

2013

# Critical Reflectivity and the Development of New Culturally Relevant Teachers .

Tonia Renee Durden

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, [tdurden2@unl.edu](mailto:tdurden2@unl.edu)

Diane M. Truscott

*Georgia State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub>

 Part of the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

Durden, Tonia Renee and Truscott, Diane M., "Critical Reflectivity and the Development of New Culturally Relevant Teachers ." (2013). *Faculty Publications from CYFS*. 82.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub/82>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Children, Youth, Families & Schools, Nebraska Center for Research on at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications from CYFS by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# Critical Reflectivity and the Development of New Culturally Relevant Teachers

Tonia R. Durden<sup>1</sup> and Diane M. Truscott<sup>2</sup>

1. University of Nebraska–Lincoln
2. Georgia State University

*Corresponding author* – Tonia R. Durden, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies, 249 Mabel Lee Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0236, email [tdurden2@unl.edu](mailto:tdurden2@unl.edu)

## Abstract

Three case studies present how preservice teachers use reflections while learning to teach. Interviews and document analysis reveal that critical reflections evidence greater understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and offer a platform for critical consciousness. Using critical reflectivity to develop teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy is discussed.

Teaching today requires a new way of thinking and calls for teacher education programs that develop educators who can teach children culturally, linguistically, and economically different from themselves. We know that 45% of U.S. public school children are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, while 84% of current teachers are White females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Multicultural scholars argue that this cultural mismatch could be problematic if preservice teachers (PSTs) have limited cross cultural awareness and naïve, deficit, or stereotypical beliefs about children from diverse backgrounds (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). In this Obama era, PSTs are aware of and exposed to more positive images of ethnically diverse people and leaders; however, scholars argue that this doesn't translate to a post-racial society in which prejudice, discrimination, and racial intolerance no longer exist (Carter, 2009). When teacher education programs introduce issues of racism, discrimination, and inequality in schooling in coursework, PSTs still adopt an "I-don't-see-color" view of children. Therefore, teacher education programs are challenged in helping PSTs examine how they think about diversity and create culturally relevant educational environments for all children (Castro, 2010).

The importance of reflectivity is discussed extensively in the teacher education literature. We agree that understanding how reflection influences teacher development is important, but *how* reflectivity influences the development of culturally relevant educators is vital. We believe that preparing a new generation of teachers involves a careful cultivation of educators who reflect *critically* on their practices and the ideology that drives them. In this article, we present three case studies illustrating the connections between PSTs reflectivity<sup>1</sup> (or the act of making reflections) while learning to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students and their development as new culturally relevant teachers.

## Critical Reflectivity and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Teacher education programs in the United States aim to develop more culturally relevant teachers by encouraging reflective thinking that connects beliefs, practices, and teaching (Castro, 2010). Reflectivity, in its simplest form, represents the act of thinking about a phenomena, event, or experience and dates back to the early 1900s (Dewey, 1933). Inexorably, as classrooms become more culturally and linguistically diverse, teachers must move beyond

1. Reflectivity and reflection are terms used interchangeably in this manuscript and draw upon educational theories such as critical race theory, social constructivism, and critical pedagogy.

Dewey's call for reflective action to more critical examinations of how their ideologies influence teaching responsively (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Much has been written on how to foster teacher reflectivity. However, we argue that *critical* reflectivity is key to helping PSTs become culturally relevant practitioners.

Teachers who espouse a critical theoretical lens consciously and constantly question whether and how students' voices are respected and affirmed for students and their families.

Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire (1973) notes that critical reflectivity situates ones thinking, beliefs, and values within the political, economic, and social contexts of teaching. Teachers engage in multiple levels of analyzing a classroom phenomena related to the teaching and learning of culturally diverse students. Teachers who espouse a critical theoretical lens consciously and constantly question whether and how students' voices are respected and affirmed for students and their families.

