has written extensively about the centrality of reflection in creating reflective practitioners. He describes three modes of reflection that need not be conceptualized as strictly stage-wise or developmental: (a) Reflection on action, (b) Reflection in action, and (c) Reflection for action. Reflection on action is reflecting on actions and thoughts already completed. Reflection in action describes impromptu reflection during action. Lastly, Reflection for action is the most favorable, and guides a teacher's future actions (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Schön's (1987) notion of the reflective practitioner consists of a motivated educator who views reflection as vital to her practice. And most importantly, the reflective practitioner sees reflection as crucial to her *action* in teaching. Schön's reflective practitioner taxonomy was useful in the development and conceptualization of Self discovery because the latter, too, focuses on the importance of improving the critical self-reflection skills of preservice teachers as not only as prospective educators, but as lifelong learners. The reflective practitioner framework, as outlined by Schön and others, also melds nicely with the development of cultural competence, self-awareness and self-understanding. A new teacher cannot hope to be successful as a reflective practitioner or as a culturally responsive teacher without first examining herself and then acting on what she has discovered.

Lastly, van Manen's (1977) concept of reflection also proves valuable in the discussion of Self discovery. His view of teacher reflection consists of three stages. The first involves "the effective application of skills and technical knowledge in the classroom setting" (Yost et al., 2000, p. 40), and can be likened to content knowledge, or subject competence. The second stage concerns a teacher's underlying assumptions about classroom practices and the effect of her strategies on student outcomes and learning. The third stage involves "questioning the moral and ethical dimensions of decisions related, directly or indirectly, to the classroom situation" (Yost et al., 2000, p. 40). At van Manen's (1977) last stage of reflection, teachers move toward social action by considering the larger implications of the role in schools that are situated within a broader sociopolitical, societal, economic, and global context. In this stage of reflection, teachers see themselves not as mere deliverers of information, but transformers of schools and society. These tenets, especially that of reflection for deliberate action and meaningful social change, also underlie Self discovery. Dewey's (1933), Schön's (1987), and van Manen's (1977) works on reflection and teacher practice all play an important role in shaping Self discovery and its stages. These writers have influenced the field of teacher preparation and education in ways that have called great attention to the importance of teacher reflection, but not explicitly to the importance of teacher reflection for cultural competence and social justice.

Filling the Gap: The Role of Self discovery

Previous models describing reflection, self-awareness, and self-understanding in teaching and education have either centered generally on reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987; van Manen, 1977) or more narrowly on racial and ethnic identity development (Banks, 1994; Cross, 1978, 1994, Helms, 1984; 1994; Storti, 1998) as the chief mode by which individuals come to an intrapersonal understanding of themselves. The latter models tend to address race and ethnicity solely, which is but one facet of the self. Although helpful in describing the process of self-understanding as it applies to race, ethnic identity models do not encapsulate the whole experience of becoming culturally competent. Cultural competence, therefore, requires not only knowledge of the intersections of race and ethnicity in self and society, but broader analyses of

the vast array of elements that comprise a person. Having racially identified as White or Black, therefore, does not speak to a teacher's level of competence in understanding issues of religious discrimination or homophobia, for example. It simply describes her ability to situate herself among others who share or do not share her ethnic grouping. Because there is far more to an individual than how he or she identifies racially, these models are somewhat limited in their ability to describe the entire process of how one achieves cultural competence.

M. J. Bennett (1993) put forth a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) that extends deeper into the realm of describing cultural competence. This model provides another framework for describing the development of self awareness as individuals situate themselves among various continua and within an array of cultures. Intercultural sensitivities may lie on either the ethnocentric or ethnorelative side of the continuum of cross-cultural understanding. The stages of the DMIS are:

Ethnocentric Continuum

- (a) Denial – inability to see cultural differences
- (b) Defense – recognition of cultural differences coupled alongside negative outlooks on those whose culture is different
- (c) Minimization – emphasis on the similarity of people and common humanity

Ethnorelative Continuum

- (d) Acceptance – ability to recognize and appreciate cultural difference
- (e) Adaptation – seeing cultural categories as flexible and better able to communicate cross culturally
- (f) Integration – possession of multiple frames of reference and maintaining a heterogenous identity (M. J. Bennett, 1993).

