

**Dimensions of reflexive thinking in social foundations pedagogy:
Complicating student responses for theoretic understandings**

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**DIMENSIONS OF REFLEXIVE THINKING IN SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS
PEDAGOGY: COMPLICATING STUDENT RESPONSES FOR THEORETIC
UNDERSTANDINGS**

Angela Minnici, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2006

This study explores how dimensions of reflexive thinking in a social foundations pedagogy facilitates an understanding of student and teacher talk and text in a social foundations classroom. Even though pedagogy is defined as both thinking and acting, discussions about teacher pedagogy in teacher education have often focused on the behavior or actions of teachers in the classroom. This study focuses on the thinking aspect of pedagogy and seeks to portray thinking in pedagogy as a way in which theoretic meaning can be derived from students' talk and text in the classroom.

In the study, I draw on Garman's (1998) levels of reflection and weave the concept of reflexivity through the reflective process and call this *reflexive thinking*. I use this framework to explore the problematics of teaching social foundations in order to come to theoretic understandings of students' talk and text. This study attempts to reframe the notion of pedagogy to include reflexive thinking as a pedagogic act.

This interpretive study draws on student and teacher dialogues as well as teacher journal texts from a social foundations course. Five fictive vignettes are crafted from these texts which demonstrate reflexive thinking in pedagogy. Each vignette explores a problematic encountered while teaching social foundations in order to derive theoretic

meanings. This study attempts to demonstrate how reflexive thinking in pedagogy is a pedagogic act which can prepare one for future action in the classroom.

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PREFACE

Writing the dissertation and completing doctoral study would have been impossible without support from my family, friends and colleagues. First, the love and encouragement of my family was essential. I would like to thank my husband, Stephen, for his seemingly unending support. He never let me waiver in my resolve to finish. I would also like to thank my children, Alexander and Isabella, for their understanding and mostly for their patience. I would like to also thank my parents, Fred and Jeanne Zaganiacz, for their support and encouragement throughout all my academic endeavors. My mother- and father-in-law, Nick and Angie Minnici, have also been there for me, keeping me in both their thoughts and prayers. I feel lucky that I have such a rich family network that has always been there when I have needed them, and I want them all to know that I realize what a special gift it is to have their love and support.

I have also had the support of a rich family of academic friends who have guided me through this complicated journey. First, I need to thank Dr. Deanna Hill, my friend and colleague. She has endured my frustration, my rants, my constant nagging and questioning throughout our relationship. She is my best friend, and I am forever thankful for her support in both my professional as well as personal life. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Noreen Garman whose guidance and encouragement was an important part of my intellectual growth at the university. She is both a mentor and a friend. Finally, I would like to thank my committee members, especially Dr. Amanda Godley and Dr. Jo Victoria Goodman. They gave me support and encouragement when I needed it most.

PROLOGUE

Deanna Hill and Angela Minnici

In the word question, there is a beautiful word – quest. I love that word. We are all partners in a quest. The essential questions have no answers. You are my question, and I am yours – and then there is dialogue. The moment we have answers, there is no dialogue. Questions unite people.

(Elie Wiesel, Tanner Lecture on Human Values at Snow College, 22 May 2006)

This is a companion dissertation or collaborative study about teaching in the field of social foundations. Our companion dissertations were borne out of a shared teaching experience that filled us with questions. At times, it was troubling for us to dwell in such uncertainty, but in attempting to make meaning of the experience, we became partners in a quest to understand pedagogical challenges within the social foundations classroom and challenges within the field of social foundations of education generally. The resulting dialogue pushed us to new theoretical insights and united us as colleagues. The purpose of this prologue is to conceptually link the companion dissertations as well as to provide the backdrop to the studies.

This prologue is co-authored by us, and at times, we will refer to one another by our first names, Angela and Deanna. We begin with a depiction of our shared experience as teaching fellows for the course *Social Foundations of Education* from 2003 to 2005 at Jefferson

University¹. We also present a chronology of events in our shared experience that led us to companion dissertations. We conclude this section with a procedural explanation of how our companion studies were crafted.

What does it mean to be a teaching fellow?

The teaching fellowship at Jefferson University represents a unique opportunity for graduate students in the School of Education's Department of Administrative and Policy Studies to gain experience in the university classroom. In exchange for a small stipend and a tuition scholarship, four teaching fellows are each charged with teaching one of four sections of the course. While enrollment varies, each section tends to have anywhere from 12 to 18 students who are assigned alphabetically by last name.

Although each teaching fellow has her own section, the teaching fellowship is collaborative in nature. The teaching fellows meet prior to the start of each semester to develop a joint syllabus. They also meet weekly with their Supervising Professor to discuss current events, the issues raised by the assigned materials, and the happenings in the individual classes. The teaching fellows also share an office where they meet, albeit informally, both before and after class. It is this collaboration that makes the teaching fellowship a unique learning experience.

The identity of the teaching fellows changes each year; some of the teaching fellows receive their degrees and leave the university while others decide to pursue other interests. The new teaching fellows enter the existing dialogue and bring new ideas and perspectives to what are already complicated conversations (Pinar, 2004). From the fall of 2003 through the spring of 2005, we were the only teaching fellows who remained constant. The continuity allowed us to

¹ Jefferson University is a pseudonym.

develop a dialogic that continued beyond the scheduled meetings. In the office, on the telephone, and via email, we shared our stories about the events that were occurring in our classrooms and the challenges we faced.

“Trouble is the engine of narrative²”

During the fall semester of 2003, our teaching fellow meetings began to take on a common theme. We were concerned and troubled by what we characterized as students’ reluctance and often active resistance to discussing issues such as race, gender and class from multiple perspectives. We also felt some students were disengaging from the classroom discussion altogether. When students did engage, it was not what we had hoped for or envisioned; rather than furthering the dialogue, students seemed to be depositing their perspectives in sound-bite fashion and thus limiting the dialogue to a series of monologues. In addition, some students questioned the relevance and importance of a course which did not teach “best practices” or classroom management. Some students saw our class as only theoretical and thus impractical. We later came to understand and name this period of time a “pedagogical crisis.”

This period of crisis led us down many paths. It pushed us to try to understand what was occurring in our classrooms by sharing our experience with others. It also drove us to literature on pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Greene, 1988; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2004) which we hoped would help us think differently about how we might be in the classroom. We read about critical pedagogy, democratic pedagogy, and anti-oppressive pedagogy and brought the ideas back into our teaching fellows’ meeting to try and unpack what was happening in our classrooms and to imagine how we might respond pedagogically.

² Bruner, 1996, p. 99

At the same time, Angela was an elected student representative on Jefferson University's School of Education Council (School Council). School Council is the governing body for the School of Education and is made up of faculty, staff and student representatives. While not a voting member, the Dean of the School of Education plays a major role on School Council.³ Angela began to bring to the teaching fellows' meeting troubling stories about an internal debate occurring within the School of Education. This debate centered around the extent to which the school could determine Basic Areas of Education (BAE) or "core" courses required for all students in all programs. Within this debate, some faculty members were questioning the place and space for social foundations in teacher education. As Angela was privy to these deliberations, these concerns naturally seeped into our discussions.

It was at this time that we articulated to one another the connection between the two seemingly unconnected events. The concerns of our students as well as their reluctance to engage in discussion with one another were mirrored in the deliberations faculty were having over the place of social foundations in teacher education at Jefferson University. This distinct feeling of pressure from within by some students and from outside by some faculty, compelled us to articulate for ourselves as well as others our vision for what social foundations could be. We began by reconceptualizing the course to imagine what a classroom might look and feel like when it was guided by democratic principles.⁴ We also felt the need to communicate to others within the School of Education through faculty, student and scholarly presentations, why social foundations and particularly our course was important to teacher education. We each wrote about and presented our ideas at the School of Education's Graduate Student Research Conference. Later, we presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Educational

³ For further explanation on the role of School Council at Jefferson University, see Hill, 2006.

⁴ See Minnici & Hill, (forthcoming)

Research Association (AERA). Finally, we presented the reconceptualized course to faculty in Jefferson's Department of Instruction and Learning.

As we began to write about and present to others what we were experiencing both in our classrooms and in our school, we also began to read and hear similar stories from other social foundations scholars. And we began to wonder if what we were experiencing was something unique to the course we taught and to the university we taught in or rather, if what we were experiencing was something endemic to both the course and to the field itself. As the teaching fellowship came to an end for both of us in the Spring of 2005, we were left with more questions about our experience than answers. These unanswered questions drove us to conceptualize companion studies where we would be able to explore our unanswered questions from our shared experience. One study would explore deeper the pedagogical challenges we faced teaching in social foundations while the other would explore the situation at Jefferson University and within the field of social foundations itself.

Angela's dissertation, *Dimensions of Reflexive Thinking in Social Foundations Pedagogy: Complicating Student Responses for Theoretic Understandings*, explores the pedagogical challenges of teaching social foundations through an examination of student talk and text. She presents a framework for reflexive thinking in social foundations pedagogy as a way to respond to a pedagogical crisis and develop a stance for action.

Deanna's dissertation, *(Re)Imagining a Place and Curricular Space for the Field of Social Foundations in Teacher Education: A Call for Communication and Collaboration*, addresses perennial challenges to the field through an exploration of the controversy at Jefferson University. In her dissertation she imagines how we might reconceptualize a place and curricular space for social foundations in teacher education.

Together, these dissertations attempt to make meaning of our experiences in a field in transition as well as the inherent and underlying challenges of teaching in the field. Ironically, the dissertations that we hope will usher us into academia are also the dissertations that expose to us the challenges that lay ahead for us as foundations scholars.

What does it mean to write a companion dissertation?

This section procedurally addresses our companion dissertations. Our intent is to state in a clear and transparent manner, the way in which we crafted shared texts. While many companion dissertations share data (Lynn, 1996; May, 1991; McConaghy, 1991; Nolt, 1991), ours do not. Instead, our companion dissertations begin with a shared context - a teaching fellowship for a social foundations course at Jefferson University. Both dissertations share a common, co-authored prologue. The purpose of the prologue is to introduce the inquiry and to explain how the dissertations are conceptually linked. Within the dissertations, there are places that share co-authored text. The co-authored text represents literature that was relevant to both studies. (See Appendix A for a chart showing where co-authored text can be found within the chapters of our dissertations.) We further weave the dissertations together by referencing one another's dissertation when appropriate.

In the end, the dissertations share a co-authored epilogue. The epilogue discusses some lessons learned in undertaking companion dissertations. Further, we speculate that our dialogic relationship was essential to the success of our shared experience. We believe this relationship has been and continues to be essential to our intellectual growth and our ability to navigate what we perceive to be a challenging field of study.

Our dissertations are meant to be read together. We hope that the studies we have undertaken will provide a more complex picture of the field of social foundations of education,

what it means to teach in the field, and why we believe the field must remain integral to teacher education.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

[E]ducation is often about returning again and again to certain existential and intellectual problems, sometimes in new ways or with particular insights, but not with a sense of ever *solving* them or making them go away.

(Burbules, 2004b, p. 9)

One of the intellectual problems that I have returned to over the years is the purposes of public schooling. It is not unusual for me to begin a new semester asking my students in my social foundations class “what is it that we want our publicly funded educational system to provide for our society?” I am not alone in asking this question; many foundations scholars ask it as well (Ayers, 2004; Lubeck, 1996; Hill, 2006; Miller, 1992, Noddings, 1992; Tozer et al, 2006; Smitherman, 1997; Spring, 2002). How we think about the answer to this question (and *if* we even think about this question) is intricately tied to how we think about pedagogy. As a beginning K-12 teacher, I believed pedagogy was *always* about solving teaching problems. I was steeped in positivist language and therefore positivist thought. I thought of pedagogy in medical/clinical language: assess the child’s strengths and weaknesses; utilize an intervention or instructional approach which reflected the assessment; evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention or instructional approach and revise if necessary. Pedagogy for me was merely a form of effective teaching practices. I not only used techno-rational (Schön, 1987) language to describe my pedagogy, I thought of pedagogy as techno-rational. Further, pedagogy for me was

defined by actions or behaviors in the classroom. I thought of pedagogy as a skill such as teaching a particular lesson or unit or maintaining discipline and control over my students.

Eleven years later, I have come to believe pedagogy is much more than a techno-rational way of acting in the classroom. My experiences as an instructor in the field of social foundations have significantly influenced my thinking about pedagogy. I have also come to think more about the purposes of public schooling. Public schooling is an important part of democracy (Giroux, 2002; Gutmann, 2001; Nieto, 1995). Further, I believe public schooling in a democracy can maintain the status quo, or it can re-imagine and reinvent it. I have also come to understand that pedagogy is not only a way of acting or behaving in the classroom but also a way of thinking and being in the classroom. In the dissertation, I focus on thinking in pedagogy and how this can be conceptualized outside the boundaries of techno-rational language. I also attempt to demonstrate how thinking in pedagogy is a pedagogic act which allows one to develop a stance for future action in the classroom. Further, I present a framework for thinking in pedagogy which includes reflexivity, the examination of self, in the process. This chapter includes a brief background about the issue under study as well as my own interest in and experience with the issue under study. Additionally, I provide both an overview and statement of intent of the study, as well as five guiding research questions that provide a conceptual structure for the inquiry.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1.1 Social Foundations of Education as a Field of Study

Since its institutional origin at Teachers College, Columbia University, in the 1930's, the field of social foundations of education has suffered from a lack of clarity as to its scope and purpose.⁵ In 1951, the Division of Historical, Comparative, Philosophical and Social Foundations of Education at the University of Illinois claimed that the very name of the field “social foundations of education” was ambiguous. In a textbook titled The Theoretical Foundations of Education: Historical, Comparative, Philosophical and Social, the Division stated:

There are two reasons for the ambiguity of the term “social foundations.” One reason is that the term is commonly used in two different senses. It is frequently used in a broad, collective sense to designate the ‘non-psychological’ foundation fields. In this sense, it includes such fields as the history of education, comparative education, philosophy of education, educational sociology, educational anthropology, and educational economics. The term is also used in a much more restricted sense to mean a specific foundation field which is coordinate with, but distinct from, other fields (...) A second reason for confusion over the term is that, even when used in the restricted sense, it does not convey a single, generally understood meaning because the field of ‘social foundations’ is relatively new and unstabilized, and is not taught as a separate discipline in many teacher training institutions (p. iv).

