

Cultivating Pre-Service Teachers towards Culturally Relevant Literacy Practices

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This course has widened my knowledge about what it means to include a rich, diverse reading curriculum that is respectful, aware and accepting of multiple learning strategies. I now know that in order for this to occur the teacher has to establish a comfortable environment where students feel invited and safe to participate and discuss. (Jennifer, personal communication, April 20, 2009)

This written excerpt illuminates the voice of Jennifer (a pseudonym), who represents pre-service teachers in an urban teacher preparation program who employed culturally relevant and innovative practices, situated in her use of narrative and expository texts. This case study is an examination of one pre-service teacher's experience in a reading methods course, entitled Reading Models and Methods, and corresponding urban reading practicum. Jennifer participated in a program aimed to address varying dilemmas that persist in the field, including: pre-service teachers' discomfort with diversity and urban contexts, the underuse of expository texts, and a literal comprehension focus influenced by didactic practices. The program is intended to prepare pre-service teachers for the urban teaching context and culturally relevant literacy teaching. By design, the field experience provides exposure to diverse learners in an urban context and to exemplary

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teachers of balanced literacy methodology, a paradigm encouraged in the university coursework.

Pre-service teachers in the program are required to design two lesson plans during the course. The first is a narrative lesson, in which pre-service teachers devise strategies and prompting for students' deep meaning of events in a narrative text. Pre-service teachers additionally design an expository lesson, in which they use companion expository text materials and orchestrate factual linkages with fictional accounts outlined in the narrative text. The programmatic learning goals are intended to facilitate narrative and expository comprehension outlined in the state standards. Narrative comprehension is a dominant focus in primary classrooms (Duke, 2003), while expository comprehension is often overlooked and underused (Kaplan, 2003). Consequently, the program aims to instill value and possibility of linking fact and fiction in a manner that is culturally relevant, while satisfying curriculum requirements.

In alignment with the program's goals of cultivating reflective practitioners, pre-service teachers are additionally encouraged to reflect deeply about the lessons they enact with their students. During this process, they reflect upon their strengths, along with ways in which they improve the delivery of their instruction.

Jennifer designed and taught culturally relevant narrative and expository lesson plans that prompted deep thinking for herself and her students in the process of linking fact and fiction. The course and fieldwork were intended to help pre-service teachers construct lessons that imbue deep thinking across narrative and expository texts. Therefore, Jennifer determined it was possible to use supplemental expository text materials to inform the narrative unit of study, *The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963* (Curtis, 1997).

The novel is significant because of its intimate portrayal of an African American family in Flint, Michigan. The context resembles the manufacturing town where Jennifer pursued her practicum requirement at Travis Elementary School (a pseudonym) in Metro Detroit. The children in the Watson family partake in myriad bouts of humorous sibling rivalry in a manner that is appealing to students in the upper elementary grades. The author positions the reader to acknowledge that the Watson children were cared for by their family as deeply as the victims of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963 were cared for by their families. Thus, the students in this case forged a bond with the fictional characters, and consequently the real life victims of the tragedy. This bond led to a desire for Jennifer and her students to further investigate the details surrounding the church bombing with companion expository texts.

This case study will explore the mentorship of a teacher educator

and cooperating teacher that influenced Jennifer's enactment of innovative narrative and expository lessons. Her use of Cognitive Strategy Instruction (CSI) and varying participation discourses are examined, and consequently her willingness to improvise and facilitate discussion of difficult topics with her students. Jennifer's perspectives and her student reactions will be documented to display the potential for linking *The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963* and expository texts in a manner that is culturally relevant and evokes deep comprehension.

This study was guided by the following research questions: How does a teacher educator, coupled with a cooperating teacher, cultivate a pre-service teacher's use of culturally relevant pedagogy with expository and narrative texts through her practicum in a classroom? What is the nature of a pre-service teacher's enactment of expository and narrative comprehension strategies? How do students respond to employment of these strategies? How does a pre-service teacher manage controversial discussion among diverse learners? How does a pre-service teacher transform as a result of this experience?

Literature Review

This study is situated in the body of knowledge surrounding instructional strategies manifest in culturally relevant pedagogy, namely Cognitive Strategy Instruction and varying participation discourses. Within the realm of these modalities, the scholarship surrounding discussion of controversial topics is embedded in the use of narratives dealing with matters of race and class, and companion expository texts. Additionally significant is the field of teacher preparation for work in urban and diverse classroom contexts. These bodies of knowledge are brought together to inform varied approaches for mentoring pre-service teachers for innovative, culturally relevant practices.

Cognitive Strategy Instruction

Cognitive Strategy Instruction (CSI) is a form of comprehension instruction and discourse that is widely integrated into reading programs adopted by school districts, and thus employed by classroom teachers (Handsfield & Jimenez, 2009). CSI pedagogies include making connections (e.g., text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world) (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Additional strategies include predicting, summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and inferencing, all grounded in traditional cognitive theories of reading (Handsfield & Jimenez, 2009). Cognitive theories of reading postulate that activating background knowledge, or schema, enhances reading comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984;

McVee, Dunsmore & Gavelak, 2000) and that schema is essential to the process of inferencing (Spiro, 1980). CSI is additionally situated in social constructivism and draws from Vygotskian theory (1978). Schema is, therefore, informed by readers' experiences, shared by engaging in peer-led dialogue to facilitate meaning.