This taxonomy, although better able to describe the process of cultural competence than the aforementioned racial identity models, still only serves as a model for how individuals come to intercultural sensitivity, and not explicitly how to encourage it in teacher education settings. Self discovery, on the other hand, describes both the process by which teachers come to achieve cultural competence, as well as how to inspire and facilitate that complex process from the vantagepoint of an instructor. Self discovery serves, therefore, not only as a means of describing what drawing closer to cultural competence “looks like,” but also as a method of bringing that change about. Thus, Self discovery goes further than existing models in the following ways:

- (a) It does not simply describe the racial or ethnic identity of any particular group. Teachers of any race can undergo Self discovery; it is therefore “universal” in nature.
- (b) It recognizes that racial identity and ethnic identity formation are but one step along the way in achieving cultural competence. Race is one of many aspects of self-identification among many that must be explored. Individuals, therefore, must also come to identify themselves along lines of gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, region, family upbringing, learning style, physical ability, and so forth. Self discovery considers *all* aspects of one's multilayered being, and does not simply stop at racial or ethnic affiliation.

(c) It does not merely take into account how individuals who undergo Self discovery will interact with those labeled as “other.” Rather, it calls for constant interaction with self as a reflective practitioner, as well as for changes in interaction with members of the same culture group. A teacher who has reached the Proaction stage of Self discovery, (which resembles Schön’s (1987) “reflection for action” stage and entails acting for social justice) therefore, is expected to exemplify her cultural competence not only with “foreigners,” but among familiar people such as colleagues, family members, and those closest to the teacher. Self discovery is not, therefore, simply a prescription for how to behave around those who are different, or how to navigate encounters with those unlike the individual.

Self discovery fills the gap of needed scholarship on viewing the *whole* process of self-understanding, and not just one slice. Racial identity and intercultural sensitivity are important facets of cultural competence, but teacher educators must have a method for examining how anyone, regardless of racial affiliation, can come to achieve cultural competence in a common and systematic way that is applicable to all. Teacher educators should also have a way of describing cultural competence in all contexts, and not just those involving “others.” One who is culturally competent should be able to navigate cultural differences as well as interactions with those of their own culture who are not yet competent. Cultural competence, especially as it relates to preservice teachers, will here be defined as “the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than your own” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 2). C. I. Bennett (1995) adds to this definition by individuals who combat racism and “all forms of prejudice and discrimination, through the development of appropriate understanding, attitudes, and social action skills” (p. 263). Cultural competence is here operationalized as a melding of reflection and social action capabilities.

Setting the Stage for Safe Self discovery

Before engaging in the Self discovery process with prospective teachers in a course setting, it is necessary to establish the preconditions most conducive to its success. The prerequisite settings for Self discovery are: safety, nonjudgmentality, and confidentiality. Multiculturalism includes topics such as racism, sexism, classism, colorism, and a host of other “isms” that are likely to incite strong emotional reaction from partakers in these conversations. Thus, to ensure that all preservice teachers who are a part of the Self discovery process achieve the appropriate level of comfort, teacher educators must make it “safe” for students to speak with candor, emotion, and sincerity without feeling as though they might be attacked or penalized for their utterances. In fact, the first stage of Self discovery – Discussion/Invitation to Attack – is labeled as such because when teachers leave the safe confines of their preparation programs and attempt to unsilence dialogues about diversity, they may very well be “attacked” by undiscovered individuals who still see societal “isms” as taboo and not to be discussed (especially in schools). Thus, to adequately prepare teachers in the Self discovery method is also to give them fair warning about the insular nature of teacher education programs when compared to the real world. Practically, a teacher who enters a school and asks the question, “Does anyone else think that we don’t have enough computers just because we are a high-minority, low-income school?” might indeed “invite an attack” by inservice teachers who are not willing to tackle race-

based inequity. New teachers should be armed with this information before venturing out as Self-Discovered individuals in heterogeneous settings. Safety, therefore, is the overarching tone of a course or program that allows preservice teachers to open, invite, and engage in difficult discussions about diversity and multiculturalism without fear. Tatum (1992) has identified safety as the first strategy in promoting successful student development in her courses as well.