⁵ For a more detailed history of the field of Social Foundations, see Gibson, 2002 and Hill, 2006.

The field, which draws on the humanities and social sciences, has also struggled to distinguish itself from the behavioral sciences. In 1977-78, in response to a growing emphasis on a narrowly behaviorist, competency-based evaluation movement in education, the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) developed and the Council in Learned Societies in Education (CLSE) distributed *Standards for Academic and Professional Instruction in Foundations of Education, Educational Studies, and Educational Policy Studies*. The Standards expressly defined the scope and purpose of the field:

Foundations of Education refers to a broadly-conceived field of educational study that derives its character and methods from a number of academic disciplines, combinations of disciplines, and area studies, including: history, sociology, anthropology, religion, political science, economics, psychology, cultural studies, gender studies, comparative and international education, educational studies, and educational policy studies. As distinct from Psychological Foundations of Education, which rely on the behavioral sciences, these Standards address the Social Foundations of Education, which rely heavily on the disciplines and methodologies of humanities, particularly history and philosophy, and the social sciences, such as sociology and political science. The purpose of foundations study is to bring these disciplinary resources to bear in developing interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives on education, both inside and outside of schools (n.p. #).

The interpretive perspective seeks to “assist students in examining, understanding, and explaining education within different contexts” (n.p. #). It addresses how

interpretation can vary with different historical, philosophical, and cultural perspectives. The normative perspective seeks to “assist students in examining and explaining education in light of value orientations” (n.p. #). It probes the nature of assumptions, examines how and the extent to which policy analysis and policy making reflect values, and encourages students to develop their own value positions on education and schooling. The critical perspective seeks to “assist students to develop inquiry skills, to question educational assumptions and arrangements, and to identify contradictions and inconsistencies among social and educational values, policies, and practices” (n.p. #). It asks students to use democratic values and to consider the origin, influences and consequences of educational beliefs, policies, and practices.

In essence, the study of social foundations of education is the study of how education and schooling relate to the complex environing culture. Regardless of the disciplines/area studies that define its character and methods, and despite the various perspectives on its purpose, the social foundations of education represents an attempt to describe what is currently happening in education as well as what ought to be occurring (CLSE, 1996).

In this study, I adopt the Council in Learned Societies in Education’s definition of the field of social foundations of education.

1.1.2 Social Foundations of Education as a Course of Study

At Jefferson University, social foundations of education is an upper-level, three-credit course offered to undergraduate students who have not been formally admitted to a teacher

education program.⁶ In the fall of 2003, the course was a prerequisite for students who intended to go on to Jefferson's fifth-year teacher education program. The course is distinguished from "Introduction to Teaching" type courses. Through readings, class discussion, lectures, films, reflective journaling and a field experience, teaching fellows and students explore the philosophical, historical and social forces that shape education, as well as what it takes to become a justice-oriented educator and citizen.

1.1.3 The Role of Blackboard

In the Spring of 2004, we introduced Blackboard to our social foundations course. Blackboard is a networked learning environment which allows instructors to incorporate the internet into their courses. On Blackboard, instructors can post their syllabus, documents and web sites as well as email students and post announcements. Further, Blackboard features both asynchronous and synchronous discussion forums. Asynchronous communication refers to two-way communication where a delay occurs between sending and receiving information (i.e. not in "real" time) whereas synchronous discussion forums refer to exchanging messages or information while two or more participants are online simultaneously. The discussion board on Blackboard is a form of asynchronous communication.

In the social foundations of education course at Jefferson University, the discussion board which was a form of asynchronous communication was an integral part of the class. The discussion board consisted of one whole group board where all students enrolled in the class could deliberate as well as four individual group discussion boards which were limited to the

⁶ Jefferson University subscribes to the Holmes Group's framework for graduate level teacher education. Students must obtain a 4-year degree in an academic discipline prior to enrolling in Jefferson University's teacher education program which results in certification. For more information on this framework, see Hill, 2006.

members of that individual section. Instructors posted questions about the topics and ideas we were exploring in the class (See Appendix B for a sample of Blackboard postings). Participation on Blackboard was also built into the attendance and participation grade for the course.

Pedagogically, I hoped that the discussion board would provide another space in which students would deliberate. I believed this form of computer mediated communication would enhance critical thinking skills for students (Fauske & Wade, 2004; Im & Okhwa, 2004) and might remove some of the obstacles for discourse and reflectivity (Wickstrom, 2003; Markel, 2001). Additionally, as a pedagogical tool, I hoped that the discussion board would provide a space for marginalized voices to be heard as well as “disrupt discursive norms” (Fauske & Wade, 2004, p. 148).

1.1.4 Encountering a Pedagogical Crisis

During the 2003-2004 semester, I began to exchange disturbing stories with my colleagues about the way in which I believed my students were engaging with both the ideas presented in the class as well as with their peers. Too often, our stories featured students who seemed to thrive on confrontation and who appeared to be pleased with themselves when their verbal attacks on their classmates resulted in stunned silence. And as an instructor, I often felt as if I was at a loss pedagogically to respond. As I began to engage in deliberation with my colleagues and supervising professor, I recognized that the challenge I was facing in the classroom was clearly an inability to respond to a social and cultural situation I was experiencing. I later came to name this inability to respond a pedagogical crisis (Minnici & Hill, 2005) and wondered how I might begin to rethink my own pedagogy. I also began to explore

both my pedagogy and the pedagogical crisis itself through immersion in the literature and collaborative writing as well as through conference presentations (Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference, 2004; AERA Annual Conference, 2005). A pedagogical crisis was the impetus for the inquiry as it pushed me to examine the underpinnings of my pedagogy.

1.2 THE STUDY

The intent of the study is to explore how dimensions of reflexive thinking in a social foundations pedagogy facilitates an understanding of student and teacher talk and text in a social foundations classroom. Even though pedagogy is comprised of both thinking and acting, discussions about teacher pedagogy in teacher education have often focused on the behavior or actions of teachers in the classroom (e.g. teaching a lesson). This study focuses on the thinking aspect of pedagogy and seeks to portray thinking in pedagogy as a way of acting. Thinking in pedagogy allows meaning to be derived from students' talk and text in the classroom in order to develop a stance for future action in the classroom. Drawing on various discourses about pedagogy, student and teacher dialogues (Blackboard texts) as well as teacher journal texts and utilizing an interpretive approach to educational research, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on teacher pedagogy by exploring the problematics of teaching social foundations of education through the use of personal experience related to theoretic interpretations. In the study, fictive vignettes are crafted using student and teacher dialogues. These fictive vignettes explore the problematics encountered while teaching social foundations and attempt to derive theoretic meanings from these experiences.

This study seeks to contribute to theory by both critiquing and expanding on notions of teacher pedagogy by explicating dimensions⁷ of reflexive thinking as a way of thinking in pedagogy and as a mode of inquiry. Drawing on Garman's (1998) levels of reflection, I incorporate the notion of reflexivity in order to come to deeper and more theoretic understandings of my experience and pedagogy. This study also seeks to contribute to research by revealing the ways in which dimensions of reflexive thinking in pedagogy can reveal the complexities and dilemmas teachers and researchers face in the field of social foundations in order to develop a stance for future action in the classroom. Five research questions guide the inquiry:

1. What do I mean by a pedagogical crisis?
 - a. What is the cultural and political context of the time period under study?
 - b. In what ways does a pedagogical crisis reflect the cultural context?
2. What do I mean by dimensions of reflexive thinking in pedagogy?
 - a. What are some of the current competing views of teacher pedagogy?
 - b. What do I mean by reflection and reflexivity and how do these notions inform my understanding of pedagogy?
3. How does reflexive thinking begin to respond to a pedagogical crisis?
4. How can dimensions of reflexive thinking in pedagogy be portrayed in Blackboard and teacher journal texts?
5. What are the implications of reflexive thinking in social foundations pedagogy?

⁷ I chose the term dimensions instead of levels in order to avoid a linear portrayal of the process of reflection.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

In Chapter Two, I address research question number one. I begin by situating the pedagogical crisis in a period of cultural conflict and confrontation. I examine some prevalent themes in American (i.e. the United States) society (found in the media) which I contend portrayed the period under study as one of extremes. Further, I contend that the culture of academia was influenced by the tensions in society. This chapter attempts to relate the dilemmas I faced as an instructor in the classroom to one culture of American society. The chapter concludes with a description of what I came to think of as and then name a pedagogical crisis. I explicate the pedagogical crisis and attempt to name some themes which challenged me pedagogically in the classroom.

In Chapter Three, I address research question number two. I present competing notions of teacher pedagogy in education in order to identify the tensions in the ways of thinking about teaching. I then focus on reflective pedagogy and include a discussion of reflexivity. I review these discourses to provide a contextual basis for my own practice and understandings of what “effective” teaching ought to look like. Finally, I present a framework for reflexive thinking in pedagogy which weaves reflexivity throughout the reflection process.

In Chapter Four, I address research question number three and describe the mode of inquiry undertaken in the dissertation. This interpretive dissertation provides a rationale for the use of fictionalized narrative in order to make meaning of student and teacher texts and to portray dimensions of reflexive thinking.

In Chapter Five, I address research question number four and present five fictive vignettes which speak to the challenges I faced as a social foundations teacher as represented in

the pedagogical crisis. Each vignette corresponds to one of the three themes represented within the pedagogical crisis and attempts to illustrate reflexive thinking in pedagogy.

In Chapter Six, I address research question number five and discuss the implications of the study. I reflect on the use of fictionalized narrative in the dissertation and explore both the intended and unintended outcomes of writing the vignettes. I conclude by addressing insights about reflexive thinking in pedagogy.

2.0 ENCOUNTERING A PEDAGOGICAL CRISIS

The infamous culture war might be reasonably defined as a struggle between the left and right for control over the terms of social decency. Whoever wins this war wins the extraordinary power to have their ideology become invisible. Much is at stake – literally the public culture and institutions of our society, much more than any single political platform or campaign can encompass.

(Steele, 2000, p. A22)

As I began to reflect on my struggles in my classroom, I looked beyond the classroom walls to initially understand how the social, political and economic context might have influenced what had occurred within my classroom as well as how I was making sense of a pedagogical crisis. The images in the media (in print, on the radio and on the television) seemed to be sending the same message: conflict and contestation were occurring in all facets of society. The notion of a “culture war” – the values and beliefs of different groups conflicting with one another – appeared in every medium. Boler (2006) referred to this time period (i.e. the late twentieth and early twenty-first century) as a time of “corrupted synergy created between media and politicians” (n.p. #), and I wondered what effect the images of a culture and society divided and in direct confrontation with itself might have had on the events in my classroom. The following sections explicate my interpretation of a culture war of the twenty-first century as was

represented in the media⁸ and how this culture war might have been manifested within the field of social foundations, academia and my classroom.

The idea of a culture war in America isn't new⁹. In every decade, generational gaps (e.g. Hippies of the sixties, Regan conservatives of the eighties), historical events (e.g. Vietnam War, Gulf War) and cultural events (e.g. Woodstock, the controversy in the 1990's surrounding art funded by the National Endowment for the Arts) often make us more aware of these culture wars. The beginning of the twenty-first century is no exception. In this section I attempt to relate the cultural context of the twenty-first century to the dilemmas I was facing as an instructor in a social foundations classroom. I do this by suggesting that the cultural context was both a window to and a mirror of my own experiences. I begin by examining one interpretation of a cultural context of American society as represented in the media and then discuss one interpretation of the cultural context of academia. Finally, I address one interpretation of the cultural context of Jefferson University. I then attempt to relate these contexts to my own experiences within the social foundations classroom in order to better identify and understand the complexities I faced in my classroom. At the end of this chapter, I return to a more in-depth discussion of a pedagogical crisis and identify some of the tensions I encountered in the classroom.

One interpretation of American society at the beginning of the twenty-first century centered on conflict and contradiction. I contend that various events (which can be traced through the talk and text at that time) and the increasing access to and dissemination of

⁸ I draw primarily from media sources for this section in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness and accessibility of these images.

⁹ The term "culture war" actually appears in the New York Times in the 1950's and 1960's but is used to refer to a global culture war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Gitlen and Rosen first use this term in *The New York Times* in 1987 when they describe America's cultural war as a "century old cultural civil war between modernizers and traditionalists, between proponents of freedom and of order" (New York Times, Nov. 14, 1987, p. 27).

information created a climate of polarization, conflict and contradiction. I draw on two main areas of American society in this analysis: the media and the political arena. I focus specifically on the media and politicians as they constitute an elite group in American society. According to van Dijk (1993), elites are often thought of as “groups in society that have special power resources” (p. 44). Furthermore, “elite power can be defined in terms of the type or amount of control elites have over the actions and minds of other people” (p. 44). Although I separate these groups for analysis, I recognize that they are intertwined, the media often the tool of political elites.