In our study, critical reflectivity is defined as the process from which PSTs examine how their experiences, beliefs, and expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students impact teaching and learning. Critical reflectivity requires teachers to closely question routine and habitual classroom practices by intentionally analyzing teaching as a highly contextual and complex act. Without such expansion of reflectivity, teachers run the risk of perpetuating and justifying personal actions and beliefs that could be culturally and educationally harmful to students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)<sup>2</sup> can serve as a framework for engaging PSTs in critically conscious practices (Paris, 2012).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994) culturally relevant teaching is a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 17-18). To effectively implement a culturally relevant and sustainable pedagogy, schools and teachers must first believe that all students can succeed, maintain an affirming student-teacher relationship, and see excellence as a complex standard that takes student diversity and individual difference into account (Paris, 2012). Hilliard (2006)

argues that schools should abandon labels for diverse students such as "at risk" and "disadvantage" and instead adopt beliefs that speak to the brilliance and cultural tools children from diverse backgrounds bring to the classroom. CRP is rooted in the belief that learning is a socially mediated process explicitly connecting to students' cultural and linguistic experiences and shaped by personal experiences (Chartock, 2010; Groulx & Silva, 2010). However, CRP is more than making connections. It requires teachers to consciously reflect upon how to effectively use and support the languages, literacies, and cultural tools of students who represent the dominant and marginalized sectors of our society (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999). This reflectivity is crucial for the development of new culturally relevant teachers for today's schools.

### The Study

Using a case study design (Merriam, 1998), we examined three PSTs' reflections as they navigated through teacher education courses and fieldwork. Two questions guided this work: (1) what do elementary PSTs reflect on when learning to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students? and, (2) what do these reflections reveal about their understandings of CRP?

The three case study participants were PSTs enrolled in an elementary level teacher certification program in a southeastern urban university and were taken from a group comprised of 74% White, 23% African American, and 4% Asian. PSTs took classes together as a cohort for two years in the program and participated in school-based field placements in grades PK-5. At the time of the study, PSTs were taking four courses (literacy, assessment, classroom management, social studies) and placed in local urban schools for field experiences in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Many course assignments connected work completed on campus with actions performed in classrooms under the supervision of a university supervisor and classroom mentor teacher. PSTs were also required to take a three credit-hour cultural diversity course focused exclusively on introducing the importance of context (social, cultural, and historical) in providing culturally relevant environments for diverse students.

### Sampling and Case Study Participants

Sampling procedures began at the time participants were taking the cultural diversity course (two semesters prior to this study). All PSTs ( $n = 22$ ) in the course were given a questionnaire by Love and Kruger (2005) to iden-

2. We drew upon the original framework of Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1999) CRP but acknowledge and draw upon current iterations of culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching.

tify where their beliefs about diversity fell. The questionnaire contained 48 culturally relevant and assimilationist statements presented on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Answers were used to code each respondent into one of three categories as established by Love and Kruger (2005): culturally relevant (CR), culturally relevant/ assimilationist (CRA), or culturally assimilationist (CA). Using the data from the questionnaire and observational data collected by one of the authors as a participant observer in the course (group interviews, reflective blogs, and observations), a sample pool of 6 PSTs (2 representing each category: CR, CRA, CA) was formed. Using this pool, three case study participants were selected based on age in order to represent the age range of the cohort (ages 21–49). However, even though the three case participants were selected because they represented very different views of diversity, what we discovered was that placing these beliefs in a particular category was neither accurate nor helpful in what we were trying to examine.

Once selected, we used the questionnaire responses in the first interview and asked participants to expand and explain their responses from the questionnaire. When given extended opportunities to talk about their beliefs, no participant fell easily into their initially scored category. It is important to emphasize that the Love and Kruger (2005) questionnaire was developed to measure the culturally relevant beliefs of teachers who teach primarily African American children in urban public schools. Our work focused on PSTs preparing to teach children representing a broader range of ethnic diversity. Consequently, we abandoned the sample CRP marker and instead let the data collected (interviews, observational data and work samples) guide the work. Ultimately, the PSTs selected as three case study participants were indeed very different in their beliefs. These beliefs represented the complex and dynamic lived experiences of Carla, Jody, and Ronald (pseudonyms used).