The second precondition for Self discovery is the nonjudgmental nature of the teacher preparation atmosphere. The underlying premise of Self discovery is that, as long as preservice teachers feel stifled about expressing how they truly feel—which children they prefer to teach, who they believe can and cannot learn, which schools and school districts they would rather avoid—they will not ever be questioned as to why or how they came to develop those feelings. And most dangerously, they will not be challenged to rethink and change those ideas. When a future teacher, for example, expresses that she thinks all Latino Americans are illegal Mexican border-jumpers, and that she does not wish to teach children who “don’t want to learn English,” it imperative that she not feel the immediate and harsh judgment of her peers and the instructor at the helm of the class. This teacher candidate should know that, irrespective of her level of candor in class, there will be no consequences of social ostracism, public rebuke, the assignment of a lower grade, or academic penalty of any sort. Without this nonjudgmental nature, it is impossible to prompt prospective teachers to truly conjure up and publicly discuss their innermost feelings and deepest convictions. Establishing a nonjudgmental environment, therefore, is crucial to the Self discovery process, and is essential to the disclosure level and individual growth of teacher candidates.

The third precondition for Self discovery is confidentiality. Preservice teachers must feel as though their public statements, class contributions, and expressed opinions will remain with the group, and only with the group, long after the session or course is over. It is not likely that teacher candidates will open up publicly about long-held beliefs, attitudes toward culture groups, or preconceived notions about children if she senses that her verbalizations will be spread to other domains. An indispensable aspect of a positive experience in a teacher education program is knowing that teachers are allowed to admit who they are, say who they are, work through who they are, and change who they are. If prospective teachers do not feel as though they can engage in all four of these important elements without suffering public scrutiny and condemnation outside their designated “safe spaces,” it is unlikely that the roots of Self discovery can take hold, or that the seeds of change can be effectively planted.

Once the preconditions for Self discovery have been established, teacher educators and teacher candidates will be well on their way toward engaging in candid, meaningful, and life-changing dialogue. Teacher education programs should be in the business of “catching” faulty views, biased perspectives, and dangerous dispositions *before* teachers enter schoolhouse doors. New teachers should enter diverse and culturally varied settings having discussed how and what they feel about diversity and multiculturalism long beforehand.

Stage One: Discussion/Invitation to Attack

In the first stage of Self discovery – Discussion/Invitation to Attack – preservice teachers are presented with a variety of themes to consider. Any teacher education program worth its

meat should include courses on, or be entirely centered around how issues of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, physical ability, and learning style intersect in American classrooms. Education is a non-neutral mode of mass socialization (Nieto, 2004; Grant & Gillette, 2006) and preservice teachers should be afforded the opportunity to broach the many ways in which it is tainted. In the Discussion stage of Self discovery, prospective teachers are likely to feel uncomfortable speaking openly about subjects that have long been regarded as unspeakable or taboo. In this initial phase, teacher candidates learn to open discussions about difficult topics and develop a fearlessness for what might ensue. In school settings, teachers will inevitably need to infuse curricular plans and activities that breach the “comfort zones” of students and colleagues, and they must learn to do it in preparation programs. Teachers of history, for example, as demonstrators of cultural competence, will need to present the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II from multiple perspectives. They will need to examine literature that expresses the views of mainstream Americans who fell pray to the “Yellow Scare” that culminated after the attack on Pearl Harbor, as well as the anecdotes of Japanese children and parents who wrote about the oppressive nature of the relocation camps in dry deserts and swamps to which they were sent. Surely, approaching such traditionally aberrant subject matters and perspectives will not be easy, but having traveled through the Discussion stage of Self discovery will make it far more familiar.