2.1 THE CULTURE WAR OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Conflict and contradiction became routinely represented in the media for American society as some journalists professed the country was facing another culture war (Broder, 2000; Carter, 2005; Dionne, 2003; Fineman, 2003; Harwood & Murray, 2002; Mattingly, 2000; Steele, 2000). Himmelfarb (1999) in her book, *One Nation, Two Cultures*, lamented over the declining moral status of the country and characterized it as a battle between “unrestrained individualism and an overly powerful state” (p. 35). Furthermore, she described the “cultural disease” as the “ethical and cultural relativism that reduces all values, standards, and institutions to expressions of personal will and power” (p. 37). *The Economist* featured an article in January, 2001 which asked the question, “how divided is America?” and contended that “the 2000 election revealed the racial divide in American politics more sharply than in the recent past.” *Time Magazine* (December 1, 2003) featured articles on why the public either “loves or hates” the President. In the same issue, Dickerson and Tumulty posited “The Rise of the Anger Industry,” and described

how media pundits such as Rush Limbaugh on one side and those like Al Franken on the other have reveled in strong, negative language with great success. *Sports Illustrated on Campus* (November 18, 2003), in bold front cover headlines, shouted, “Hate Thy Neighbor,” about college rivalries. In a recent brochure for the *National Review*, William F. Buckley, Jr. invited readers to “Be Sinfully Judgmental.” Sally Kalson, a journalist for the Pittsburgh Post Gazette characterized the year 2004 as “louder, meaner, madder [and] cruder.”

USA Today in February 2002 presented a series entitled, “One Nation, Divided” which examined how both values and religion have divided the country as well as how current political events (e.g. terrorist attacks, rise of Islam) have united groups that otherwise would have remained divided. The report claims that the contrasts between the two groups’ (liberal and conservative) values “are as obvious as what people eat and how their neighborhoods look. Others are as deep as their immutable views of sin, morality, and the right to bear arms” (Part 1, p. 2). Furthermore, the USA today report claimed that religion “lies at the heart of the cultural divide” (Part 2, p. 2). The USA today report along with other media images promulgated for consumption in the early twenty-first century seemed to portray a sharply divided and confrontational America¹⁰.

¹⁰ Fiorina (2004) in her book *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, attempts to dispel the notion that the people in the country were so deeply divided, but rather that the media created this perception. She posits that the media has an economic interest in portraying conflict, disagreement, polarization, etc. in America. Fiorina believes, “the myth of a culture war rests on misinterpretation of election returns, lack of hard examination of polling data, systematic and self-serving misrepresentation by issue activists, and selective coverage by an uncritical media more concerned with news value than with getting the story right” (p. 5). Kaufmann (2002) lends support to this idea. She states, “the combatants in the culture wars, as they have been so defined, do not represent a diverse cross-section of the American polity. There is little evidence that the partisan realignment over cultural issues extends beyond white Americans, or more specifically, much beyond white Christians (Kohut et. al., 2000; Layman, 2001)” (p. 284). Although I recognize this as a plausible portrayal, I still contend that the media has effectively “spun” the idea that America is caught in the throes of a culture war by effectively portraying an America deeply divided about moral, political and social issues.

News programs have become more politically polarized as well. In the 2004 Pew Research Center Report on the news habits of Americans, more people are watching cable news programs (38%) and using the internet (29%) to become informed of the daily news. Additionally, cable news has become more politicized; cable news viewers who identify themselves as politically conservative has risen to 43%. Furthermore, “as the regular audience for the Fox New Channel has grown over the past six years, it has become much more conservative and Republican (24% in 1998, 29% in 2000, 34% in 2002, 41% in 2004)” (p. 7). The number of Fox viewers who identify themselves as conservative has also increased to 52%. CNN has a more Democratic audience than the general public; however, the ideology (i.e. conservative, moderate, liberal, other/don’t know) is almost identical to the general public. Radio talk shows in general are listened to more by Republicans and conservatives than Democrats and liberals. Rush Limbaugh’s radio show’s audience is 77% conservative while National Public Radio’s audience is somewhat more balanced (conservative 31%; moderate 33%; and 30% liberal). Given these statistics, as more people select media news programs based on their political party and political ideology affiliation, the news media will have compelling reasons to continue representing issues in a polarized and contentious manner.

2.1.1 The Political Climate of the Twenty-first Century

The political climate during the beginning of the twenty-first century was unique in that it was post- many major events. First, it was post-9/11. As Goodman (2003) states, the period of time immediately following 9/11 was dangerous for people in the academy who sought to critically examine U.S. policy in any context. The national teachers unions also found out that it was risky for any educational organization to do so as well when their attempts to develop

curriculum specific to 9/11 were labeled soft on terrorism and unpatriotic (the National Education Association (NEA) actually removed its 9/11 curriculum for some time) (Lesson Plans for Sept. 11 Offer a Study in Discord, New York Times, August 31, 2002). Patriotism became something one had only if one did not question U.S. policy. President Bush referred to the terrorists as “evil-doers” and federal legislators responded with the Patriot Act, which stripped U.S. citizens and non-citizens of many of their civil liberties. International students found it difficult if not impossible to obtain student visas¹¹, thus reducing the number of international students on university campuses dramatically. The U.S. waged war on Afghanistan and then with Iraq, all in the name of ridding the world of terrorism.

As the war in Iraq heated up, the country endured a hot presidential race that saw the country through “Deaniacs” and, finally, through a close race between President Bush and Democratic Candidate John Kerry. MTV, with rapper Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs as its spokesperson, waged its own campaign to motivate 18-25 year olds to vote. And, political analysts separated the states into Blue and Red, thereby portraying the entire country as a polarized nation of states¹². This fast-paced and volatile political climate was reflected in the climate of higher education as well.

2.1.2 The Climate of Academia in the Twenty-first Century

The political climate was reverberating through the halls of academia. Cornell West (2004), a controversial and outspoken academic, contends that “we are losing the very value of

¹¹ See cnn.com’s article “International student enrollment slows in U.S., November 3, 2003 for additional information.

¹² To further support this claim, Layman and Carsey (2002) describe how both the Democratic and Republican party elites have become extremely polarized on major domestic policy agenda and how the mass public has endorsed this political positioning by failing to respond negatively to this polarization.

dialogue [in our society as authoritarianism] triumphs over the kind of questioning, compassion, and hope requisite for any democratic experiment” (p. 7). Furthermore, West asserts that academia is reeling from this narrowing of dialogue as it faces “increasing monitoring of viewpoints, disrespecting of those with whom one disagrees, and foreclosing of the common ground upon which we can listen and learn” (p. 7). Additionally, the role of the instructor in academia is being questioned at the highest governmental levels. Legislation supporting the *Academic Bill of Rights*¹³ has been introduced and passed in several states. This legislation opens up the door to lawsuits against professors who violate this bill of rights.

The *Academic Bill of Rights* promotes the inclusion of “controversial material” only when it is related to the course and furthermore requires that a diversity of scholarship be included in the course readings as well. While many professors already do this, it is easy to imagine how these seemingly innocent requirements might be used to censor and restrict what is included and/or excluded in courses. Withey (2005) believes the academic bill of rights is both “an effort to control scholarly debate on our campuses” as well an effort “to intimidate faculty who teach about controversial issues” (p. 3). As more students who self-identify as conservative enter university classrooms, they believe higher education should “simply reinforce conservative dogmas, which they regard as self-evident truths, not as biases¹⁴” (Lazere, 2004, p. 3). When instructors challenge these dogmas, they face the risk of being seen as indoctrinating students.

¹³ David Horowitz is the author of this text which can be located on the Students for Academic Freedom website at <http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/>. Additionally, information on Horowitz’s book *The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* can be retrieved at <http://dangerousprofessors.net>

¹⁴ To further understand Lazere’s claims, I look to the annual survey conducted by UCLA of the national norms for American freshmen. According to the 2004 *The American Freshman* survey, “students entering college have become increasingly polarized in their political orientations, as a record number of students label themselves as politically ‘far left’ (3.4 percent) and ‘far right’ (2.2 percent).” Additionally, students who identify themselves as conservative has increased since last year to 21.9 percent. The study finds that “the change between 2003 and 2004 in students’ political orientation – concurrent with the 2004 presidential election year – reflects the largest one-year shift in this item’s thirty-five year history on the survey.”

Given the political and academic climate, instructors in higher education seem to face certain risks in the classroom today. Internet savvy watch dog groups like NoIndoctrination.org¹⁵ are ready to “share with the general public what [they] learn about sociopolitical bias in higher education.” And other groups such as the Republican Study Committee of Colorado have targeted tenure and academic freedom as “top priorities” (AFT, 2005, p. 1). Professor Priya Parmar was featured in an article in *The New York Sun* on May 31, 2005 in which she was accused of infusing her own views and beliefs into the curriculum at the College of Education at CUNY. In an open letter to Chancellor Goldstein on academic freedom, Barbara Bowen, the president of PSC-CUNY, wrote, “[a]cademic freedom at Brooklyn College is under attack,” and the “chilly intellectual climate created by an absence of academic freedom” restricts faculty from pursuing “lines of inquiry wherever they lead – whether on stem cell research or evolution or education theory” (June 3, 2005). This chilly climate is being felt nation-wide by instructors in all disciplines.¹⁶

Furthermore, the Association of American University Presses (AAUP) has faced recent First Amendment threats. A recent case which involved the publishing of a controversial book, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, caused the University of California Press to initially withdraw the book from publication, a decision it eventually reversed.¹⁷ At the 2005 Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Lynne

¹⁵ Students can anonymously post narratives about “political bias” in which they can identify both the universities and the instructors by name.

¹⁶ In the article, “Is the Sky Falling? Conservative Groups on Campus and the Potential for Critical Debate,” Melissa Weiner reminds us that although the current events in higher education are “disheartening,” there is a historical relationship between times of war and campus and educational climate.

¹⁷ For more information on the specifics of this issue, see Jon Wiener’s article *Giving Chutzpah New Meaning* (The Nation, July 11, 2005), Inside Higher Ed News’ article *First Amendment Furor* (June 27, 2005) and Jennifer Howard’s article *Calif. Press Will Publish Controversial Book on Israel* (July 22, 2005, The Chronicle of Higher Education)

Withey, Director of the University of California Press and 2005-06 AAUP President addressed these concerns.

How many times have we all heard, from politicians, faculty, board members, that we should stick to publishing scholarship and not venture into ‘politics?’ My own press, which admittedly ventures into controversy more often than many publishers, has often been on the receiving end of such criticism. We have been struggling this spring with our most politically controversial book, ever. As a result, I’ve been thinking even more intensively than usual about the limits of publishing on politically and socially charged issues, and have come more and more to believe that we have an obligation to present critical points of view – especially now, in a political culture that seems bent on suppressing information and spinning the news to fit its political agenda, and when the mass media favors sound bite journalism over thorough coverage of serious issues.

(n.p.#)

Withey’s address reminds us again that this particular moment in time represents one of risk for those who attempt to “buck the system.” I recognize that there are other arguments which suggest that many, if not most, Americans are moderate and do not find themselves on the fringe of the ideological spectrum. However, the cultural context in American society at the beginning of the twenty-first century was an alarm which sounded loudly within my own life and profession.

2.1.3 The Climate within Teacher Education and the Field of Social Foundations

In 2000, the Council in Learned Societies in Education (CLSE) changed its name to the Council for Social Foundations in Education (CSFE)(Gibson, 2002). The name change was

significant because “it occurred in large measure so that the identity of the group would be more immediately apparent to individuals and organizations outside of the field of social foundations” (Jones, Simpson & Watras, 2005, p. 243).

This was important because the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) – the centerpiece of President George W. Bush’s education agenda – ushered in a new phase that will undoubtedly take the field in new directions. NCLB is the “meta-text” of the current national teacher education context (Butin, December 2005a, p.215). NCLB requires that all public school teachers of core academic subjects be “highly-qualified” by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. The U.S. Department of Education has defined highly-qualified as having a bachelor’s degree, full state certification, and demonstrated subject matter mastery (USDOE, 2004).

Given that being “highly qualified” requires full state certification, the subtext of the current teacher education context is the debate over the “relevance and viability” of traditional teacher education programs as the sole route to full state certification (Butin, December 2005a, p. 216). This debate has serious implications for traditional teacher education programs in the face of federal initiative supporting alternative routes to state certification (alternatives routes that have already allowed ten percent of the teaching force to gain full state certification)(Butin, December 2005a).

Teacher education programs and organizations like NCATE and AACTE stand on one side of the debate and argue that “strengthening teacher preparation is the key to enhancing teacher quality” (Butin, December 2005a, p. 216). The “Deregulation Movement,” led by conservative organizations like the American Enterprise Institute and the Thomas Fordham Foundation, stand on the other side of the debate and argue that teacher preparation programs “are ineffective and cumbersome, thereby providing ineffectual education to individuals within

them and creating steep hurdles to otherwise qualified individuals attempting to enter the teaching field” (Butin, 2005d p. 216).

Ambiguous research findings on teacher quality complicate the debate (Butin, December 2005a). Researchers have found that “teacher quality is the primary educational variable affecting student outcomes” (Butin, December 2005a, p. 216 (citing Darling-Hammond, 2002; Goldhaber and Brewer, 1999; and Huneushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 1999)). Yet, the only variables that appear to affect teacher quality are subject matter competence and verbal ability (Butin, December 2005a, p. 216). Other variables (e.g., teacher experience, certification, advanced degrees) appear to matter little while educational variables overall “pale in comparison to [students’] individual and family background characteristics” (Butin, December 2005a, p. 216 (citing Goldhaber and Brewer, 1999)).