At the time of the study Carla was a 29-year-old African American female born in a working-class<sup>3</sup> family in the South. Prior to pursuing her interests in teaching, she traveled internationally as a naval officer. Carla attributed her knowledge and appreciation of other cultures to her travels abroad and growing up in a multi-racial community. She felt strongly about the influence of a child's cultural background on learning yet responded in the initial questionnaire that she didn't see color in the classroom.

Jody was a 39-year-old European American female born in a working-class family in the Midwest. She worked for several years in business administration before venturing to a career in education. Jody's initial interest in education was to pursue a counseling degree;

however, she felt that she could reach and serve more children as an elementary education teacher. Jody's questionnaire data suggested she believed that racial and cultural identities should be used by teachers to meet children's unique needs.

Ronald, a 21-year-old Black male, was born in a low-income family in the South. He attributed his interest in pursuing an education degree to his quest for serving as a change agent for his community and an advocate for children; a goal encouraged and inspired by his grandmother. According to the results of the questionnaire, Ronald felt strongly that each child is a unique composite of his or her racial, cultural, home, and peer experiences. He felt a responsibility to make connections between what happens in the world to these experiences.

### Data Sources: Interviews and Course Documents

Three interviews (approximately an hour each) elicited the PSTs' beliefs and reflections on culturally responsive pedagogy. Questionnaire (Love & Kruger, 2005) responses were used to prompt questions for the first interview to gain a better understanding of participants' beliefs and experiences teaching and learning about children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example one questionnaire statement, "I don't see color in my classroom, I just see children" was used as a prompt in the first interview. After asking for thoughts on the statement, we solicited elaboration on earlier responses such as "You also stated in the questionnaire that the cultural backgrounds of students play an important part in teaching. How? [Probe] How do you define cultural background?"

Eight weeks later, a second interview was conducted to discuss a CRP lesson plan that PSTs implemented in their field placements. Participants were asked to reflect on why the lesson they chose was culturally relevant, how students responded to the lesson, and any challenges they faced implementing it. Building on prior analysis, the third interview specifically tried to capture participants' experiences with and understandings of CRP using openended questions and prompting for reflective references. For example, "Share an experience you have had this semester with learning about or teaching culturally or linguistically diverse student populations. [Prompt] Tell me about the community literacy project. What did you learn about culturally and linguistically diverse students?"

With the assistance of the course instructors, we used eight course assignments that required the PSTs to make reflections. In some cases we explicitly asked participants

3. Working-class and low-income were terms participants used to describe their backgrounds when given the question "Tell me about growing up?"

to reflect on the teaching and/or learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The course documents allowed us to explore and analyze written reflections. We compared those reflections with participants' spoken (interview) reflections. For example, one literacy course assignment, The Literacy Brief Write, was a reflective short essay on PSTs prior experiences, perceptions, and beliefs about the students' communities before and after observing in classrooms. Other data sources included the first of two member checks where participants responded to interpretations of the data and emergent themes. The second member check asked participants to expand, clarify, and confirm tentative findings. Written descriptive memos allowed us to track emergent findings and themes but were not analyzed.

### Data Analysis

Because we understand reflections that demonstrate CRP include beliefs and practices inside and outside of the classroom, we adapted an ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to organize the varying contexts where PSTs may reflect. Bronfenbrenner describes multiple levels, or systems, that represent immediate surroundings (micro, meso) and external environments (exo, macro, and chrono) that strongly influence personal development even with limited direct contact. We analyzed PSTs reflections in terms of *what* they thought about and *where* the thinking occurred within this framework. For example, teacher educators observe that PSTs concentrate their reflections on their immediate practice, such as how well a lesson went. These reflections are housed at a micro-level (e.g., classroom setting, grade level, lesson goal). Another level is the meso-system where reflections represent connections between beliefs and actions (e.g., assumptions about students and subsequent decisions for instruction). In contrast, reflectivity at the exo-system level is not based on direct experience but is one that is purposefully directed toward an issue (e.g., influence of local, state, and national mandates, reforms, and policies). For example, reflections may include being conscious of racism in schools but not personally experiencing it. Critical reflection at the macro system entails PSTs to consciously question both their personal and professional beliefs about teaching and learning and how societal beliefs and practices could be oppressive to others. Bronfenbrenner's model also describes a chrono-system that characterizes the entire process as it moves through time and includes the impact of historical events on the individual. Although reflections were analyzed for chrono-elements, they are not included in this article.