In this first stage of Self discovery, teacher educators and teacher candidates unseal cans of worms, open up Pandora’s boxes, and climb the slippery slopes of opinion exploration. All teachers enter the teaching profession with a particular view of the world, and this lens through which they see all things, inevitably affects their teaching (Noel, 1999). In the words of Palmer (1999), “we teach who we are.” Similarly, Lin and Kinzer (2003) posit that “our cultural knowledge, which is often implicit, influences how we interpret and understand the world around us. For this reason, we feel it is important that teachers become aware of their own cultural assumptions and the cultural differences of the students in their classes” (p. 241). Teacher educators should feel confident to take the lead in wading through the contents of future teachers’ forbidden territories, and to help guide them to uncover their own “baggage.” The Discussion stage of Self discovery allows for an initial invitation to a complex and ongoing dialogue about the interplay of what teachers believe in their hearts, what teachers impose in classrooms, and what students gain or lose as a result.

In the Discussion stage of Self discovery, teacher educators and candidates will encounter questions such as:

Today or in the future, am I willing to...

- 1) Share my personal experiences and long-held beliefs about individuals and groups who are similar to different than me?
- 2) Have someone form an opinion about, or disagree with my statements?
- 3) Hear and consider views that run counter to my own?
- 4) Participate in open dialogue where I must speak *and* listen?
- 5) Defend my personal views and opinions if challenged?

If teacher educators and teacher candidates can answer in the affirmative to these important questions, they will have engaged in the first stage of Self discovery, which mandates that

teachers at least be able to *talk about* critical issues in multiculturalism. Participants might begin to ask questions about “others,” or members of different cultural groups, or they might pose relevant questions to classmates with whom they share or do not share cultural affiliations. Teacher candidates may respond to the experiences of their fellow teachers and offer preliminary input on issues of physical ability, stereotypes, or previous injustices. When teachers begin to verbalize, question, and share, the psychological barriers to engaging in dialogue about taboo issues begins to be lifted, and the road to Self discovery is in sight.

Stage Two: Admission/I am Not Immune

The second phase of Self discovery is Admission/I am Not Immune. In this phase, teacher educators must do more than orchestrate topical discussions of sensitive subject matter, and move individuals and the group along to critical self-inquiry. In the Admission phase, opening up and speaking on issues of diversity and multiculturalism is made second priority to having future educators ruminate more deeply about the discussions at hand. In the Admission stage of Self discovery, teachers are prompted to seriously consider and identify ways in which they have been influenced and socialized to think about themselves and “others.” Have you been taught to think that certain parents, based on race, care more about their child’s education? Have you been exposed to the idea that some kids just can’t learn? Do you think the educational aspirations of some children, based on class, should be lower? Do you see certain types of students, based on phenotype, as inherently “harder workers” than others? The Admission stage of Self discovery moves teachers beyond the simple sharing of their encounters with diversity, and nudges them toward critically examining those encounters in a way that might yield a more telling story. We are all biased in some way, but admitting our biases—positive and negative—is an arduous and unpleasant experience.

The Admission stage of Self discovery prompts future teachers to delve deeper into their worldviews, or conceptualizations of the way things should be, and to identify elements of that worldview as ethnocentric, narrow in scope, or discriminatory. In this phase, teacher educators and candidates realize and embrace the fact that *all* educators (and indeed, all inherently fallible humans), regardless of the multitude of cultures to which they belong, bring a distinctive set of biases to the educational table (Noel, 1999). Knowing this, there is little left to do but to admit their own biased and prejudicial notions and acknowledge that neither they, nor anyone, is immune from the prejudicial “mist” (Tatum, 1997) that we all breathe.