What these research findings mean for the field of social foundations is not clear (Butin, December 2005a). This is especially true when teachers themselves do not see foundations as relevant to their practice. As Butin (December 2005a) tells us, while research shows that teachers overwhelmingly believe it is “absolutely essential” that they be able to work with students whose backgrounds differ from their own, research also shows that teachers identify historical and philosophical foundations of education as “the least significant coursework requirements vis-à-vis their present job tasks” (Butin, December 2005a (citing Levine, 2005 and Public Agenda, 2000)).

Demonstrating foundation’s relevance to teacher education is inherently difficult in this NCLB era. NCLB positions what it calls “scientifically-based research”¹⁸ as the only legitimate

¹⁸ NCLB defines Scientifically Based Research as “[r]esearch that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.” (NCLB, Title IX, Part A, Sec. 9101(37)).

form of educational research (NCLB, Title IX, Part A, Sec. 9101(37)). This has caused some foundations scholars to question whether it is even possible to demonstrate, through scientifically-based research, how social foundations matters in teacher education. However, as Butin (December 2005a) tells us, the question of whether, through scientifically-based research, we can demonstrate that social foundations of education matters in producing a highly qualified teacher is the wrong question. Butin (December 2005a) suggests that foundations scholars use the rhetoric of the current educational context while at the same time making visible “the constructed and thus contestable nature of our definitions, deliberations, and enactments” (p. 218).

Interestingly, Butin’s argument comes after the Council for Social Foundations in Education was dropped from NCATE membership in 2004 for not paying its dues. Dottin et al (2005) suspect that the organization’s funds problem was more likely “a superficial reason to deeper philosophical concerns about the role, structure, and practices of NCATE within teacher accreditation” (Butin, December 2005a, p. 224). They go on to question “whether it is more effective to raise [such concerns] within or from outside of the national accreditation dialogue” (p. 253). Dottin et al. (2005) note that, without membership in NCATE, The Council for Social Foundations in Education’s concerns will likely go unheard. Further, they warn that the statement in NCATE’s Professional Standards that refers readers to the Council for Social Foundations in Education for “information about what candidates should understand and be able to apply related to the social, historical, and philosophical foundations of education” (NCATE, 2002, p. 19) may well be dropped (p. 253).

The cultural and political climate as well as the teacher quality debate has reached the field of social foundations through the questioning of its curriculum. A conservative publishing

group named John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* as the fifth most harmful books of the past two centuries because it supposedly "had great influence on the direction of American education ---- particularly in public schools and helped nurture the Clinton generation" (Human Events Online, n.p.#). In addition, Jonathan Kozol was named in the top ten of the "100 People Who Are Screwing up America"¹⁹." In a study conducted by David Steiner and Susan Rozen in 2002 in which they reviewed the syllabi of the social foundations of education at 16 schools of education, the authors doubted that "most schools of education are doing an adequate job conveying essential knowledge and skills to prospective teachers" (2003, p. 32). Furthermore, the over representation of readings of "intellectually left" authors (e.g. Freire, Giroux, hooks) in the syllabi drew fire from Steiner and Rozen as they called for a more balanced curriculum²⁰. The New York Times asked the question: "Who needs education schools?" in which the author asserted that "for decades, education schools have gravitated from the practical side of teaching, seduced by large ideas like 'building a caring learning community and culture' and 'advocating for social justice'" (Hartcollis, 2005, p. 24). Critics of this approach claim it "ill prepares teachers to function effectively in the classroom" (24) and call for more practical experience and less "theory." Underlying these perspectives are philosophical positions about what it means or should mean to be a teacher.

¹⁹ Goldberg, 2005

²⁰ David Steiner and Susan Rozen first published their results at a Washington conference sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute and the Progressive Policy Institute. Their study later became a chapter in the 2004 book *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*.

2.2 A PEDAGOGICAL CRISIS

During the first semester of teaching social foundations in the fall of 2003, I faced many challenges inside my classroom. At first, I described these challenges anecdotally, relaying stories to my colleagues about conversations with my students. As I began to address with my students contentious issues such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation and the like, some students voiced concerns over the “negative” tone of the curriculum and consequently the classroom discussions. Some students believed the curriculum was not neutral and was clearly biased. And some students, when faced with the structural and systematic inequalities of American education, believed that “that’s just the way things are” and that *those* students and *their* families would just have to deal with it.

I encountered many challenges that first semester teaching social foundations. These challenges, however, were unlike the ones that had been typified for me during my early teaching career in K-12 settings (e.g. getting to know your students and their needs; creating a coherent, comprehensive curriculum; establishing classroom routines, etc.). Further, these challenges were also different from my initial experiences in teaching post-secondary courses like *Introduction to Education* and *Introduction to Psychology*²¹. I speculate these challenges were different given both the purposes and curriculum of social foundations. Social foundations of education explores contested ideas and asks students to consider multiple perspectives about these ideas using a variety of curricular texts,²² and as I taught social foundations of education, I

²¹ I began teaching post-secondary courses at a local community college in January 2001. I make the distinction between the courses Social Foundations of Education and Introduction to Education, the latter being an introduction to courses on teaching which do not explore contested social issues but rather provide an overview of the teaching profession.

²² For more information about social foundations’ curriculum, see Hill, 2006.

attempted to create a space for the contestation of ideas. I return to a discussion of the purposes of the field and creating a space for contestation in chapter six of the dissertation.

These challenges lead to a pedagogical crisis. The pedagogical crisis, for me, was not only the inability to name and respond to these challenges but also the inability to think beyond actions or behaviors in the classroom. As a teacher, my pedagogical repertoire consisted of identifying strategies to effectively teach students whatever it was that I believed they needed to learn, usually a part of the assigned curriculum. For example, in the past, when I attempted to facilitate a classroom discussion about institutional racism in American society, some students responded by retelling their own personal experiences. These stories often focused on their inability to obtain scholarships or financial aid to go to college. These students would often say that this was because they were not African American (or another minority group) and would claim this process was reverse racism. When students would respond in this way, I felt as if I was left without a strategy to not only address the ideas represented by the students, but I was more importantly left without a way to think about the challenges in a conceptual way (e.g. beyond thinking students were racist). I often left the classroom feeling frustrated with my inability to respond and frustrated with not understanding why I was hearing what I was hearing. In attempting to understand what was going on in my classroom, I knew initially I had to identify at least two things: (1) Why students were saying these things in my classroom; and (2) How my own beliefs and ideas about the world influenced what was occurring in my classroom and influenced my interpretation of student talk and text. In the following section, I identify the most challenging dilemmas I faced in the classroom which led to what I came to think of as a

pedagogical crisis²³. The following dilemmas were what troubled me the most about my experiences in the classroom.

The first dilemma I encountered in the classroom was students' overwhelming belief in education as a neutral endeavor. Neutrality often poses as the status quo and common sense in education. Agostinone-Wilson (2005) believes students address this value in many ways including the talk and text of "there are two sides to every story" and "why is this relevant? (or what are we going to need this for?)." Students' belief in neutral knowledge and neutral teaching further complicated pedagogy for me.

Another challenge I faced in the classroom was students' belief in radical individualism. This belief purports that success is earned and failure is deserved. Further this belief refutes the notion that structural and institutional inequality exists in the United States and contends that we shouldn't classify or categorize people because everyone is an individual. This belief is often revealed in the talk and text of students as "personal choice" and/or "personal responsibility" and is difficult to counter because it "sounds like a democratic concept [that] makes it seem as if individual volition creates freedom: all you have to do is choose" (Agostine-Wilson, 2005, n.p. #)

I also was challenged by the students' use of personal experience as a warrant. Students often used personal experience to justify their positions and/or to name their reality and viewed personal knowledge as the "only source of legitimate knowledge" (Trosset, 1998, p. 3). When students were presented with the inequities of society and particularly education, some students had a difficult time reconciling that knowledge with their own experiences, thus tending to

²³ Even though I refer to it as a pedagogical crisis, I do not mean to imply that a crisis happened at one particular moment in time. The pedagogical crisis was more of a series of flash points - the gradual realization that I could not respond to the dilemmas I was facing in the classroom because I did not have a way to conceptually think about students' talk and text, nor did I have way to address it.

believe that the experiences of others were somehow less credible. Gay and Kirland (2003) describe these kinds of discursive strategies students employ in the classroom as “deliberate maneuvers” (p. 183) to avoid, silence or deligitimize topics like race, class, gender and the like in the education classroom. As an instructor, I was unsure of how to respond to this dilemma. On one hand, to negate the students’ personal experiences refuted notions of experiential learning; how could I negate experience when I wanted to build on experience to socially construct meaning? However, I felt uncomfortable when personal experience influenced learning in a way that resulted in narrowed understanding or that justified inequality. Thus, I was personally committed to challenging students’ use of personal experience when they positioned their personal experience as the only source of legitimate knowledge. I do not mean to imply that personal experience is not valuable, but rather that personal experience is only one source of knowledge rather than the *only* source of knowledge. This particular aspect of the crisis left me feeling as if I had no agency in the classroom, as if I had no way to even think through the dilemma let alone address it.

As an instructor, I felt at a loss to confront these dilemmas inside (and then later, outside) the classroom. I spent time thinking about how to respond; deliberating with my colleagues about how to respond; but still unable to respond in the classroom. I did not have a way to conceptually frame what was occurring in the classroom, and therefore, did not have a way to *think* about what was going on in the classroom. The kinds of dilemmas I was facing in the classroom necessitated a theoretic and conceptual understanding of student talk and text before I could respond and act meaningfully in the classroom. Thus, because pedagogy for me was

defined only as an ability to act and respond in the classroom, my inability to respond was a pedagogical crisis²⁴.

This dissertation represents for me, a way of thinking through the crisis. I expand my notion of pedagogy to include thinking as a pedagogic act and focus on how thinking in pedagogy can reveal the theory underpinning student text. In this dissertation, I revisit the students' texts from Blackboard, emails and journal writings, and identify what I interpret as the potential underlying themes and theoretic explanations. While this dissertation does not focus on traditional pedagogical responses to the challenges I faced in the classroom (such as designing a lesson or assigning a text to read), I posit that understanding the theory underpinning both students' and teacher talk and text is a pedagogic act which allows one to develop a stance for future action in the classroom.

2.2.1 Framing a Pedagogical Crisis Within a Cultural Crisis

As I reflect on the cultural context in which I encountered what I came to call a pedagogical crisis, I identify several relationships between the two. As contradiction and extremism became readily accepted in the media and the political climate, I believed it pervaded the classroom environment. In addressing the relationship between a pedagogical crisis and a cultural crisis, I do not mean to imply a causal relationship. However, I do believe that the cultural context influenced my interpretation and understanding of my experiences in the classroom including the students' talk and text. Therefore, I briefly describe the ways in which I

²⁴ I acknowledge that the other teaching fellows and/or the supervising professor may have experienced and consequently defined the pedagogical crisis differently. This dissertation attempts only to relate my own understanding of a crisis.

believe the cultural context somehow influenced what was occurring in my classroom as well as my own interpretation of the students' talk and text.

As was briefly addressed in chapter one, the field of social foundations often represents “what is not emphasized generally” in teaching as well as provides an opportunity to defend “precarious values” (Bredo, 2005 citing (Butin, 2005b, p. 31)). The social foundations class at Jefferson University addressed contentious ideas about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and the like. These issues, coupled with a portrayal in the popular media of deliberation as confrontational, only made it more challenging for me to navigate the classroom dialogue. Additionally, I believe that some students needed to reach consensus and/or resolution during discussions where many students had very diverse ideas. Further, I believe that the need to reach consensus often left us (the students and myself) feeling frustrated as if nothing had been accomplished. Dialogue and deliberation in my classroom was stifled as students' verbal attacks on classmates often resulted in silence. Dialogue and deliberation did not seem to be used to advance discussion and ideas. Rather it seemed that students brought an agenda of “talking points” to the classroom discussion that they wished to have aired without having others question their ideas. Again, I believed this way of engagement was legitimized in various forms of media as well as by the political engagement that was occurring at the time.

The notion of neutrality as “good” and bias as “bad” was also represented in the climate of contradiction and polarization. This only reinforced and strengthened students' notions that education and teachers should be neutral. As a teacher who believes that education is always political (Apple, 2000; Freire & Horton, 1991; Giroux, 2001) I was further confounded in my attempts to begin to counter neutrality in my classroom. It was difficult to have a conviction in

the classroom when the mantra of “fair and balanced²⁵” was being employed in many different mediums in the cultural context of American society (Agostine-Wilson, 2005).

I believe the cultural context contributed to and enhanced the dilemmas I was facing in the social foundations classroom. In order to address the challenges I faced inside the classroom --- which were situated within a problematic cultural context --- I looked to a pedagogy which would allow me to respond to and move beyond the dilemmas I was facing. In the next chapter, I begin to understand my own pedagogical orientation as I examine competing views of pedagogy found in contemporary educational literature. It is important to begin with these views in order to understand how my progression from more traditional notions of pedagogy toward more reflective and reflexive notions of pedagogy created tension for me in the classroom and further exacerbated the pedagogical crisis.

²⁵ Fox News registered the slogan “fair and balanced” in 1995.

3.0 DIMENSIONS OF REFLEXIVE THINKING IN PEDAGOGY

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge – and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.