Daniels (2002) claimed that expository texts, traditionally known for rote report writing, have the potential to inform peer-led discussions and enhance students' knowledge of factual information derived from fictional texts. Given the potential to enrich comprehension and learning, teachers are urged to rethink their use of expository texts.

Varying Participation Discourses

Wells (1993) suggested a variety of participant discourses, known as heteroglossic speech activities, can be facilitated to enhance the possibility for more democratic forms of classroom interaction instead of discourse that is teacher directed and authoritative. The presence of various participation styles has the potential to elicit dynamic interactions among younger children (Hicks, 1995), similar to interactions documented in this study among students in the upper elementary grades. Moreover, discourse heterogeneity promotes children's motivation and learning (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Alvarez, 1998; Willet, Solsken & Wilson, 1998). Kamberelis's (2001) research on classroom interaction resulted in heterogeneous discourse patterns as hybrid discourse practice. Merging new and familiar discourses is a culmination of children's everyday lives and social worlds in a manner that connects with and disrupts traditional and authoritarian school discourse. Providing varying participation discourses elicits a feeling of student-centered ownership.

Controversial Literature, Race Talk, and Controversial Topics

Authentic controversial literature has the potential to present accurate portrayals of discrimination and social issues from a non-traditional, nuanced perspective. Literature that represents social issues from a counter narrative lens offers the opportunity for teachers to facilitate discussion of difficult topics. However, a study with middle class teachers revealed the tendency to reject texts that posit non-dominant experiences that differ from their own. Wollman-Bonilla (1998) identified criteria for rejection among participants, including racism and homelessness. Many teachers in this study rejected literature dealing with and overcoming racism based on fears that discrimination is foreign and frightening to children. Fears engendered the potential for students to misinterpret their teacher as racist, based on the content in the book (Wollman-Bonilla, 1998). In addition, literature about homelessness

was deemed inappropriate and regarded as a reality students should not know about. Instead of protecting children from controversial topics, Wollman-Bonilla (1998) suggested a need for teachers to facilitate discussion of realities and inequities that exist in society with non-mainstream literature. She contended that discussion of difficult topics promotes social responsibility by teaching children an appreciation for diversity and encouraging them to strive for equity and challenge discrimination. Through classroom discourse, participants can attempt to understand varied reactions, while carefully considering “sociopolitical implications” (Wollman-Bonilla, 1998, p. 294). Discussion of non-dominant experiences assists in understanding the realities children experience outside of school (Wollman-Bonilla, 1998).

Discussion of controversial topics presents the potential for teachers to respond to students’ unexpected, ambiguous queries (Britzman, 2003). Responding “in the moment” requires a strong knowledge base to respond to unexpected queries if there is potential to disrupt classroom relations. Therefore, teachers must manage collaborative improvisation (Sawyer, 2004). In addition, students bring interpretive frames from their cultural norms to make sense of their learning. Upon constructing meaning of controversial topics, teachers must be aware of the potential for non-dominant groups to draw from their interpretive frame in a manner that may be displeasing to everyone else (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). An example might involve a student employing racial terms regarded as acceptable at home, but might offend peers at school. A pre-service teacher’s awareness of handling students’ unexpected queries can be cultivated through mentoring.

Cultivating Reflective Pre-Service Teachers toward Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Experiential factors influence individual and personal teaching styles and embody what Allen and Porter (2002) termed an effective teaching-learning exchange. Hence, pre-service teachers must acquire the ability to reflect on ways in which their personal values, behaviors and beliefs influence their interactions with others. Allen and Porter (2002) further contended that teacher education faculty must facilitate this teaching-learning exchange by modeling pedagogies that are effective and meaningful among diverse student populations, coined by Ladson-Billings (1995) as culturally relevant pedagogy. Exposure to effective pedagogies has the potential to prompt deep reflection among pre-service teachers (Wasonga & Piveral, 2004). Many teacher educators have assumed the responsibility of providing experiences intended to transform pre-service teachers toward culturally relevant pedagogy

(Goodwin & Genor, 2008; Risko, Rollo, Cummins, Bean, Block & Anders, 2008).

Gomez (1993) and Haberman (1996) claimed that preparing pre-service teachers for urban communities requires mentoring on behalf of faculty and cooperating teachers, along with experiences in multiracial field placements. To that end, Gay (2002) suggested a need for pre-service teachers to conduct fieldwork with exemplary cooperating teachers who are able to serve as equity mentors. Equity mentors serve as exemplars of culturally relevant pedagogy and cultivate pre-service teachers toward transformative, socially just practices. A study conducted by Wiggins, Follo, and Eberly (2007) among pre-service teachers in a multiracial urban school in Southeast Michigan revealed participants' enhanced preparation for work in culturally diverse classrooms. Attributes of effective teacher preparation programs included an on-going partnership with the school, relevant coursework, and support from and immersion with exemplary mentor teachers.

Sleeter (2001) reviewed 80 studies of varied teacher preparation program strategies for culturally diverse schools. The focus in the literature is on addressing attitudes and lack of cross-cultural knowledge among White pre-service teachers. The dominant focus in the literature informed about attributes of teacher education programs and field experiences toward culturally relevant pedagogy, but few informed specifically about mentoring strategies or how pedagogies were acquired. Similarly, Xu (2000) argued a need for reading methods courses structure coursework in a manner that addresses diversity issues. There is a body of knowledge that informed about mentoring roles and acquiring culturally relevant reading pedagogy, but gaps are prevalent.