A two-tiered coding system was used to analyze the three individual interviews, eight course documents, and

two member checking written records. Data were divided into meaningful units consisting of phrases and segments. The first level of analysis coded reflections using an *a priori* scheme to represent *where* in the ecology framework the reflection was placed (micro, meso, exo, macro). The second level used an open coding method (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to determine *what* the reflections were about. This level of analysis involved determining whether the reflections described elements of CRP and whether the reflections were considered critical in nature. At this level, a meaning unit was not coded as CRP if it wasn't critical. There are instances where a unit was coded as critical but not representative or evidence of CRP.

For example, during the first interview Jody stated that: "I worry that I won't be able to look past my own filters as a WASP from the Midwest. . . . Can I get past my own backgrounds and my own biases?" This reflection was first coded as "micro-personal beliefs" because it represented her personal racial beliefs and experiences. However, in the second pass the reflection was further coded as "culturally affirming beliefs" because it was deemed critically reflective through her acknowledgment of the need for teachers to have affirming beliefs when teaching children of color.

### Trustworthiness and Limitations

Several methods were used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. Data were collected over a 10-month period to allow for prolonged engagement. Multiple data sources were used and to ensure that we authentically captured the experiences and voices of participants we conducted two member-checking conversations with each participant (Merriam, 1998). Finally, a peer, trained in qualitative analysis, was used to confirm coding during the analyses.

Nonetheless, these cases are not intended to generalize the experiences of all teachers, but rather to give nuance to extant theories and research about teacher preparation. Findings are limited to the time in which data were collected and do not indicate developmental progress in teacher identity formation nor pedagogy beyond the teacher preparation program. Always a concern when examining PSTs is the dilemma of whether the students are telling the instructors what we want to hear. In this study, we purposely selected course assignments that *required* PSTs to reflect on applying theory to practice. These assignments forced our three participants to make reflections if they wanted to receive credit. By using reflections from several courses and instructors, we were able to capture a glimpse of how reflections foster CRP.

Our findings suggest that by critically reflecting beyond the classroom PSTs are demonstrating knowledge of factors that influence instruction other than materials and delivery. However, such critical reflection didn't necessarily lead to or represent CRP.

### Findings

Two main findings from the study illustrate one aspect of PSTs' reflectivity and its relation to their development as culturally relevant educators. First, we discovered that while all three case participants concentrated their reflections primarily at the micro level (e.g., classroom, self) they were also able to make reflections that extended *beyond* the classroom boundaries and their roles in it (e.g., society, policy). We also found that while doing so, the *criticality* of these reflections determined whether they were culturally relevant or not. This extends earlier work by Irvine and Armento (2001) who state that teacher knowledge and reflection are necessary for culturally responsive practice. Our findings suggest that by critically reflecting beyond the classroom PSTs are demonstrating knowledge of factors that influence instruction other than materials and delivery. However, such critical reflection didn't necessarily lead to or represent CRP. To be considered culturally relevant, the reflection itself had to be critical whether situated within and/or beyond the classroom.