(Parker Palmer, 1998, p. 2)

Palmer poses a question to all educators: “How can the teacher’s selfhood become a legitimate topic in education and in our public dialogues on educational reform?” (p. 3). In this section, I take up Palmer’s call and reassert the importance of reflexive thinking - bringing to the forefront teacher’s selfhood - in education. Further, I strive to understand how both reflective and reflexive thinking in pedagogy respond to the “multiple realities of human experience” (Greene, 1988, p. xii). I first attempt to frame a current context of teaching in regards to teacher pedagogy and contend that notions of “best practices” and “research-based” represent one prevalent theme in teacher education today. I believe it is important to understand this current theme in teacher education in order to situate reflection and reflexivity in teacher pedagogy.

Further, I attempt to explicate this theme in order to understand my own educational experience and its influence on my actions and thoughts both in and out of the classrooms. I do this so as to be a reflexive researcher and also make transparent for the reader my world view and its influence on how I interpret and make meaning of the texts.

I also hope through an analysis of some competing views of teacher pedagogy to reassert the need for reflexive thinking as an important part of pedagogy. I acknowledge that there are many ideas about teacher pedagogy which are beyond the scope of this study (e.g. van Manen's (1994) notion of pedagogy as relational). Therefore, I limit the discussion of teacher pedagogy to the notion of pedagogy as reflective practice. Reflective practice has been a major movement in education since Dewey (1933) and popularized by the publication of Schön's landmark book, "The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action" in 1983. At the end of this chapter, I present a framework for reflexive thinking in pedagogy which I attempt to portray in the dissertation.

Further, I attempt to analyze the many ways in which reflection and reflexivity as a part of teacher pedagogy have been conceptualized so as to draw out the commonalities and differences between the two. The analysis will show how the terms reflection and reflexivity have been conceptualized and applied by various scholars as well as demonstrate how these are embedded in the tensions of discussions about teacher pedagogy. The term reflection in particular has morphed since Schön popularized the term in the early 1980's, and thus I choose the term reflexive thinking (instead of reflective thinking) in the dissertation to emphasize the importance of understanding one's own beliefs, values and experiences in the reflection process. This discussion begins with a discussion of teacher reflection for teachers of various levels (e.g. elementary, secondary, post-secondary) and subjects (e.g. mathematics, history, social

foundations) and then focuses specifically on reflective practices of post-secondary educators (including teacher educators). This analysis highlights the contrast between the two terms, reflection and reflexivity, (not as competing practices but rather as complimentary practices) and then portrays my own conceptualization of reflexive thinking as it is used in the dissertation to explore a more theoretic understanding of pedagogy and inquiry.

3.1 COMPETING VIEWS OF TEACHER PEDAGOGY

From the standards movement of the 1990's to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind or NCLB) in 2001, techno-rational language and ideas about effective teaching and accountability have dominated educational language. These ideas call for teachers to adopt pedagogies which reflect best practices and research based techniques (Gentzler, 2005; Eisenhart & Towne, 2003; Tileston, 2003; Slavin, 2002; Stone, 2001; Ravitch, 1998). For example, the Educational Testing Study (Wenglinsky, 2000), "How Teaching Matters: Bringing the Classroom Back Into Discussions of Teacher Quality," claims that what matters most is what teachers *do* in the classroom. However, the report limits "quality teaching" to three main techniques: integrated hands-on learning, critical thinking and frequent teacher developed assessments. The use of the term techniques is problematic in that it frames what teachers do as a set of skills to be mastered instead of a continually developing intellectual pursuit.

NCLB's call for "scientifically-based research²⁶" which emphasizes/legitimizes positivist-oriented research (and excludes other kinds of research) has led the Education Department to develop a database of effective practices. According to Grover Whitehurst, Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, "it's extremely important if education is going to move toward an evidence-based practice to have a central source in education for what can be trusted" (Education Week, September 4, 2002, p. 1). These current practices in education suggest that what has been lacking in education is trustworthy knowledge about how to enact pedagogy in the classroom. As Pinar (2004) contends, the field of teaching holds "a popular misunderstanding of [its] mission, namely, that we are to find out 'what works' and then 'apply' it in the schools" (p. 170). Pinar further describes this predicament through the use of a metaphor of the automobile engine.

This misunderstanding seems to assume that education is somehow like a complex automobile engine, that if only we make the right adjustments – in teaching, in curriculum, in assessment – that we will get it humming smoothly, and that it will transport us to our destination, the promised land of high test scores. (p. 170)

"What works" is often today synonymous with "research-based" practices. Slavin (2002) believes that in order for education to gain legitimacy, a "focus on rigorous experiments evaluating replicable programs and practices is essential to build confidence in educational research among policymakers and educators" (p. 15). The American Educational Research Association's 2006 Annual Conference theme was "education in the public interest" which asked participants to address the current educational context and described this context as one in which

²⁶ According to Education Week (January 30, 2002), the words "scientifically based research" appears more than 100 times in the document.

“social and political pressures on education research suggest that research must meet the demands of evidence-based and scientifically based inquiry.” Every level and every field in education has been influenced by the current cultural context of accountability. I address this current context in order to understand how notions of pedagogy are influenced and in some cases co-opted by techno-rational language. The language of best practices and scientifically-based research is steeped in techno-rational language restricting teachers who want to understand and express pedagogy in more complex and personal ways. I contend that teaching today needs a more complex understanding of pedagogy in order to reflect a complicated world (Van Manen, 1994).

3.1.1 Thinking Beyond Techno-rational Language

In order to address a complicated and complex world, it is necessary to rethink and expand notions of what it means to educate and teach. Luke (1996) believes, “learning and teaching (...) are the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life. They exist beyond the classroom and are always gendered and intercultural” (p. 8). Furthermore, “pedagogy cannot be conceived of as an isolated intersubjective event since it too is fundamentally defined by and a product of a network of historical, political, sociocultural, and knowledge relations” (p. 1). In other words, learning and teaching mutually influence one another and are also influenced by the larger networks in society. Thinking about pedagogy in this way allows teachers to not only respond differently but to *think* differently about teaching. I believe language is critical to cognition in this instance. For example, when the language of applied behavior analysis and/or classroom management techniques is solely adopted by teachers, the kinds of relationships teachers can have with their students may be restricted. When techno-rational language is

employed, how can teachers account for ideas like empathy in this kind of pedagogical understanding of students? How can a teacher's values, beliefs and assumptions be accounted for? Further, I share Rose's (2005) concern that the "dominant vocabulary about schooling limits our shared respect for the extraordinary nature of thinking and learning, and lessens our sense of social obligation" (n.p #.).

Contemporary debates about the legitimacy of educational research today (Ercikan & Roth, 2006; Jacob, 2005; Mayer, 2000; Zeichner, 1999) further support this idea. The current emphasis on experimental research in education which can be generalizable to all students (NCLB, Title IX) and which results in one-size-fits-all policies creates the illusory notion that education and the educational experience for students and teachers is the same. This illusion discourages complex understandings of schooling and pedagogy.

The language of "best practices" infers that all teaching experiences can be addressed through some kind of systematic practice or way of thinking. Teachers are taught that if they have their toolkit of best practices, they can be effective teachers, and students will learn. Pedagogy as reflective practice represents one way in which pedagogy has been conceptualized outside of the language of scientific positivism.

3.1.2 Distinguishing Between Reflection and Reflexivity

Pedagogy as reflective practice responds to calls for understanding teaching as a dynamic and complex profession. (Watson, & Wilcox, 2000; Matthew & Jessel, 1998) For example, Schön (1983) felt that teachers sometimes have to deal with "a swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution" (p. 42). It is in this "swampy lowland" where engaging in reflective practice hopes to provide deeper understanding for teachers.

Schön's book, "The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action" has influenced educational thought and practice. Piantanida (2000) recalls that "[h]is alternative, constructionist view of practitioner knowledge as reflection-in-action precipitated wide ranging deliberations about what educational strategies might best prepare competent practitioners" (p. 1). Thus, a flurry of scholarly writing began to include reflective practice in pedagogy (Gore, 1987; MacKinnon & Erikson, 1988; McDonald, 1989; Mezirow et. al., 1991; Schön, 1987; Smyth, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zeichner, 1992).

However, defining reflective practice for teachers has engendered debate amongst scholars on what reflective practice looks like as well as what role it should play in teaching. This debate is embedded in educational talk and text today which employs techno-rational language (e.g. best practices and research-based) to define pedagogy. Therefore, current definitions and/or portrayals of reflective practice are varied and reveal different philosophical and epistemological stances.

Models of reflective practice which employ technocratic language and positivistic thinking (Cruickshank, et. al., 1981; Cruickshank 1985; Knight, 1996; Williams, 1982) characterize reflective practice as, "a process involving interrelated skills in the testing and use of information in the planning and implementation of professional action [which] claims significant improvements in the competence of professional action and resulting client outcomes" (Knight, 1996, p. 362). These kinds of characterizations rely on figuring out how to "implement" reflection and thus diffuse the empowering potential of reflective understanding for teachers. This way of thinking about reflective practice limits teachers to the role of evaluation monitors and does not push teachers to examine the underpinnings of their practice (e.g. the reasons one has come to view a particular event in the classroom as such; the kinds of

relationships with students and parents that support learning; how prior experiences with students influence instructional and curricular choices). In this way of thinking about reflection, teachers record student progress (or non-progress) and adjust their practices according to the output of students. This techno-rational model of reflective practice is best exemplified in the following example which characterizes how reflective practice can be enacted in a teacher preparation program:

[C]oursework leads to a process of planning a particular classroom activity.

Then, the actual teaching takes place in a school classroom. In some cases, the teaching is videotaped, and in other cases, the teacher or a supervising instructor makes notes on what happened. Copies of student work also may be collected. Then, the teacher in training reflects on what happened, gets mentoring advice from a cooperating or supervising instructor, and writes down some ideas on how the particular teaching task can be done better next time. (Jefferson University Strategic Plan, 2005, p. 6)

Thus, reflective practice is reduced to recording classroom events (often in various mediums), analyzing the “data” and making appropriate instructional changes (i.e. what works and why). While some teachers may begin to think about pedagogy in more complex ways, the way in which reflection is framed may not encourage teachers to examine other pedagogical aspects (e.g. the relationship they have with a student, their own beliefs and values and how these influence expectations and achievement). Even models which emphasize the potential of reflective understanding are influenced by the need to “operationalize” or create a “how-to” guide for reflection (Matthew & Jessel, 1998; Watson & Wilcox, 2000).

There are some scholars who make distinctions between reflection and critical reflection. (Beyer, 1991; Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Imel, 1998; Scoggins & Winter, 1999; Young, 1996;)

Imel (1998) asserts that critical reflection should assist teachers in “moving beyond the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding, in to questioning [of] existing assumptions, values, and perspectives” (Cited in Cranton 1996, p. 76). Critical reflection also requires teachers to think about the political and social contexts of education and its affect on teaching and learning.

Ideas about reflective practice which rely less on technocratic language, emphasize reflection as knowledge making. (Bolton, 1999; Dewey, 1916; Garman, 1998; Hunt, 1998; Matthew & Jessel, 1998; van Manen, 1995, 1992; Watson & Wilcox, 2000) Watson & Wilcox (2000) believe this process emphasizes thinking as questioning.

[A]s we read between the lines, interpreting, wrestling with the phenomena of practice, we continue to raise intriguing questions, gain some insight, but never require absolute certainty or fixed solutions. The discourse and involvement with both text and activity of one’s practice offer an ongoing ‘happening of understanding’ (Bernstein, 1983, p. 126), in making sense of experience. (p. 59)

In this conceptualization of reflection as knowledge making, the process is continuous and does not produce definitive answers. However, even in the process of reflection as understanding of experience and knowledge generating, the examination of self is still positioned peripherally. Therefore I look to notions of reflexivity to provide an understanding of reflection which incorporates an examination of self.

I chose not to use the term reflective practice for two reasons. The first is the importance of incorporating reflexivity in reflection. Additionally, I agree with Bolton (1999) in that the term reflective practice “suggests a very limited metaphor: a mirror reflection is merely an image of the object faithfully reproduced back-to-front” (p. 3). Instead, I hope to create a multi-

dimensional portrayal of pedagogical thinking in the dissertation that does not merely recall events.

3.2 REFLEXIVE THINKING IN PEDAGOGY

While some notions of reflective practice hint at self as a concept in reflection (Hunt, 1998; Imel, 1998), few speak to the importance of the examination of self in the reflective process. Usher and Edwards (1994) define the post modern concept of reflexivity as a way in which assumptions (and the power embedded in those assumptions) can be revealed. Lawson (1985) describes reflexivity as “a turning back on oneself, a form of self awareness” (p. 9). Therefore, reflexive thinking requires individuals to question the assumptions, values and beliefs they bring to any situation and how those influence both their interpretation of and response to those situations. Matthew and Jessel (1998) believe reflexive thinking counters notions of objectivity by arguing that “we have a social and intellectual unconscious – and consciousness – that we bring to any situation” (p. 3). The process of reflexivity allows one to become more self-aware by making known one’s social and intellectual unconscious. It requires teachers to acknowledge how their identity influences the process of meaning-making. However, this process is not about reaching or obtaining a level of reflexivity; it is ongoing and continuous.

Reflexivity is also particularly important for understanding one’s own practice. As Cole and Knowles (2000) assert:

Being reflexive is like having a mirror and transparent prism with which to view practice. Examinations of practice, with an eye to understanding and/or improving it, sometimes lead to complete turnabouts in thinking. Mirrors and prisms also separate light rays into

component wavelengths, making visible the color of the spectrum. Similarly reflexive inquiry affords opportunities for the analysis of the various components or elements of teaching practice. (p. 3)

Reflexivity in pedagogy thus allows teachers to examine and question their own practice which may lead to new ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

The idea of reflexivity in pedagogy for teaching students in post-secondary education and particularly those in teacher education has been addressed by many scholars (Darder et al, 2003; Giroux, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parham, 2002). Although some instructors in post-secondary education cite their use of reflexivity in pedagogy (Fleming et al, 2004; Gray, 2003; O'Brien, 2002), few actually detail what reflexivity in pedagogy entails, the importance of reflexive thinking in pedagogy or even specifically what they mean by reflexivity in pedagogy. The following authors include a discussion of reflexivity in pedagogy in their post-secondary settings.