Barnes' (2006) research in an elementary pre-service teacher program in the Midwest illustrated how teacher education faculty mentored pre-service teacher's development of book discussion groups situated in culturally relevant pedagogy, but did not elaborate on the mentoring role of cooperating teachers. Lazar (2001) documented the outcomes of mentoring pre-service teachers on behalf of a reading methods professor and cooperating teacher in an urban practicum in Philadelphia. Pre-service teachers were mentored in a variety of participation discourses and balanced reading practices. Findings emphasized pre-service teacher's pre and post survey responses about varying topics, including growth in ability to employ culturally relevant teaching. In spite of revealing pre-service teachers' increased abilities to use culturally relevant texts and pedagogies, the study did not elaborate on how students were mentored.

Thus, there are gaps in the literature about specific strategies and mentoring on behalf of cooperating teachers and reading faculty. The

gaps this study aims to fulfill are ways in which a cooperating teacher and teacher educator mentor and cultivate development of innovative practices and strategies toward culturally relevant teaching.

Methodology

Setting and Participants

Jennifer was enrolled at a small, suburban university in Southeast Michigan where I was a teacher educator in the department of Reading and Language Arts. The data collected were based on Jennifer's interaction and participation at Travis Elementary School, a Westmore Community School (the district, school, and teacher were assigned pseudonyms) that was classified as Title I. As a Title I School, Travis Elementary was a receptor of local educational agency grants intended to improve educational programs and academic achievement among disadvantaged students in high poverty schools (U.S. Department of Education). School-wide, 53% of the students were Black, 41% were White, and 5% were Latino. Travis was a high poverty school, given that 74% of the student population qualified for free and reduced lunch (www.greatschools.net). The composition in Mary's grade five classroom was consistent with the demography in the district. Students at Travis Elementary struggled with standardized test scores in reading and writing. Although state assessment data revealed improvements in recent years, scores suggested that the students were not meeting "on grade level" expectations in reading and writing during the time of the study.

Westmore Community Schools were located within five miles of the university and approximately 30 minutes away from Jennifer's hometown. The 2008-2009 academic year marked the second year of the collaboration between the district, the reading methods course and corresponding practicum. The 45-hour practicum was a requirement one semester prior to student teaching.

Jennifer, a White pre-service teacher, was a traditional student who grew up in a suburb approximately 30 minutes away from the university during the time of the study. She was required to conduct 45 practicum hours from January to April of 2009. Her fieldwork was comprised of observations, working with students in groups, tutoring one struggling reader, and developing and teaching two lessons. Her coursework in the methods course supported her practicum requirement.

The selection of Jennifer as a key informant was guided by purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1997) of a pre and post survey, her lesson plans, and compelling written and spoken reflections that revealed her negotiation of ambiguous student queries about difficult topics. Jennifer's written

reflections demonstrated her negotiation of varying participation discourses.

Mary, a White teacher, was a 15-year teacher veteran in the Westmore Community School District. Mary represented the cooperating teachers at Travis Elementary who facilitated culturally relevant pedagogy and balanced literacy methodology, tenets encouraged in the university methods course. Mary was regarded by pre-service teachers and student teachers under her tutelage for knowing and genuinely caring for her diverse class of fifth graders. In addition, she was known for maintaining high expectations and cultivating innovative practices for all of her students, regardless of many students enduring poverty in the working class community she served.

As the professor of the course, I have had 11 years of teaching experience in urban and suburban schools in metro Detroit. I am a biracial teacher educator, White and Black, and my ethnicity is German and Jamaican. As a pre-service teacher in the mid 1990s, most of my peers voiced their preference to teach in suburban contexts among students who resembled themselves and were emphatic about avoiding diverse populations. From the year 2000, as the affluent suburban community where I taught became more diverse than its traditional image, many colleagues in the district were unprepared and resistant about demographic changes (Hill, 2009; Walsh, Sarnecki & Mask, 2005). Demographic changes in this community and elsewhere conveyed a need for teachers to be prepared for teaching diverse learners. Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1990) claimed that by 2020, nearly half of school-aged children will be of color. As a teacher educator in the program, it was my obligation to prepare pre-service teachers for work among diverse learners regardless of educational context. As a program, the on-going partnership with Travis elementary identified teachers such as Mary in that endeavor who serve as equity mentors for pre-service teachers.

One year prior to the time of the study, the teacher preparation program maintained a protocol of sending pre-service teachers to schools in close proximity to their home to conduct fieldwork. As a result, my colleagues and I were concerned our pre-service teachers were not prepared for diverse educational contexts, nor was the program preparing them for culturally relevant teaching. We were contacted by the principal at Travis who was an alumnus from the program. She requested pre-service teachers who could provide teachers additional support for struggling readers at her school. We desired exemplary teachers who could serve as equity mentors. Our collaboration made it possible to fulfill our dual obligation.