### Reflecting Beyond the Classroom

One important finding was that Ronald, Jody, and Carla reflected within and beyond the classroom as they considered factors that influenced the teaching and learning of diverse students. They did not reflect only on classroom factors and the pragmatics of instruction nor did they confine their reflections solely to isolated personal and professional issues. Instead, we noted reflections on various aspects of teaching and learning at different levels in the ecology and at different times (387 instances). For example, participants all shared the belief that teaching children about historical oppression, such as slavery and the Holocaust (micro level), would help advance race relations in America (exo level). But each drew upon personal frames of reference when thinking about it. For example, during

the second interview, Jody reflected, "I believe in teaching history. I believe in understanding, I've told kids several times those who forget the past are doomed to repeat." Ronald also did not want history to repeat itself, but focused on using knowledge as power. When reflecting upon a lesson implemented in the field during the second interview, he drew upon his own background knowledge and personal goal of promoting agency by stressing the need to teach students about past and present acts of dehumanization (slavery), racism, and discrimination to empower future citizens who will have the knowledge, conviction, and "the power to make sure that this never happens again."

Connecting to her experience as a U.S. naval officer and personal beliefs, Carla's rationale for implementing a lesson on slavery was because she felt "slavery is a very important part of the history of the United States and that knowing this history will help them to understand and appreciate the freedoms that we all have today." She further added how "... the practice of slavery played a big part in how the United States became what it is today ... it continues around the world. Many people all over the world are still fighting for freedom and a better way of life."

These reflections illustrate that participants were able to make connections about teaching in the classroom to outside influences (socio-historic). The reflections also revealed that participants drew upon and connected their personal background knowledge and beliefs to what they were learning and observing in their courses and field, but in unique ways as described in the next section.

### CRP Requires Critical Reflectivity

Despite the ability to make personal and professional connections through reflections, these reflections *did not* necessarily represent CRP thinking and practice. The next example illustrates how a PST could reflect critically and yet her teaching practice was not considered culturally relevant. Carla critically reflected on the sociocultural implications of teaching students about slavery (past/present, United States, and global). However, this critical reflection did not translate to culturally relevant practice for the Latino students in her field placement, which constituted the class majority. Despite such student diversity, she implemented a lesson focused exclusively on the historical experiences of African slaves in the United States without drawing upon cultural connections of slavery and oppression (current and historic/United States and global) that were representative of the other cultural backgrounds represented in her classroom.

We thought that if PSTs used reflections about the community, policy, history, and the world to inform their teaching, we would witness CRP in action. Instead, what we found was that those reflections that extended beyond

the classroom *and* those that were critical represented CRP. It wasn't just *what* they were thinking about (curricula, policy) that fostered CRP but *how* they were thinking about it (critical connections). We found PSTs who had more developed understandings of CRP showed evidence of critical reflectivity and these connections were evidenced at various settings and levels. The influence of media and societal beliefs on teaching linguistically diverse students provides an example. In their Social Studies methods course, PSTs developed a teaching unit that they implemented in their field placement. In the second interview, participants identified and discussed a "culturally relevant" lesson from this unit that they implemented in the field. Jody selected a lesson plan introducing students to the elements of poetry through music. In her paper Jody wrote that the use of "popular music" made the lesson relevant to the large number of African American students in her field placement. During her second interview, Jody elaborated that this lesson was culturally relevant because:

they don't know who William Wordsworth is and I can say the name William Wordsworth a hundred times but if I can use something like this that they are familiar with, it's, well even for me, when I'm learning something if I can relate it to my daily life, I can make sense of it.

On the surface, this reflection represents tenants of CRP by making content culturally applicable and meaningful to students. Jody commented that next time she did a similar lesson she would select more *culturally relevant* music. When prompted by the researcher to explain *why*, she reflected, ". . . all of the video games and MTV have lowered their attention spans and they literally cannot sit still." Later during her first member checking session, Jody was asked to expand on this response and added, "I think the times have changed . . . the media has changed, kids, I think their attention spans are shorter. You may have to work a little harder now to captivate them and make it relevant to their lives now."

This example illustrates how Jody has looked at influences outside of the classroom (media, exo level) that impact teaching within the classroom (micro level). She even reflects upon ways to make this lesson more culturally relevant for future practice. Upon first glance, it would appear that Jody possesses elements of becoming a culturally relevant educator. However, when asked to reflect further, her rationale for using culturally relevant music focused on a deficit lens or blame the victim rhetoric (they can't sit still) instead of critically considering the positive benefits to learning by using meaningful connections through different music choices.