3.2.1 Examples of Reflexive Thinking

MacGillivray (1997) provides an example of reflexive thinking as reflection as she contemplates how her “unacknowledged biases/expectations sabotaged [her] conscious attempts to change the traditional power structures created in college classrooms” (p. 469). In her study she addresses how her assumptions, beliefs and values that she brought to the classroom had a significant impact on her ability to teach from a critical stance. In order to understand what was happening in her classroom, MacGillivray turned her “philosophical stances inward” to see the contradictions in herself (p. 470). In her article, MacGillivray makes reflexive thinking transparent for the reader. Ultimately, she looked to the origin of her biases such as her “familial

interactional patterns (e.g. inappropriateness of emotional outbreaks)” and “societal models (e.g. the boundaries and expectations of the academy)” (pp. 483-484) to begin to understand her own pedagogy. As MacGillivray acknowledges, self awareness was critical to her ability to change her teaching practice.

Drawing on notions of reflexivity, Glazier (2005) discusses the importance of “positional lens” in teaching. She asserts that “who [teachers] are and what they have experienced necessarily impacts on both how and what they teach” (p. 231). Furthermore, she believes “teacher educators must help teachers better understand the way their subject positions, as raced, and gendered, for example, play out in the classroom” (p. 231). Glazier used reflexivity to examine these subject positions. This study highlights the importance of providing teachers with the opportunity to examine one’s own subject position through talk and text with other teachers. The reflexive process of examining pedagogy which Glazier proposes, illuminates how teachers often do not realize how their worldviews and experiences influence aspects of both curriculum and instruction.

Asher (2005) addresses how reflexivity is crucial for both teachers and students in developing a multicultural education pedagogy. She believes that students and teachers need to be aware of how race, gender, history and location intersect in their lives and in their work.

As educators develop pedagogical practices that attend consciously to the different stories that they and their students bring to the multicultural classroom, they create a site for engaging hybrid identities and cultures via critical, self-reflexive analyses on the part of both teacher and student. (pp. 1080-1081).

In her study, Asher unpacks the “contradictions encountered in multicultural work and [her] own situatedness as a postcolonial border crosser” (p. 1081). She does this by incorporating reflexive

thinking into her teaching practice. Engaging in this kind of critical, reflexive pedagogy by both Asher and her students is essential for living in a multicultural society. According to Asher, this pedagogy “fosters self-reflexivity and dialogue in the multicultural classroom, so that students and teachers can engage differences as well as interrogate their particular interstitial locations” (p. 1089). She considered how her identity as a woman of color, foreign born and from the North influenced her understanding of students from the south enrolled in a multicultural education course. This kind of reflexive thinking led her to many questions.

The question that I, therefore ask myself is: How can I be sure that I will not make the mistake of being (...) the well meaning, ‘enlightened’ teacher of multiculturalism, armed with a doctorate earned in the bastion of bewildering difference – New York City – come to the South to teach. How can I ensure that I do not other/colonize my students? I know that I want to be open to and engage my students’ particular stories and contexts, and at the same time, avoid the pitfall of slipping into a seemingly benign cultural relativism. (p. 1086)

It is only by recognizing the experiences and beliefs that she brings with her in the classroom, that Asher is able to ask these kinds of questions. Reflexive thinking brings these ideas to the forefront of the inquiry and is a significant first step in advancing social justice by recognizing the way in which teachers may privilege their ideas, beliefs and experiences over others.

There is another commonality between the studies discussed in this section. The teachers who chose to employ a reflexive stance in their practice were teaching subjects which broached contentious issues such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation and the like. As I will discuss later on, this is important in social foundations of education which also attempts to wrestle with contentious ideas. Therefore, embedding reflexivity in reflective practice for both teachers and

their students becomes essential for teachers who address contentious ideas with students in their classrooms.

3.2.2 Challenges of Reflexive Thinking

Even though many authors recommend pedagogical practices which incorporate reflexive thinking, the concept poses challenges for teachers in an educational system immersed in technorational language. First, it is difficult to “operationalize” and provide step-by-step guides for “implementation.” Furthermore, reflexive thinking requires teachers to delve into areas of self sometimes fraught with conflict and/or dismay. Finally, reflexive thinking is not intended to provide definitive answers all the time. These dilemmas are captured by Bolton (1999) in her portrayal of reflexive thinking:

[W]e need to let go of the certainty that we know what we are doing and where we are going; we need the confidence to search for something when we have no idea what it is for which we are searching; and we need to let go of the security blanket of the sense that this search will result in answers. This kind of work will lead to more searching questions, the opening of fascinating avenues to explore, but few secure answers. (p. 3)

This ambiguity represents a kind of messiness in reflexive thinking, but it is within this messiness that one can push for deeper and more theoretic understandings of pedagogy as well as to better understand how and why teachers act or behave in the classroom.

Encouraging teachers to think reflexively about their pedagogical practices implies that teachers are professionals, exerting autonomy in their work and in possession of both specific skills and knowledge. However, many authors argue that teachers and teaching continue to undergo the process of deprofessionalization or proletarianization. (Apple, 2000, 1995; Apple &

Teitelbaum, 1986; Giroux, 1985; Labaree, 1995; Spring, 2002; Yeom, 2005) As Apple (2000) asserts, “important transformations are occurring that will have significant impacts on *how* (original emphasis) we do our jobs and on *who* will decide whether we are successfully carrying them out” (p. 115). Young (1996), drawing on Giroux, believes this process “reduces teachers to the status of specialized technicians whose function is to manage and implement curricula designed and/or selected by others” (p. 9). Current educational reforms such as NCLB address both Young (1996) and Apple’s (2000) concerns. Pinar (2004) asserts, “[u]sing a business model, politicians and others have made the commonsensical (...) argument that all that matters is ‘the bottom line’ – scores on standardized tests – and in the process converted the school into a business, a skill-and-knowledge factory” (p. 164). NCLB’s emphasis on standardized test scores, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and research based curriculum are significantly influencing teaching. Teachers are often forced to adopt packaged curriculum the district has mandated. Furthermore, teachers spend a significant portion of their day preparing students to take tests in order to make AYP (From the Capital to the Classroom, 2006). These kinds of influences on education have led to the deskilling of teaching (Greene, 1988). Apple (2000) contends that deskilling occurs when:

The skills that teachers have built up over decades of hard work – setting relevant curricular goals, establishing content, designing lessons and instructional strategies, ‘community building’ in the classroom, individualizing instruction based on an intimate knowledge of students’ varied cultures, desires, and needs, and so on – are lost. (p. 118)

We can see these trends occurring in today’s teaching environment, and they are yet another challenge to reflexive thinking.

3.3 DIMENSIONS OF REFLEXIVE THINKING

In this section, I attempt to portray a way of thinking reflexively. I contend that reflexive thinking in pedagogy can assist teachers in understanding both themselves as practitioners as well as researchers. Further, I reframe the notion of pedagogy to include reflexive thinking as a pedagogical act. I draw on Garman's (1998) levels of reflection and position myself centrally in the study in order to come to deeper and more theoretic understandings of my experience and pedagogy and call this *reflexive thinking*. Garman's three levels of reflection describe reflection as recollection, reflection as introspection, and reflection as conceptualization. Using Garman's levels of reflection, I embed reflexivity in the process in order to provide a multi-dimensional portrayal of pedagogy. I begin with a discussion of Garman's levels of reflection. The first level Garman discusses is the level of recollection.

In this form of reflection a person recalls the details of the events and describes what has happened. In other words this interpretation of reflection is a matter of *giving an account of the events of the experience*. Recollection can be used for purposes of documentation of events, however, recollection can also become a manifestation of an *aesthetic portrayal of experience* (through stories, poems, drama, etc.). (Garman, 1998, n.p.)

This level provides the basis for writing about the reflective process. Using reflexive thinking, one begins to identify potential questions and issues to probe deeper into after recalling and portraying the details of the events.

The second level is the introspective level. At the introspective level, one looks within to examine one's mental and emotional responses and begins to identify what is troubling about the situation, event or response. According to Garman (1998), "introspection is often thought of as *accounting for* what has happened. Introspection begins to get at the articulation of *meaning* that

one makes of the experience.” Reflexive thinking is embedded within this level. As one begins to question what is troubling about the episode, one needs to consider how their values, beliefs, assumptions and experiences influence the meaning-making process.

The third level is the conceptual level. At this level, one asks, “how am I now thinking theoretically about what is occurring or has occurred?” as one consults theoretic scholarship. It implies the process of theorizing and moving toward a conceptual perspective. This process can be thought of as the dialogic that takes one beyond the introspective level to consider what ideas are pushing one to come to a theoretic understanding of an experience. This helps address solipsism by conferring with other scholarship that has explanatory power. Again, reflexive thinking helps push one to the conceptual level. One asks, “what theories and ideas are accepted and rejected?” and “how does one’s self-awareness influence the selection, interpretation and acceptance of theory?” At each level, reflexivity is embedded in the process and guides the inquiry.

4.0 INTERPRETIVE CLAIMS AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

In this chapter, I present and discuss the inquiry undertaken in the dissertation. This study is an interpretive study which follows the tenets of interpretive research in order to make complicated student responses for theoretic understanding. According to Schwandt (2003), “interpretivists aim to reconstruct the self understandings of actors engaged in particular action” (p. 299). Therefore, “a basic tenet of interpretivism includes the notion that as reflective human beings, we construct our realities, for the most part, in discourse²⁷ communities” (Garman, 2005, p. 1).

Interpretive studies attempt to understand and make meaning of experiences as well as to engage ideas. According to Greene (1992), “adopting the interpretivist logic of justification for inquiry means foregoing aspirations to *get it right* (original emphasis) and embracing instead ideals of *making it meaningful*” (p. 39). Therefore, in interpretive inquiry, experience or a phenomenon is under study. Additionally, in interpretivist social inquiry there is an “opportunity to give voice to one’s self, to offer a view of human experience that promotes one’s own values and ideals” (Greene, 1992, p. 39). This stance necessitates adopting different truth claims. Garman (2005) makes further distinctions about truth claims in interpretive research:

[I]nterpretivists do not claim that their research portrayals *correspond* (original

²⁷ Garman (2006) defines discourse as a poststructuralists concept in which discourse “communicates the social relatedness of the human world, and more specific, our social relatedness is inscribed in and expressed through language” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 49)

emphasis) to a general reality, as do those postpositivists who strive for logico-scientific truth claim (Bruner, 1968). Rather, interpretivist portrayals strive for *coherence*, which provides the reader with a vivid picture and the meanings about the experience under study. (p. 2)

Further, a purpose of the inquiry can be “to promote doubt about the desirability of the values and interests associated with knowledge in a particular paradigm, framework, or world view” (Barone, 1995, p. 172). These truth claims are markedly different from other positivistic and science-like forms of research.

Another distinction of interpretive inquiry is the notion of data. Interpretive inquiry relies on texts as data. Garman (2005) defines texts as:

a written form that has inherent meaning in it for the researcher --- a chunk of related words or images that reflect an idea or ideas. Text may take the form of vignettes, profiles, stories, media excerpts, theoretic insights, images, pictures, memos, to name only a few products of inquiry. The concern here is that these crafted texts are capable of hermeneutic interpretations, and are not generally used for reductive purposes. (p. 5)

The notion of texts allows for a rich portrayal of the experience or phenomenon under study.

4.1 NARRATIVE INQUIRY

This study also draws on narrative inquiry methodology as the representation of texts through narrative (Denzin 2001; Joyce and Tutela, 2006; Ochs & Capps, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schrader, 2004). I turn to narrative to provide a more complex and rich understanding of my own experiences in the classroom. According to Dewey (1938), teaching and learning are “a

continuous process of reconstruction and experience” (p. 59) and narrative inquiry attempts to capture and portray that process.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research genre which has been used in educational research (McVee, 2004; Connelly, Phillion, & Fang He, 2003; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 1999; Eakin, 1999; Davies, 1998; Bochner, 1997; McEwan, 1997; Clandinin, 1989) as well as in dissertation research (Curran, 2002; Fowler, 1997; Kirk, 2004; Wojecki, 2004;). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience” (p.20). Curran (2002) posits that “telling and listening to narratives are how we learn to translate, represent and interpret our experiences in the world” (p. 35). Further, Schrader (2004) contends that, “[t]elling tales assists participants in making sense of how social interactions flow and how humans understand the seemingly related and/or unrelated nature of events” (p. 208). Narrative inquiry assists not only in making meaning of one’s own experiences but also situates one’s experiences within a larger social framework. Furthermore, “when using interpretive methods, [narrative inquiry] can become a form of self-understanding or self-interpretation as it seeks to relate the stories scholars tell to the stories current in society at large” (Hones, 1998, p. 2).