The practices I modeled for pre-service teachers were intended as my obligation to provide exposure to culturally relevant pedagogy, CSI,

and varying participation discourses, embedded components of the teacher education program. The expository and narrative comprehension strategies from *The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963* were borrowed from my own teaching of the novel when I taught diverse learners in an affluent Detroit suburb. Consequently, I anticipated my pre-service teachers would apply similar approaches and reflect deeply about their practice.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study was framed as a mixed methods case study. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used to examine Jennifer's transformation and perspectives about her participation in Mary's classroom. I drew from quantitative methods by designing and conducting a pre and post survey. The pre and post survey was employed to determine pre-service teachers' transformation over the course of the semester. The survey was comprised of closed questions on a Likert response scale, ranging from 1 (uncomfortable) to 5 (very comfortable). Likert scale responses reflected the pre-service teachers' comfort level with topics, including urban settings, diverse learners, and teaching reading and writing in the upper grades. Open ended questions included prompts for what reading and writing instruction looks like generally, and in the upper elementary grades. The same survey was conducted at the beginning and end of the semester for the purpose of comparison.

I drew from qualitative methods by gathering in-the-moment field notes to document my in-class conferencing with Jennifer. We conferred about her negotiation and planning of expository materials to complement the narrative text. In addition, I gathered field notes to document her reactions after she taught her lesson plans.

I additionally collected Jennifer's on-going journal of her classroom observations and interactions. I gathered descriptions of Mary's practices by reading Jennifer's jottings. I collected Jennifer's journal reflections of the lessons she taught, along with her end of semester celebration essay. I collected these data to inform Mary's role as an equity mentor in supporting Jennifer's development toward culturally relevant teaching.

Reduction of units of analysis and manual coding for salient themes were informed by strategies recommended by Dyson and Genishi (2005) and Saldana (2009). Hence, data reduction and emerging themes were influenced by Jennifer's transformation that was documented in her journals, celebration essay, and pre and post survey. Moreover, reduction of data and emerging themes were guided by my fieldnote documentation of ways I supported Jennifer's innovative practices. Data reduction and emerging themes were additionally guided by Jennifer's reporting of practices, initially on behalf of Mary, then on behalf of her own teaching.

I paid attention to compelling examples of Cognitive Strategy Instruction, varying participation discourses, and culturally relevant pedagogy. In addition, data reduction of units of analysis and coding for themes were influenced by Jennifer's reflective and informative responses. Her responses surrounding her handling of students' controversial discourse make her an exemplary case study. From my field note units of analysis, themes were devised on the basis of Jennifer's reactions that were provocative and transformative.

Results

Initial Perspectives

Upon being asked what reading and writing instruction looks like in general during her pre survey, Jennifer jotted, "teaching students to be comfortable reading and understanding how to express their thoughts through written language." When asked what reading and writing instruction looks like in an upper elementary classroom, she jotted, "writing paragraphs, more complex sentence structure, modeling." She responded by selecting "4" (comfortable) when prompted for her comfort level working with students from diverse backgrounds and "3" (somewhat comfortable) when prompted for her comfort level with urban schools. The emerging themes described in the sections that follow will inform strategies she acquired the course and practicum that influenced her perspective on balanced literacy, and consequently, her perspective on working with diverse learners in an urban context.

Mentoring on Behalf of The Teacher Educator

I presented pre-service teachers with lesson plan ideas inspired by *The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963*, and companion expository texts. Strategies were influenced by my own practice when I taught the novel among diverse learners in an affluent suburb. Jennifer was particularly interested in the companion materials and ideas from the novel because it was a unit of study conducted by Mary.

Expository texts included the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute website (www.bcri.org), travel websites, and a social studies textbook entitled *Build our nation: American history and geography* (Bednarz Clinton, Hartoonian, Hernandez, Marshall & Nickell, 2001). The novel's epilogue was additionally included as a text to demonstrate a variety of materials and perspectives that could inform a lesson.

Salient features on the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute site include interview transcripts of 16th Street Baptist Church members who intimately knew the four girls who died, along with the institute's

efforts to promote social justice. Additional components of the website chronicle Birmingham's transformation to embrace diversity overcome its segregated past. I referred pre-service teachers to additional websites that highlight Birmingham as a tourist attraction and city that has transformed from the perspective in the novel, including www.essortment.com/travel/thingstodoala_sxdz.htm and <http://alabama.destinations2discover.com>.

I demonstrated a K-W-L chart (Ogle, 1986) as a strategy for students to build on what they know about Birmingham from reading the novel and document what they learned in the present day. In addition, I demonstrated how the K-W-L chart could inform a four paragraph "Then" and "Now" Essay. The two body paragraphs would include details to illustrate what Birmingham was like then, followed by a paragraph to inform ways in which the city has transformed.

Another strategy I modeled was an organizer, which served as a written preview (Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 2006) for an essay. I conceptualized the organizer under the premise that there is no one way to develop an organizer (Vacca et al., 2006). The organizer is an adjusted version of a Venn diagram, conceptualized to provide more drafting space to compare and contrast the novel's epilogue and the Build Our Nation (Bednarz et al., 2001) textbook (see Figure 1):

The textbook informs generally about acts of nonviolent protest and violent resistance during the Civil Rights movement. However, the epilogue in the novel provides a more intimate and local perspective of the children at the 16th Street Baptist Church who participated in nonviolent social change and the consequent bombing from resistant European Americans. The documentation surrounding the 16th Street church bombing in the epilogue informs the author's purpose. Rather than view the deaths of the four girls as a statistic across a myriad of tragic events, as displayed in the social studies textbook, the reader is able to glean that the girls were cared about by their families as intimately as the Watson children were cared for by their family in the novel. By reading the epilogue, the reader discerns that such a tragedy is linked to an intimate story, in which the reader is able to identify him/herself as being cared for deeply within his/her own family. Both sources illuminate the ways in which acts of violence prompted action on behalf of the government. The sources additionally inform about activism among varying organizations, African Americans, European Americans, young and old.