In the Admission/I am not Immune stage of Self discovery, participants might ask themselves the following questions regarding unmitigated disclosure and self-identification as a biased individual:

Today or in the future...

- 1) Can I share my personal experiences, beliefs, and true feelings regardless of the consequences?
- 2) Can I admit to myself and others that I may harbor self-hatred, bias, prejudice, or even hate toward certain groups, including my own culture groups?
- 3) Is this a safe and contained enough environment for me to share painful or telling anecdotes, where I may have been the purveyor of an ism?

- 4) Am I willing to accept that I can now qualify my perceptions as unfair and biased miscalculations?
- 5) If I am open and honest with my instructor and classmates, will something positive result?

In the Admission phase of Self discovery, teacher candidates are likely to experience the unpleasantness of having been newly coined as some type of “ist,” be it racist, sexist, heterosexist, ablest, and so on. What is comforting about this progression, however, is that once teachers realize that all individuals are products of their upbringings, cultural backgrounds, and familial influences, they soon realize that they are far from being alone in admitting their inherently biased beliefs and tainted views. From this stage, a teacher candidate might glean the following: “We are all socially constructed beings who make sense of our worlds from a certain frame of reference,” and “To acknowledge my biased nature does not negate my goodness or intentions.” These realizations, coupled with the awareness that there are ways to combat disharmonizing, hurtful, and prejudicial notions, is an integral part of the Self discovery process. Teachers and teacher educators can now look to the third stage for further direction.

Stage Three: Accommodation/I Must Change

In the Accommodation/I Must Change phase of Self discovery, the challenge of teacher educators and teachers is to consider any new information learned about themselves and others, and to incorporate new perspectives, viewpoints, and worldviews into their own schema. Accommodation is lifted directly from the work of Piaget, who described how young children come to accommodate, or integrate new information into their psyches, and replace old and outdated information (Vasta, Haith, & Miller, 1995). At this point in the Self discovery process, teachers will have had the chance to engage in open dialogue with others who are different, acknowledge and admit their own flawed thinking, and consider alternate vantage points in American society. It is at this point that teachers should be able to incorporate those new perspectives into their own, and forge meanings in their minds that extend beyond what they were raised with, what they learned in their own schooling experiences, and what they had always believed.

In the Accommodation/I Must Change phase, teachers are likely to ask themselves questions such as:

- 1) Am I more aware of the feelings and life experiences of others?
- 2) Do I accept that racism, sexism, classism, and various forms of discrimination have existed in the past?
- 3) Do I accept that racism, sexism, classism, and various forms of discrimination still exist?
- 4) Am I convinced that members of society who do not look, speak, or act like middle-class, able-bodied White men have a different life experience?
- 5) Do I want to stop partaking in commonly held beliefs that are inherently biased and replace them with culturally sensitive beliefs?

If teachers can answer these questions in the affirmative, then a true breakthrough has occurred.

Central to this phase of Self discovery is the “I Must Change” attitude that develops as a result of having engaged in this degree of self-reflection, dialogue, and discovery. Similar to Dewey’s (1933) attitudes of open-mindedness and whole-heartedness, it is crucial that teachers develop a lifelong willingness to reflect on different ideas, absorb new information, and change as a result. It is vitally important that future educators exit their teacher preparation programs with a firm grasp of their “unfinishedness” and as new agents in a perpetual process of change and adjustment (Freire, 1998). In a diverse and changing society, with schools that bend and sway to the most recent legislation and trends, the ability to keep pace with change will not only serve new teachers as they gain cultural competence and face diverse students, but as they navigate the fast-paced and ever-changing schools.