4.1.1 Fictionalized Narrative

Although narrative inquiry is itself fictive (i.e. the retelling and interpretation of experience), I make the distinction here between narrative and fictionalized narrative. Clough (2002) defines fictionalized narrative as “versions of the truth which are woven from an amalgam of raw data, real details and (where necessary) symbolic equivalents” (p. 9). There are compelling reasons for representing experience as fictionalized narrative. Clough (2002)

purports that “[t]he fictionalization of educational experience offers researchers the opportunity to import fragments of data from various real events in order to speak to the heart of social consciousness” (p. 8). The researcher can craft narratives using data in order to uncover and explore complex social interactions, ideas and ideologies. By fictionalizing events in one’s professional life, the researcher can “think about those events in a way that would not be possible [through] (...) a nonfiction account” (McMahon, 2006, p. 190). Additionally fictionalized narrative emphasizes the “interconnectedness of the past, the present, the future, the personal and the professional in an educator’s life” (Beattie, 1995, p. 54). In addition, this kind of writing is “especially appealing because it offers a greater expressive range and an opportunity to reach audiences outside the academy” (Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 581). Thus, the researcher has the possibility of creating a rich portrayal of experience or experiences for a variety of audiences.

When crafting fictionalized narratives, methodology remains important but takes on new direction. “The idea of methodological regulation (...) is importantly shifted from material to moral accountability (...) and (Richardson, 1994, p. 523) ‘self-reflexivity [within the written story] unmask[s] complex political/ideological agendas’” (p. 9). The researcher can focus on the representation of ideas as expressed by the texts rather than be constrained by notions of accuracy and replication of the texts. For example, the researcher can alter texts in fictionalized narrative (e.g. deleting repetitious and uninteresting dialogue) as long as the ideas embedded in and expressed through the texts are represented in the narrative. This is accomplished through self-reflexivity, making transparent for the reader the researcher’s understanding and examination of the texts.

Kilbourn (1999) addresses essential elements of fictionalized narrative in educational research focusing on both the quality and method of writing wholly or partially fictionalized

narratives. He believes the most important aspect of fictionalized narratives in educational research is the researcher's ability to demonstrate "*self-conscious method*" (original emphasis) (p. 28). Kilbourn describes self-conscious method as writing that "reflect[s] the layers and complexity of the process of a thesis as it unfolds from conceptualization to finished product" (p. 28). In other words, Kilbourn proposes that the researcher make transparent the researcher's relationship with the texts, how the researcher is making meaning of the texts and the justification for the portrayal of the texts.

Further, Kilbourn describes three methods of achieving self-conscious method: direct explanation, authorial intervention and character intervention (p. 28). Direct intervention refers to "telling the reader in plain terms why a particular form of writing will be used in the text" (p. 29). Authorial intervention is explained as allowing "an author to insert ideas about the text into the storyline of a piece of fiction" (p. 30). Finally, "an author can have the characters reflect on the text of which they are a part of" (p. 31). All three of these methods can effectively address self-conscious method in fictionalized narrative in educational research.

Educational research using fictionalized narrative has contributed to a more complex understanding of teaching (Abowitz, 2005; Campbell, 2000; Clough, 2002; Kilbourn, 1998; McMahon, 2000). McMahon (2000) discusses how fictionalized narrative can explicate as well as interrogate pedagogical issues. Through the examination of a fictionalized narrative she wrote based on her experience teaching a basic writing course and her relationship with one of her students, McMahon was able to uncover and reveal pedagogical dilemmas. She contends that as she interrogated her experience in the classroom through fictionalized writing, she began "to illuminate a darker side of life in the classroom" and saw "beneath the surface of [her] own pedagogy" (p. 132). Fictionalizing the narrative brought to the forefront issues she was

struggling with but had been unable to name such as authority in the classroom and students' perceptions of her as a teacher. McMahon supports the use of fictionalized narrative by highlighting its potential to focus on problematics in teaching. She explains, "fiction provides me with a form to portray my lived experiences in a way that encourages me to respect the complexities and ambiguities with which I am often confronted in my practice" (p. 138). McMahon captures the possibility of fictionalizing narrative as she describes the process and benefit of fictionalizing one of her students.

Absorbing my student into a fictional representation of reality, I gain a different view of him because I move him beyond the classroom, and in so doing, study him from an unfamiliar perspective. (...) I can distill whatever lessons there are to be learned by observing my character's motives in this new setting (...) I am less likely to take for granted what it is I know, not only about my student, but about my teaching, for, should I choose, as the teacher-author, I am free to experiment with my own intentions, assumptions, and actions as well, within the context of the story. (p. 139)

Fictionalizing narrative allowed a reinterpretation as well as a rerepresentation of McMahon's pedagogical experiences.

Abowitz (2005) provides another example of the use of fictionalized narrative specifically in the field of social foundations. She uses fictionalized narrative to examine some of the "pedagogical challenges faced by typical social foundations teachers in negotiating the terrain of autonomy, critical thinking, and teaching" (p. 130). Abowitz created two composite characters who are social foundations teachers who faced these challenges in their own classrooms. She presents several fictionalized narratives which represent specific challenges the characters faced, and then reviews the relevant literature in order to "contextualized the narratives" (p. 130).

Abowitz's narratives are effectively crafted to illuminate not only the challenges social foundations instructors face, but also ways in which to both understand and address these challenges through the use of theory.

4.1.2 A Rationale for Using Fictionalized Narrative in the Dissertation

I have chosen to use fictionalized narrative in the dissertation to represent student texts, my interactive responses to them, and my analyses of them in order to present and examine the significant themes in student texts in their interactive context rather than in isolation from each other. By "interactive context," I mean the interactions that characterized the pedagogical situation that gave rise to student texts, a pedagogical context that was Internet-mediated but that centered on interactions both among students and also between students and me. By representing these texts as fictionalized narrative, I highlight the ways in which student texts built from and responded to one another rather than representing each student voice in isolation. Using fictionalized narrative allowed me to portray the interactive context of student texts while still presenting the reader with only the most powerful and salient examples of those texts. Additionally, fictionalized narrative forefronts my own position in the class discussions and emphasizes, rather than hides, my interest and potential biases as the teacher of the course. Thus, fictionalized narrative allows me to examine my own conceptualization of reflexive thinking in pedagogy.

Using fictionalized narrative allows me to represent my interaction and understanding of the texts as a teacher as well as to portray my "authorial voice" (Garman, 2006) in the dissertation. Further, fictionalized narrative creates an interactive text between the researcher and the reader. As Lomax (1999) contends, the possibilities of creating this kind of

representation “open up the living contradictions of one’s practice to oneself; while sharing the representation opens up the possibility of dialogue with others” (p. 17). Fictionalized narratives have the potential to allow readers to imagine and place themselves within the story.

The use of fictionalized narrative also represents my understanding of being a reflexive researcher. Gergen and Gergen (2003) describe reflexive researchers as investigators who:

Seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographic situatedness, their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work, their surprises and ‘undoings’ in the process of the research endeavor, the ways in which their choices of literary tropes lend rhetorical force to the research report, and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view. (p. 579)

Employing fictionalized narrative forefronts my own self-inquiry and thought process through the writing as well as the analysis of the texts. In this process I make “my own situatedness as researcher quite evident and lay open the research process” (Kirk, 2004, p. 154). This process thus responds to Kilbourn’s (1999) call for self-conscious method as it makes the inquiry transparent by showing the evolution of my interpretations of the texts rather than only my final analysis.

Further, the use of fictionalized narrative allows me to portray dimensions of reflexive thinking. As a researcher and practitioner, I am positioned centrally through both dialogue and narration to demonstrate the dimensions of reflexive thinking: recollection (i.e. giving an account of the experience), introspection (i.e. identifying what is troubling), and conceptualization (i.e. theorizing and moving toward a conceptual perspective). As I move through these dimensions (not as a linear progression, but sometimes backwards as well), I am guided by the notions of reflexivity as I attempt to make meaning of the student dialogue by

considering my own process of knowledge construction. This process allows me to make connections where I might have not seen any and to question my own beliefs and values. In the following two sections, I address the organizing concept of the vignettes as well as how the vignettes were constructed in order to present a methodology for the vignettes.

4.2 ADDRESSING THE THEMES REPRESENTED IN STUDENTS' TEXTS THROUGH REFLEXIVE THINKING: AN ORGANIZING CONCEPT

For the dissertation, I examined a repertoire of texts including Blackboard postings, my journal writings, emails to and from both students and colleagues and think pieces I wrote during the time period under study, September 2003-May 2005. As I examined these texts, primary patterns and themes seemed to emerge (Patton, 2002, p. 463). These themes represented the ideas embedded in the pedagogical crisis—the challenges and troubling aspects of my classroom experiences. I named these themes in order to interrogate and understand them. The themes which seemed to emerge from the texts were: a) the theme of knowledge and teaching as neutral and objective; b) the theme of personal experience as the only source of legitimate knowledge (or as a warrant that trumps all others); c) the theme of radical individualism (i.e. personal choice and personal responsibility). I am not claiming that the texts represent an understanding of what students think and believe. For example, I did not interview students about the Blackboard dialogue; I did not ask students what they meant when they posted on the Blackboard or how they were thinking about the dialogue. In this study, I present my own interpretation of the texts and the themes which seem to emerge from them. These themes represent my interpretation of the way in which I believe students are representing the world. I also recognized that while the

texts I examined were taken from “outside” the classroom (i.e. the student Blackboard postings, journal writings and emails), they also represented the talk and text occurring within the classroom. These themes, as represented in the students’ texts, presented pedagogical dilemmas for me which led to a pedagogical crisis (i.e. my inability to respond to the themes and students’ ways of representing the world as revealed in the students’ texts). From these texts, I have crafted vignettes. The vignettes represent a narrative way of understanding the pedagogical crisis I faced in the social foundations classroom as well as a way of working through the crisis as a reflexive teacher and researcher. The vignettes however, are not meant to represent the ways in which students may have influenced one another. Another important caveat about the vignettes is the omission of a discussion about the curriculum of social foundations. These texts did not occur in a vacuum; they emerged from discussions generated by the curricular texts that we were reading and deliberating over in the social foundations of education classroom. However, for the purposes of this study, I do not directly address the curricular texts. Instead, I focus on the talk and text that emerged out of the classroom experience in order to understand my theoretic interpretations of them.

Each vignette examines one of the challenges I faced in the social foundations classroom that I found troubling. These challenges are revealed in the student texts. In Episode One, *On Becoming a Democratic Classroom*, I introduce my readers to the nature of the interaction between myself and the students as well as lay out for the reader the way in which I reflexively navigate through the texts. Through my narration and dialogue, I attempt to: a) examine what I unconsciously bring to the interaction with the students and the texts (e.g. my own educational experiences, my beliefs and values); b) explain my reaction to the students’ texts; and c) question and challenge the way in which I interact with and make meaning of the students’ texts. This

episode is meant to introduce the other episodes as well as to lay the foundation for further experiences in a democratic classroom.

In the second vignette, *Countering Neutrality*, I address one of the prevalent themes revealed in the students' texts: the theme of neutrality. This vignette provides a rationale for why this belief may be entrenched in the field of education. Additionally, I consider some of the power issues that I wrestle with when I choose to counter neutrality by expressing a perspective in the classroom. This is the only vignette that I did not choose a classroom setting. I chose my office as the setting for this vignette in order to examine a dialogue between a student and myself on the Blackboard. I wanted to portray for the reader the sense of confrontation I felt when engaging with this student on the Blackboard and thus chose a personal confrontation in my office to convey this feeling.

In the third vignette, *Confronting Personal Experience*, I examine another prevalent theme revealed in the students' text: personal experience as a powerful warrant. The students in this dialogue discuss their lack of personal experience and understanding in examining the experiences of "other." In this vignette, I suggest that there are in fact ways that I can challenge the ways in which students privilege values and beliefs given the challenges I face with the lack of students' experiences with others.

In the fourth vignette, *All the White Moves*, I continue my examination of personal experience in the students' texts to explore how student talk is used to privilege particular perspectives and experiences. As I began to discuss the contentious issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. in my classroom, I was often unable to move beyond student generated talk and text in which personal experience is used as the only legitimate source of knowledge. I also needed a way in which to think about students which did not limit me to thinking of students

as racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, or simply as students who “just didn’t get it.” In this vignette, I suggest that the analysis of student generated talk and text can provide a way of understanding the discursive strategies students employ in the classroom in order to counter and challenge these discursive strategies.

I have chosen to end this vignette abruptly, and it may seem as if it leaves the reader up in the air, or that I have in fact spoken the last word. On one discussion board thread, my challenge was the last posting and was not taken up by any student. It was sort of “left out there hanging,” and I wanted the vignette to convey that feeling as well. This speaks to the limitations of the discussion board as a vehicle for change; students ultimately could ignore and dismiss what was questioned.

In the fifth and final vignette, *Deconstructing the American Dream*, I examine another theme revealed in the students’ texts: radical individualism. In the students’ texts, individualism is revealed through the belief that personal choice and personal responsibility lead to success or failure through a discussion of the American Dream. Students counter the belief that institutional and structural inequality exists as some students defend the American Dream. Students’ responses also reveal their stereotypes about poor people which further support their belief in the American Dream.

4.3 CRAFTING THE VIGNETTES

In thinking about the how to craft each vignette, I knew I needed to find a way to portray both the themes embedded in the students’ texts as well as my conceptualization of reflexive thinking in pedagogy which could reflect the complexity of my interactions with the texts.

Therefore I looked for a textual alternative to: a) express the complicated and multidimensional notions of reflexive thinking in pedagogy; b) evoke in the reader a sense of the messiness of moving outside notions of techno-rational pedagogy; and c) reveal the theoretical underpinnings captured in both the student texts and my interactions with them. Creating vignettes based on the student texts allowed me to satisfy these needs.