I demonstrated the organizer's potential to guide a teacher's modeling of a comparative and contrastive essay. The comparative analysis of the texts' representations of acts of nonviolent protest can inform the drafting of one paragraph. It is also possible to draft contrasting

Figure 1
Organizer to Compare and Contrast Information
in the Novel's Epilogue and Social Studies Textbook

<i>Text: (Contrast) Epilogue in Watsons go to Birmingham--1963</i>	<i>Compare (concept/theme)</i>	<i>Text: (contrast) Build our Nation Textbook</i>
Nonviolent protest more specific to the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and children's activism/ participation in marches. Author's way of conveying the voices (on a local level) of participants	Describe activism of varying organizations (SCLC/NAACP, etc.) in nonviolent protest to end segregation/ discrimination; among varying races, and young and old	Informs broadly about churches who organized nonviolent protests in Birmingham that sparked more protest marches
Emphasis on the uses of bombings, especially the 16th street church bombing. Author's purpose intends to inform the four little girls were more than a statistic. The tragedy shocked Americans, but in connection with an intimate story that links the reader with the Watsons	Describe acts of violence from resistant Whites, but in different ways	No mention of church bombings; instead focuses on explosive blasts of fire hoses on children and adults; attack dogs biting marchers; dissemination of coverage shocked Americans
	Include the culminating strength of the Civil Rights movement to yield the March on Washington in 1963; pressure on Congress to sign the Civil Rights Act in 1964; make segregation illegal in all 50 states and the Voting Act (1965); on-going work to defend gains from the 1950s-1960s	

representations provided by both texts in another paragraph. The same process can be applied to draft comparative and contrastive representations of acts of violent protest. Lastly, the culminating strength of the Civil Rights movement can be drafted in a comparative paragraph.

I taught about the potential for facilitating students' evaluations and discussions of texts in peer-led groups, in which students document text

features in the organizer, then debrief and share outcomes with the class. Facilitating peer-led discussion groups is consistent with expository strategies described by Daniels (2002) and Hicks (1995), both of whom suggested varying participation styles foster students' dynamic interactions.

Moreover, I regarded modeling innovative strategies toward deeply linking students' home lives to the author's purpose as my responsibility. Similar to ideals posited by Risko et al. (2008) and Goodwin & Genor (2008), my intent was to provide experiences from my own practice in an effort to transform my pre-service teachers toward culturally relevant pedagogy. My responsibility as a teacher educator is inspired by Howard's (2006) claim that teachers cannot teach what they do not know. Metro Detroit is among the most racially polarized regions in the United States, which posits limited exposure and mistrust across race and class lines (Sugrue, 1996). Increased diversity in schools renders that teaching in communities that resemble the candidate is less likely. Teachers must be better prepared to teach students who do not share the same background. Providing exposure to multiracial schools and to the application of innovative practices raises awareness that culturally relevant pedagogies are possible and accessible, for all teachers and all students.

The Practicum

On many occasions in her reflective journal, Jennifer documented Mary's role as a mentor in cultivating her development as a teacher. Mary mentored Jennifer by modeling innovative practices, gradually extending more responsibility to Jennifer, and encouraging her to employ similar innovations.

Jennifer initially observed Mary's use of *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999) to supplement the social studies textbook's coverage of the Great Depression. In her journal she reflected upon Mary's use of music and supplemental literature to make instruction more relatable to the students. Mary's selection of Swing jazz music from the 1930s, including the works of Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald, intended to connect students with the music of the time period. Jennifer observed Mary's interactive read alouds, in which she prompted students for character traits, particularly Bud's use of figurative language.

Near the end of the novel, Mary encouraged Jennifer to read aloud remaining chapters and engage the class in similar discussions. During this transition, Jennifer facilitated a K-W-L chart, in which she connected students' learning from the novel and textbook. During this process, Jennifer documented students' knowledge about the hardships during the Depression years, along with their desire to know the magnitude and experience of poverty during that time period. Buddy's experiences with

homelessness and his sense of humor personalized the factual information conveyed in the social studies textbook. In addition, the students identified with Buddy's ability to remain strong in spite of his hardships.

Mary's practices coincide with Cognitive Strategy Instruction (Handsfield & Jimenez, 2009), for the music selections explicated the hardship endured during the Depression and connected students more closely to the characters in the novel and the content in the textbook. Facilitating character traits additionally corresponds with CSI. Mary's use of the novel presents a culturally relevant text according to Freeman's (2004) criteria, given that Bud's character is African American and the same age as the children in the class. Mary demonstrated linkages across *Bud Not Buddy*, swing music, and content presented in the social studies textbook. Her modeling made innovative strategies accessible for Jennifer, and a conduit for her to negotiate similar practices with the next unit of study, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. Her initial read alouds with the class provided a gradual transition of responsibility in preparation for her own lesson planning and delivery.