While Jody focused on media as both a teaching tool and reason for making instruction more relevant to stu-

dent's lives, Carla described the media's influence using a socio-cultural context (macro-exo). She argued how the media's stereotypical portrayal of minorities influences teachers' preconceived assumptions and beliefs about children from diverse backgrounds. Carla reflected during the first interview "an example of an assumption and stereotype that I heard from the news or jokes on TV shows like Hispanic men as being landscapers and having odd jobs." Here she critically reflected on how the media can project stereotypical images of certain groups in our society. She then situated such media stereotypes back to the classroom by sharing an experience in which she made efforts to get to know the family background of her Hispanic students during one of her lunch chat sessions with them:

The school that I was at for my third grade placement had mostly Hispanic students and so when I ate lunch with them and talked with them I found that none of their parents were landscapers, cleaning people . . . they worked in factories, day care centers, restaurant cooks, had their own businesses. And as far as being a maid, it wasn't true at all.

What became apparent was her awareness of the media's role in projecting and promoting deficit beliefs about diverse populations (critical reflection) and, unlike Jody, her ability to then connect how teachers can refute such beliefs by engaging in activities, such as lunch chats, to learn first hand about students' culture and familial experiences. We argue that Carla's ability to connect culturally relevant theory to practice is evident here.

In another example we found that Ronald often reflected on the negative impact that stereotypes and educational labels had on the experiences of diverse students. In an early interview, Ronald reported that he was undecided about teaching "urban" children:

Whenever you hear urban, you think poor, African American, or you know minorities, struggling. I think it [urban] came from our government's need to label our children. And I don't like that because it separates you know, I guess you could see, this is quality education then you have urban education and I don't like how people like to separate the two.

Ronald later connected this larger context (macro level) back to how it impacted instruction and assessment in one of his written papers for the assessment course. The instructions for the Assessment Policy Paper *intentionally prompted* students to address the explicit and implicit issues in a required article on culturally responsive student assessment. In his paper, Ronald reflected:

As an intern in mostly urban schools, I have experienced students in the classroom whose primary lan-

guage was not English and were mostly labeled as ESOL students. After reading this article, I think back to those students and wonder if they had been evaluated by a multidisciplinary team accordingly . . . would the results be different?

Not only did Ronald reflect on society's impact on assessment practice and the classroom, he also critically questioned whether linguistically diverse children received equitable and quality educational experiences because of it. This example further supports our conclusion that there is a relationship between critical reflections that focus outside of classroom practices and understandings of CRP.

Therefore, as the findings from this study suggest, by reflecting critically on influences that exist outside of the classroom, PSTs can begin to move beyond the practicality of teaching to considering how the "why" better informs practices that are responsive and affirming to children.

We have presented examples demonstrating how participants who critically connect outside classroom influences back to the classroom appear to be developing pedagogies and ideologies considered culturally relevant. These findings demonstrate how providing opportunities for PSTs to critically reflect across systems of influences captures what Ladson-Billings (1994, 1999) considers to be the foundational framework of CRP. She argues how PSTs need both an understanding of culturally relevant ideology and understanding of how to implement culturally relevant teaching in the classroom. Therefore, as the findings from this study suggest, by reflecting critically on influences that exist outside of the classroom, PSTs can begin to move beyond the practicality of teaching to considering how the "why" better informs practices that are responsive and affirming to children. Using information gleaned from this study, we discuss implications for teacher preparation programs in helping PSTs create culturally relevant educational environments for all children.

## Discussion

Our findings suggest PSTs are reflecting on issues within and beyond the classroom that impact teaching and learning of diverse students. Teacher education programs have made great progress in explicitly emphasizing the development of PSTs who are reflective practitioners. Even though we expected our PSTs to focus primarily on the immediacy of teaching while in their field placements, we were pleasantly surprised that they could be very reflective about important issues outside the classroom that influence their roles as teachers. We saw this as a result of the assignments PSTs were asked to complete and the explicit connections they were required to make between theory and practice while in their field placements. This is important because we believe that in order to develop as culturally relevant educators, PSTs must connect beyond the personal (Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011).