Stage Four: Proaction/I Will Do My Part

If teacher educators and candidates have had ample opportunity to pass through the first three stages of Self discovery, they might also achieve its final phase: Proaction/I Will Do My Part. This phase most closely resembles Schön’s “reflection for action” stage, in which teachers recognize their role in the broader social, societal, political, and global scheme of the world. Teachers at this stage take all they have learned in the preceding stages of Self discovery and transform it into “proaction,” or proactive action. Teachers acknowledge and own their responsibilities as the primary purveyors of culture and normative American values, and they actively plan to use that role to transform society in positive ways. Teachers who reach the Proaction/I Will Do My Part state not only recognize their crucial role in society, but engage themselves in teaching for social justice, and thereby deliberately educate their P-12 students as change agents as well. Teachers readily and gladly accept that they will “do their parts” to erase inequities in classrooms, schools, systems, and society. They protest the use of “Western canon” textbooks, question inequities in school resources, resist racist comments and jokes from undiscovered colleagues, reject discriminatory behavior from children, and squelch homophobic comments made casually in schools. These teachers come to see themselves not as deliverers knowledge, but as co-constructors of a mutable school and society.

Teachers who reach the fourth stage of Self discovery might ask questions such as:

- 1) How will I use my position as a purveyor of culture and values to affirm children?
- 2) How will I use my position as a teacher to empower my students as scholars, citizens, and as agents of social change?
- 3) How might I use my status to advocate for racial, socioeconomic, and gender equality at my school and in society?
- 4) How can I use my personal agency to reject the prejudicial notions of students, fellow teachers, superior administrators, and powerful school officials?
- 5) How can I successfully guide my students through this same process of Self discovery?

In this final stage of Self discovery, new teachers feel empowered to tackle classroom displays of cultural insensitivity, to challenge school policies that do not affirm the culture of students who are considered as “other,” and to grapple with larger societal injustices that will occur on a daily basis. The Proaction/I Will Do My Part stage of Self discovery gives teachers a much needed endorsement as agents of school, societal, and social change. It gives them the

experience in self-reflection they need to take right actions, the strength they must have to endure the unpleasanties that come along with engaging others who are undiscovered, and the confidence they deserve to be effective world changers. Self discovery, in a sense then, transforms the world on teacher at a time, starting small and starting with self.

Conclusion

Self discovery, although it can be an innovative and transforming pedagogical practice in teacher education programs, is not a panacea for the complexity of things that must be done to ensure that future educators are culturally competent. It must be noted that, even though this theory is presented as a neat and tidy step-like, stage-wise process, one must remember that teachers and teacher educators will not necessarily achieve the fourth, or any stage of Self discovery. Additionally, although just being exposed to Self discovery raises the level of awareness and cultural competence of future teachers in some areas, teachers can still be multiculturally Incompetent in others. For example, achieving the “Proaction/I Must Do My Part” on issues of race does not mean a teacher has achieved that same level of competence on issues of homosexuality. A demonstration of this dual-achievement would be a teacher reproaching a student for using the word “nigger,” but turning a blind eye to a student who says that something is “so gay.” As teacher educators, we must remember that our hopes for educating culturally competent educators on all strands of diversity—race, religion, sex, class, sexual orientation, etc.—can only guide our course design. Self discovery is a pedagogical method that takes into account the stepwise and leveled development of future teachers on a variety of issues. It gives teacher educators a framework for considering the course sequence of topics from “familiar” to “extreme,” such as teaching about the achievement gap before white privilege (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). This framework also prompts teacher educator, and the designer of courses in multiculturalism at the teacher preparatory level to consider the complexity and arduousness of the process of self-understanding, self-critique, and self discovery.

It is no easy task exploring one’s innermost feelings and values, and the duration of a secondary education course is hardly enough time to piece back together teacher educators who may come to feel as though they are no longer “whole” as a result of breaking down and rebuilding their deepest beliefs. Self discovery, therefore, is to be used as a guide and as a framework to inform pedagogical practice as it relates to the preparation of teachers. It does not promise to bring all students to cultural competence on all levels and issues related to the “isms” of society. It does, however, draw much needed attention to this crucial, lifelong process of learning about oneself.

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