Jennifer observed Mary's use of CSI during *The Watsons go to Birmingham* study, but more innovations were apparent with her enactment of varying participation discourses. Jennifer additionally documented ways in which Mary honed in on Curtis's purpose to connect the reader with the Watson family and the victims of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. One notable strategy she observed was Mary's use of character traits by posing a prompt "what is a family?" Her students responded "where you're loved," and "a place where you're accepted." Furthermore, she engaged students in discussion about making a character seem as if he or she is there with you, in her terms "walking off of the pages of stories." Mary encouraged students to apply similar character traits into their own writing about the characters in the novel. Developing this closeness to a character resonates with Curtis's purpose. Mary's on-going practice of engaging the students in deep discussion about characters in text and linking with writing fostered a text to self connection that is grounded in a text-to-text tenet of Cognitive Strategy Instruction (Handsfield & Jimenez, 2009) that embodies culturally relevant pedagogy.

Furthermore, Mary facilitated research teams, requiring students to research documentation about the Civil Rights movement to connect students with factual information that aligned with the narrative text. Students actively interacted with each other to construct peer-led K-W-L charts and received support from Jennifer. Her use of expository comprehension strategies is consistent with varying participation discourses (Hicks, 1995) and diverse learning styles (Gay, 2002). Ultimately, student ownership and discourse heterogeneity promoted student motivation (Gutierrez, 1998).

Mary's modeling of Cognitive Strategy Instruction, varying participation discourses and culturally relevant pedagogy served as exemplary practices for Jennifer. Mary served as an equity mentor by encouraging Jennifer to attempt similar strategies and conferred with her in the process of planning engaging narrative and expository comprehension surrounding the novel.

***Assuming More Responsibility:
Jennifer's Enactment of Narrative and Expository Comprehension***

Prior to designing her expository lesson, Jennifer was immersed with Mary and her students in getting to know the Watson children within the particulars of being cared for deeply by their parents. As aforementioned, Mary facilitated a variety of lessons inspired by Curtis's purpose for the reader to connect with the Watsons in order to understand the magnitude of the death of the four little girls during the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing.

Particularly notable was Mary's influence on Jennifer to build on her use of character traits. Jennifer conducted character sketches of the Watson family with the students to inform her narrative lesson. Jennifer began by explicitly modeling a character sketch of Grandma Sands. She drew what she thought she looked like and prompted the students to provide physical descriptions, actions, her manner of speaking, and others' thoughts about her.

Upon modeling with the whole class, she divided students into five groups of four and directed each group to collaborate and construct a character sketch of their assigned character from the Watson family. Group One assumed responsibility for writing about Kenny, Group Two wrote about Byron, and remaining groups wrote about other assigned characters in the novel. Upon completion of peer-led character sketches, Jennifer regrouped the students so each member was a representative and expert for a different character from their original group. This opportunity enabled the students to discuss their justifications for representing their assigned characters and to think critically about their descriptions, while gaining insight from multiple perspectives.

The opportunity to facilitate peer-led discussion groups around character sketches is consistent with tenets intended by Cognitive Strategy Instruction. In this capacity, students' schema was informed by peer-led discussions, which facilitated deep meaning in a manner that connected them to the characters. In addition, her grouping of students aligns with varying participation discourses because of the nature of student-centered ownership (Kamberelis, 2001) and enhanced student motivation (Gutierrez, 1998). Students were motivated because they were provided equitable

opportunities to voice their description of characters they could relate to and multiple perspectives were valued. Culminating strategies were the result of culturally relevant teaching design (Gay, 2002).

Jennifer's expository lesson resembled strategies she observed in Mary's class and ideas I demonstrated. Moreover, her lesson aligned with the end of the novel. During this time, her students were connected with Kenny's emotions about the church bombing. Jennifer opted to continue facilitating peer-led discussion groups. She initiated a teacher-led K-W-L about the 16th Street Church bombing, followed by a peer-led comparative and contrastive analysis of supplemental information texts in a Venn diagram. She jotted students' contributions about the church bombing, based on the evidence in the novel, then led them through their inquiry. The students wanted to know more about the suspects and their motivation for committing such a crime.

She linked fact and fiction with companion expository texts, including Currie's (2006) *The Birmingham Church Bombings* (Crime Scene Investigation) and Stolley's (2000) *LIFE: Our Century in Pictures for Young People*. She placed her students in groups of four to five and encouraged them to document appropriate evidence from the expository texts in a Venn diagram. Upon completion of Venn diagrams, she directed her students to sit in a circle and discuss their learning and connections across texts during their peer-led discussion groups.

Students Respond

Jennifer reported in her written lesson plan response that her students were excited to research and find out information about the narrative text. She determined that working in small groups was engaging for the students in the following observation in her journal:

The students liked the idea of looking through different types of text and throughout the lesson many made comments that they felt like "detectives" and asked "if the crime scene was looked at this closely at the time of the crime."

Jennifer's commentary suggests her students provided in-depth analysis of the expository supplemental texts and displays the potential for expository text, in Daniels' (2002) terms, to enrich students' discussion of the content. Their perceived role of detective suggests an engaged enactment and enhanced understanding of a detective's role. Moreover, their sense of ownership resonates with Kamberelis's (2001) notion of varying participation discourses. Similar to Hick's (1995) description of varying participation styles, Jennifer's grouping strategies fostered dynamic student interactions manifest in diverse learning styles (Gay,

2002). However, student interactions led to controversial discussions Jennifer had not anticipated.