As teacher educators, we can now capitalize on PSTs heightened abilities to think beyond the classroom and can concentrate on refining and scaffolding PSTs critical reflections. While this task can be challenging and perhaps currently absent from traditional teacher preparation programs, it is important to recognize that in order for PSTs to apply pedagogical principles associated with culturally relevant practice, they need to make critical connections (Chartock, 2010). It is interesting that there were examples in the study where on the surface the PSTs were evidencing CRP but when we delved into the thinking that grounded a particular practice or action, we discovered that the critical consciousness necessary to support CRP was missing.

In other cases PSTs were thinking critically but such reflectivity didn't produce culturally relevant teaching. PSTs need both an understanding of culturally relevant ideology and understanding of how to implement culturally relevant teaching in the classroom. Therefore, by reflecting critically on influences that exist outside of the classroom, PSTs can then begin to move beyond the practicality of teaching to considering how the "why" better informs practices that are responsive and affirming to children (Groulx & Silva, 2010).

We also found that planned experiences provided through teacher education courses and fieldwork built additional important personal and professional references that our participants drew upon and impacted reflectivity and CRP connections. Despite the fact that PSTs now have greater opportunities to develop positive frames of reference regarding diverse people (Carter, 2009) many PSTs still come from homogeneous communities which offer few direct experiences to connect to. However, even when PSTs come to teacher preparation programs with limited experiences with diverse populations, the experiences provided during teacher preparation can begin to

fill a gap. The intersect between what PSTs bring and what teacher educators provide is extremely important because we found that PSTs naturally draw on their own personal experiences when making reflections but *also draw on* what they see and experience around them as they learn to be a teacher. With guidance, these connections can be powerful learning tools.

We recognize that it takes time and experience to develop as a culturally relevant teacher. And while the PSTs were not yet “skillful cultural mediators or brokers who can explain new concepts or challenge misconceptions with examples and illustrations from students’ everyday lives” (Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011, p. 4), they are on their way. Teacher education programs have a responsibility to ensure that PSTs are equipped with the experiences they need to develop as the culturally relevant teachers who provide affirming and equitable classroom experiences for all students. It begins by helping PSTs develop as culturally relevant educators through intentional opportunities to reflect critically. These reflections should be prompted and guided by the tenants of CRP, what PSTs bring, and what teacher educators provide within and beyond the classroom.

## References

- Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (1999). The movement against and beyond boundaries: Politically relevant teaching among African American teachers. *The Teachers College Record*, 100, 702–723.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *Ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carter, P. L. (2009). Equity and empathy: Toward racial and educational achievement in the Obama era. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79, 287–297.
- Castro, A. J. (2010). Themes in research on preservice teachers’ views of cultural diversity: Implications for researching millennial preservice teachers. *Educational Researcher*, 39, 198–210.
- Chartock, R. K. (2010). *Strategies and lessons for culturally responsive teaching: A primer for K–12 teachers*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory Into Practice*, 42, 181–187.
- Groulx, J. G., & Silva, C. (2010). Evaluating the development of culturally relevant teaching. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 12, 3–9.
- Hilliard, A. G. (2006). Aliens in the education matrix: Recovering freedom. *The New Educator*, 2, 87–102.
- Irvine, J. J., & Armento, B. J. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diversity. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession* (pp. 86–123). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Love, A., & Kruger, A. C. (2005). Teacher beliefs and student achievement in urban schools serving African American students. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99, 87–98.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2011, May). *Racial/Ethnic enrollment in public schools*. Retrieved January 5, 2012, from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator1er.asp>
- Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41, 93–97.
- Richards, H. V., Brown, A., & Forde, T. (2006). *Addressing diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy*. National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems. Retrieved June 6, 2012, from [http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity Brief.pdf](http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity%20Brief.pdf)
- Sleeter, C. E., & Cornbleth, C. (2011). *Teaching with vision: Culturally responsive teaching in standards-based classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers Colleges Press.