Handling unexpected talk about race. Jennifer facilitated circle time for students to interact in small groups and discuss the difference in the expository and narrative texts. During this time students were able to formulate opinions regarding who was responsible for the 16th street bombing and why someone would cause so much harm and destruction. Upon facilitating discussion of students' opinions, Jennifer found herself in the position of addressing an unanticipated and uncomfortable discussion about race. In her written response, she expressed concern about the following exchange between two students, "One boy said 'it was a white cracka, who hated us colored.' And then a white boy said 'don't call me a cracker and we don't hate you.'" Jennifer described in her response how she handled the situation:

When this situation arose I tried to diffuse the situation and turn it into a positive learning one (opportunity). I told the class that this happened a long time ago, when tensions were high between the two races. I told them that just because some people in the south felt that way not everyone shared those common beliefs.

Another student in the class suggested the class take the time to examine tensions from both the European American and African American perspectives, a strategy Jennifer had not planned for, but welcomed. The student's suggestion prompted Jennifer to jot a t-square on the board to illustrate and examine the perspective of both sides. She called upon the students to fill in the chart. This exercise prompted Jennifer to reflect that, "Through teacher guided discussion we were able to sort out our misunderstanding and come up with ideas that we can reduce prejudice in our lives." Jennifer's negotiation of controversial topics with her students provided an opportunity to respond to what Britzman (2003) termed unexpected, ambiguous queries. Responding in-the-moment made Jennifer more aware of the need for a strong knowledge base that is required to appropriately respond to unexpected queries, especially given that the classroom relations could have further intensified. Jennifer managed Sawyer's (2004) notion of collaborative improvisation, in tandem with the student who made a suggestion to conduct the prejudice reduction exercise. Upon constructing meaning of controversial topics, Jennifer's experience enhanced her awareness of the potential for non-dominant groups to draw from their interpretive frame in a manner that may be displeasing to everyone else (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In other words, she contended with a derogatory racial term on behalf of one of her African American students that elicited discomfort among the European American students.

Although Jennifer claimed she managed to diffuse the situation with her students, her initial thoughts of what occurred were not so positive. After she taught her lesson, she arrived in my class and pulled me aside to express deep concern her lesson did not transpire as she intended. Similar to many pre-service teachers, she wanted her lesson to be perfectly orchestrated. Consequently, she deemed herself a failure for the tensions that emerged between her students. Jennifer grappled with the whether she handled the situation appropriately, and similar to teachers documented by Wollman-Bonilla (1998) she was concerned about being regarded by her students as racist. She never anticipated expository texts could ignite divisions. In addition to what Daniels (2002) suggested about enhancing content knowledge with discussion of expository texts, what likely occurred was an instance of facts pushing the students to think more deeply and personally about the magnitude of the 16th Street Church bombing.

Transforming Perspectives

An examination of Jennifer's post survey revealed a variety of transformations. Upon responding to her comfort level with urban schools, she indicated a "4.5" (between comfortable to very comfortable) and added a notation that she would become more at ease with more exposure. Jennifer's comfort level working with students from diverse backgrounds shifted from "4" (comfortable) to "5" (very comfortable). Prior to this experience, she conducted a brief practicum in an urban context that required four visits. However, in her celebration essay she indicated interacting generally with culturally diverse people on a daily basis. Her enhanced comfort level in the classroom can be attributed to recursive exposure in Mary's classroom among her diverse learners. Hence, on-going experiential factors enhanced Jennifer's confidence to work in an urban setting among diverse learners.

Furthermore, in her post survey regarding what reading and writing instruction looks like, she reflected "reading and writing instruction should be detailed and demonstrate clearly what is expected. There should be times when students write and read for enjoyment as well as a grade." Thus, Jennifer recognized that teachers must explicitly model expectations for reading and writing tasks and balance recreational and academic reading. Her post response differed from her initial perspective that teachers should instill a comfort level for students to read and express their thoughts in writing. Upon responding more specifically for an upper elementary classroom, she wrote, "Reading and writing should be structured in time slots that allow for creativity and individuality to emerge." This was a stark contrast from her initial response about

complex sentence structure. Furthermore, in her celebration essay she reflected:

This course has widened my knowledge about what it means to include a rich, diverse reading curriculum that is respectful, aware and accepting of multiple learning strategies. I now know that in order for this to occur the teacher has to establish a comfortable environment where students feel invited and safe to participate and discuss. It is important that the teacher is well rounded and knowledgeable about the information. It will take extensive modeling and demonstrating on the teacher's behalf to show students what it means to be a strong reader and writer.

Jennifer's responses are likely attributed to observing and conducting a variety of teacher and peer-led interactions that elicited diverse students' creativity and motivation. Her acknowledgement of the need for teachers to be knowledgeable resonates with Britzman's (2003) suggestion that teachers must possess a strong content knowledge base to respond appropriately to students' ambiguous queries. Responding to students' queries of complex and controversial issues requires a teacher's ability to recognize multiple perspectives and respond from a nuanced perspective.

Conclusion

This study fills the gaps in the literature surrounding teacher educator and cooperating teacher mentoring roles to cultivate pre-service teachers toward culturally relevant pedagogy. Mentorship and modeling has the potential to influence a pre-service teacher's ability to facilitate strategies manifest in culturally relevant pedagogy, and controversial discussion surrounding race talk.

As a teacher educator, I demonstrated varying participation discourses and Cognitive Strategy Instruction with *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* and companion expository texts. Mary's implementation of the same novel, *Bud Not Buddy*, and expository companion texts provided examples of similar strategies in actual practice. As a result, Jennifer was mentored toward implementing a variety of innovative, culturally relevant strategies that encompassed narrative and expository comprehension.

Jennifer's negotiation of these practices reveals complexity, dilemmas and rewards, in addition to her willingness to take risks in order to elicit discussion and comprehension of difficult topics. Jennifer's orchestration of *The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963* and supplemental expository texts provided her students with a sense of ownership in

a manner that evoked social justice and race talk. Moreover, tensions that occurred between students across racial lines required her to unexpectedly respond “in the moment,” in collaborative improvisation with her students to restore classroom relations. The outcomes of her lessons and realization that her diverse learners will likely not respond as anticipated prepared her for the importance of being knowledgeable for the uncertainty of classroom discourse surrounding difficult topics. As a teacher educator, I was additionally able to assure her that her lesson was more effective than she anticipated. This process expanded the perception of a “perfect” lesson.

Jennifer transformed as a result of this experience. Initially, teaching reading and writing was about providing a comfort level and modeling for essay writing and complex sentence structure. Jennifer indicated she was comfortable with diverse learners and somewhat comfortable with urban schools. Near the end, she recognized a need for teachers to explicitly model expectations and to be knowledgeable about content. Although she was more confident about working with diverse learners in urban schools, she recognized a need for on-going exposure and experience.

Jennifer’s experience illustrates the need to closely examine pre-service teachers’ perspectives of their cooperating teachers in order to retain exemplary teachers for future students. By identifying Mary as an exemplary teacher and equity mentor, I have deemed it necessary to place current and future pre-service teachers in her classroom.

The partnership with the Westmore Community Schools is in the early stages. In addition to continuing a working relationship with Mary, this study serves as an impetus for identifying additional exemplary teachers in the district and documenting pre-service teacher perspectives under their tutelage.

Implications for Practice

Prior to the Westmore partnership, the practicum in the reading program placed pre-service teachers randomly in schools without sustaining an on-going relationship with any particular school or district. Due to random placement, it was difficult to identify cooperating teachers whose practices resembled the perspective of the teacher preparation program, and it was common for one teacher in a school to serve as a cooperating teacher.

Since the inception of the partnership, the number of participating cooperating teachers in the Westmore Community Schools has expanded and cultivated familiarity with the program requirements in the reading methods course. In conjunction with sustaining experienced cooperating teachers, it is imperative for teacher educators to assume the responsibility

of providing experiences intended to transform pre-service teachers toward culturally relevant pedagogy (Goodwin & Genor, 2008; Risko et al., 2008). The partnership provides lessons for how reading methods coursework in teacher preparation can embed culturally relevant pedagogy, Cognitive Strategy Instruction and varying participation discourses.

One lesson learned is the need for teacher educators to disseminate relatable teaching experiences or relay innovative strategies among exemplars in the field. Utilizing on-going partnerships makes it possible to share cooperating teachers' pedagogies and align these with strategies espoused in the program. Teacher educators, in tandem with cooperating teachers, must support pre-service teachers' development of comprehension strategies that will facilitate deep thinking, ideally with culturally relevant texts. Providing exposure to culturally relevant curricular or companion texts cultivates an awareness and foundation for employing culturally relevant pedagogy, hence connecting students more deeply with the content.

Another lesson learned is the need for teacher educators and cooperating teachers to impart strategies manifest in Cognitive Strategy Instruction. Relatable texts have the potential to inform rich linkages to self and other texts, both expository and narrative. Pre-service teachers must be aware of opportunities for students to question texts and engage in dialogue.

Mary's innovative practices have prompted me to more explicitly share varied grouping strategies with pre-service teachers with the expectation they will integrate strategies into the lessons they teach. The methods course should provide models for varying participation discourses. However, effective grouping strategies are more transparent when cooperating teachers demonstrate and mentor toward innovative practices. Although teacher preparation programs might strive for placing each pre-service teacher with cooperating teachers who facilitate curricular innovations, it is likely that some will be placed among cooperating teachers who employ more traditional pedagogies. Should this occur, pre-service teachers should be encouraged to observe personnel in the school who effectively implement varied strategies for effectively grouping students for peer-led discussion and collaborative work.

The desire among pre-service teachers to teach a lesson perfectly reveals that teacher education must inform them about the possibility that their students may not respond as intended. Similarly, pre-service teachers should not deem unexpected responses as a failure but as an opportunity to facilitate collaborative improvisation. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to anticipate student responses but be prepared for the possibility of responding impromptu to controversial and unexpected

topics. Given Jennifer's experience, a lesson learned is the necessity to examine students' participation closely, particularly if controversy arises, and then reflect upon handling the situation in the moment.

Cultivating pre-service teachers for innovative practices manifest in culturally relevant pedagogy requires a program to sustain hands-on experiences with a cadre of caring and knowledgeable cooperating teachers who are willing to serve as equity mentors. Cooperating teachers who facilitate and mentor toward practices espoused by the university affirm the connection of theory and practice. Teacher preparation programs that promote reflection of culturally relevant practices have the potential to contribute teachers to the field who are prepared to work among culturally diverse students and educational contexts.

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