The writing of the vignettes was an iterative process; I wrote and rewrote them in an attempt to make meaning of the texts. This process was not only “a product of the research, [but also] part of the method” (Kirk, 2004, p. 154). At first, I was constrained by my own understanding of what a legitimate representation of the vignettes should look like, and consequently, the vignettes emerged as one-dimensional portrayals: I presented the texts; I reflected on the texts; I theorized about the texts. As I continued to rewrite, I sought to create vignettes which were multi-dimensional and could portray the complexity of the classroom discussions. Finally, as I freed myself to explore alternate forms of representation in the dissertation (Piantanida & Garman, 2006), I turned to fictionalized narrative in order to attempt to represent the texts as multidimensional as well as to convey the complexity inherent in my interactions with the texts. The vignettes which emerged are meant to engage the reader as well as represent my authorial voice. It is my hope that the reader might be able to place herself within the texts as well, grappling with them as I did and imagining their own responses to and understanding of the texts. Each vignette is divided into two parts: an experiential component (Part 1) and a theoretic component (Part 2).

4.3.1 Part One: The Experiential Component

In this part of the vignette, I use the student texts from the Blackboard postings, emails and journal entries as the student dialogue. In addition, most of my dialogue with students is taken from my Blackboard postings, emails and journal entries as well. The setting for this part is fictionalized and four of the five vignettes take place in a college classroom; one vignette takes place in an instructor's office. I believed this was important to do as it presents to the reader a glimpse of my interaction with the texts at a particular moment in time. Further, I reflexively interrogate and attempt to understand my own interactions with the texts through my narration of the vignettes as a reflexive practitioner.

While student dialogue in the vignettes is generated from the student texts, I at times, alter some of the texts in order to create a piece which takes into account audience. For example, texts like Blackboard, email and journal writings are not constrained by time (as a classroom setting is), and students would sometimes craft very long responses about their own experiences. These responses would sometimes be repetitious and/or meander off topic (e.g. a student might begin by addressing multicultural education and later veer off and provide a commentary about their favorite television sitcom). In the vignettes, I have often either chosen excerpts of the students' texts or sometimes broken up the text into manageable dialogue. I also juxtapose and rearrange student texts to deliberately construct a narrative which investigates the themes which seemed to emerge from the texts themselves. For example, the theme of neutrality appeared in many of the texts over the course of the study, but in the vignettes, I temporally rearrange these texts into a single vignette in order to present the most salient and meaningful texts. Additionally, I have chosen to correct students' grammatical errors, spelling, capitalization and change and/or delete medium specific text (e.g. the use of "ur" for "your" and "u" for "you" in

Blackboard postings; the deletion of emoticons). Each student is given a pseudonym and any personally identifiable information (e.g. a student's hometown) has been changed in order to maintain anonymity.

The classroom setting as it is portrayed in each vignette, is not meant to represent a single, recollected classroom experience, nor is it meant to represent a collection of classroom experiences. The vignettes do not represent the social foundations course itself (i.e. the curriculum and/or the assignments). I have situated the student texts within a classroom dialogue because it allows me to naturally reinsert myself back into the students' dialogue as a reflexive practitioner and researcher. Again, the discursive space of the classroom allows me to represent the interactive nature of the texts, my interaction with the texts and the themes which emerged from the texts. The vignettes attempt to make reflexive thinking in pedagogy transparent.

My character plays the central role in each vignette which allows me to demonstrate how I have come to understand reflexive thinking in pedagogy. The insertion of myself as narrator and main character in the vignettes allows me to demonstrate three dimensions of reflexive thinking by bringing my own identity to the forefront. Therefore, both my character's narration and dialogue reflexively attempts to reveal these dimensions.

The fictionalized vignettes do not take into account student-to-student interactions. Therefore, the vignettes do not explore and examine possible reflexivity in students as they engage with one another through dialogue. While I realize it is important to acknowledge and account for the reflexive nature of student-to-student interaction, it is beyond the scope of this study.

4.3.2 Part Two: The Theoretic Component

Part two of the vignette is constructed as a sort of debriefing after the classroom discussion and represents through narrative, my theoretical understanding of the experience building on the first two dimensions of reflexive thinking. In order to move beyond a pedagogical crisis or an inability to respond, it is essential for me to begin to think theoretically about the classroom dialogue. Thus, reflexive thinking is a pedagogical act which can move me beyond a pedagogical crisis. To assist me in theorizing, I have chosen to add another character for this part of the vignette. The character “Deanna,” a colleague, is meant to represent a theoretic foil; her role is to bring out the theory which may help me understand what is occurring in the student dialogue.

In creating this component of the vignettes, I draw on the work of two critical race theorists, Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, who have effectively used dialogue in fictionalized narrative in order to explicate a theoretic and to push towards conceptualization. Derrick Bell’s *And We Are Not Saved* and Richard Delgado’s *The Rodrigo Chronicles* use fictionalized narrative to explore theory and to suggest future direction for action. Derrick Bell (1987) creates several chronicles which use “fantasy and dialogue to uncover enduring truths” (p. 6). In these chronicles, Bell as the narrator, converses with his self appointed heroine, Geneva Crenshaw, a long-lost legal colleague. The dialogue between the narrator (Bell) and Geneva Crenshaw is a unique exchange in which the complexities of the history of race in the United States are further probed and analyzed. The structure of each story begins with Geneva Crenshaw’s telling of a particular story ultimately meant to illustrate and explore a theoretic. At the conclusion of each chronicle, Geneva Crenshaw and the narrator “further discuss the implications of [the] original contradiction for contemporary conditions” (p. 7). Thus, together they uncover and reveal the

theory inherent in the story as well as discuss how the understanding of this theory might guide one in future actions and thoughts.

Richard Delgado's *The Rodrigo Chronicles*, builds on Bell's original idea of the use of storytelling to critically examine theory. Delgado's main characters are Rodrigo Crenshaw, the brother of Geneva Crenshaw, and "the professor." Delgado employs the same kind of dialogue in his chronicles in order to "to test and challenge reality, to construct a counter-reality, to hearten and support each other, and to probe, mock, displace, jar or reconstruct the dominant tale or narrative" (p. xviii). In the theoretic component of each vignette, I attempt to follow Delgado's structure and purpose of dialogue to explicate a theoretic construct. While Delgado's chronicles consist of a dialogue between the professor and his student, Roderigo, I purposely veer away from this construct, not wanting to present a fabled version where one character possesses the knowledge and the other does not. This could possibly insert an artificial dichotomy where there was not one to begin with. Instead, I chose to represent the exploration of the theoretic as a dialogue between colleagues who *equally* share knowledge and question one another to further their collective understanding of the situation. Furthermore, while Deanna represents the theoretic foil, both characters represent *my* interpretation and understanding of theory. Therefore, it may be useful to think of both characters as one – my own internal process of understanding the explanatory power of scholarship.

I have also included two supporting characters who appear in some of the episodes. They are students who embody specific challenges for me at a moment in time. These characters are fictional; I use my own recollection of the time period under study (captured in my journal) to create their dialogue. The first student, Andrea, embodies the challenges of the culture for me. She represents the culture of conflict and contradiction in academia, and her dialogue is centered

on these themes. She is the student who often is wary of “the liberal bias” and believes education ought to be neutral and objective. The second student, George, represents the challenge of legitimacy²⁸ facing social foundations today. He is often the student who constantly asks why any of this material is important to him as a future teacher. I have incorporated these two additional characters to further emphasize my own interpretation of this particular space in time where my challenges and the crisis itself seemed magnified by more than the content of the course.

²⁸ For more information on the perennial challenges facing social foundations, see Hill, 2006.

5.0 PEDAGOGY OF THE OBSESSED: VIGNETTES ABOUT TEACHING IN THE DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

This chapter presents five vignettes which explicate the challenges I experienced teaching in the social foundations classroom.

5.1 VIGNETTE #1 - ON BECOMING A DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

Part One

“How’s the Democratic Classroom going?”

I turn around from reading at my desk to see Deanna, one of the teaching fellows, standing in the office. I push the student’s paper aside that I was reading and swivel around in my chair so I can respond. “Ah, the Democratic Classroom. So far so good. I’m not sure the students really understand what we’re trying to do yet.”

“Well, it’s pretty new for me too. Sometimes I’m not sure of what we’re trying to do either.” Deanna grins as she says this last sentence. It’s early February of the spring semester, and our teaching fellows team has reconceptualized our social foundations of education course as a “democratic classroom.”

“Let’s talk about it after class, Deanna. We only have a couple more minutes until three, but I’d really like to revisit everything we’re trying to do. Do you have time to talk after class?”

At this question, Deanna gets a mischievous look on her face and replies, “Of course. You know I always have time to talk!”

We both gather our materials for class and head out the office door. I try to mentally prepare myself for today’s discussion on the funding of education. Our last class ended disastrously in an all out argument about whether or not funding for education really mattered in perpetuating inequities in society. As I think back on my part in the discussion, I know that my own upbringing has influenced my stance on this in the classroom. I was fortunate enough to attend a very well funded suburban school that was endowed with a wealth of materials, fully equipped classrooms and well-educated and experienced teachers. This greatly contrasted with my early field experiences in the Boston Public Schools which had deteriorating buildings, lack of materials and even large rats that ran across classrooms. When my foundations of education students start talking about how throwing money at schools doesn’t work, I know I’m still seeing in my head all those poor children who had to attend schools I didn’t even want to be in for six weeks. I know that where I am today was made possible by where I went to school, and I get frustrated that my students don’t accept this as “truth.” After class last week, I spent a significant portion of the night looking for another reading that would somehow illustrate how and why funding is very important to education, and that funding for schooling in this country is significantly inequitable. I emailed the reading to them that very night asking them to prepare a discussion around this reading for our next class. So I’m hopeful today’s discussion will take a different turn.

“Ms. Minnici? Here’s my assignment from last week.” Tiffany, one of my students hands me a paper as we walk in the classroom together.

“Good afternoon everyone. Are we ready to get started?” I ask this question rhetorically as I take out the reading which I have placed such high hopes on. No one really answers, and as I look up, several stony faces stare back at me. “Let’s take out our reading for today. I was wondering ---” before I have a chance to continue, David interrupts me.

“Yeah, I’d like to talk about that as well. I find it puzzling that we have been assigned an extra reading because we disagreed with you last class.” Several other students nod their heads in agreement at David’s statement. Wow! I’m really shocked that he actually said that out loud. I mean, I expect students to “think” this sometimes, but has he openly challenged my authority in the classroom? Why am I feeling so defensive and insecure about this?

“Well, I find it interesting, David, that you assumed the extra reading was given as punishment for disagreeing. It is a reading that I recently found in looking for better material to discuss an issue that seemed to be generating discussion.” Did I really say that? Especially after I was obsessed with finding another reading after the last class? Is he right; did I assign the reading to punish them for disagreeing with me? Now I feel trapped; I can’t go back. I feel as if David has challenged my authority in front of his peers, and I have to respond in such a way. I think my education as a teacher as well as my experiences in the classroom resist letting me construct David’s statement as anything but a threat. So I react in a way which legitimizes the way in which I think about the role of the teacher as authoritarian. “Part of this course is for us to take an intellectual adventure into really complex ideas. This is hard work. So is teaching. The additional reading was not onerous, in my estimation, for an upper level undergraduate course.” At this last comment, everyone seems to take a new interest in the patterns of the carpet. Silence. Ok, this isn’t what I want. Do I really want to stifle expression just so I can feel powerful? Teaching in the democratic classroom has reinforced for me the idea of building a

relationship with my students, and that has to start with trust. I remember as both an undergraduate and graduate student when a professor would emphatically state that all perspectives were valued and encourage authentic expression and then turn around and penalize me or a classmate for expressing a perspective not aligned with a particular viewpoint or belief. The trust was broken and honest engagement stifled. So I need to make an effort to keep my promise to my students and encourage deliberation – even deliberation about my own pedagogy. “But perhaps we should examine this as a group,” I continue. “Do other people feel that assignments and readings are being used to discourage disagreement? Do other people feel that the class does not allow for multiple perspectives? This is clearly not the intent of the class, and it would be beneficial for us all to discuss this.” A couple of faces look up at me this time. I wait, hoping I haven’t permanently damaged our fledgling relationship.

“I agree with David,” begins Kimberly, “I personally have been feeling that if I disagree with something taught in class, it is being taken as if I am not learning the course material. As if the democratic class works until there is a disagreement between students and the teacher or the book or some statistics. Funding doesn’t seem to be something that the entire class is going to agree on, and it seems as if the disagreement isn’t necessarily ok.”

“Thank you, Kimberly, for speaking up.” Even as I say this, I cringe inside wanting some kind of emergency to occur where we all have to leave the building quickly. I try to view this as constructive criticism, but I’m having a hard time not taking this as a personal attack.

“Angela, I took the extra reading personally,” David says in a less angry tone this time. His use of my first name draws my attention again. Is he using my first name to undermine my authority or to imply a more trusting relationship? Again, everything I’ve been taught about being a teacher rebels against anything that falls outside the notion of traditional teaching and

teacher-student relationships. “Not because I mind doing extra work, but because I feel that if we had agreed with your views from the start, then these readings would not have been assigned.”

“We understand what you are trying to say,” implores Amy compassionately. “We understand how important you feel money is to schools, and I think we agree that money is important. Teachers, while most are good people, do not work for free, and schools do not repair or clean themselves. Where I think many of us disagree is when money is made out to be the critical factor when it comes to academic performance, and more money will inevitably equal high performance and a more equal society.” As Amy finishes, I look around and see students nodding their heads in agreement.

“Let me give you an example of what Amy’s trying to say,” explains Jason. “In high school, I dated a girl from a very wealthy family. Money most of us cannot dream of. How I landed this girl, I don’t know.” At this statement, a few of the girls in class laugh and then blush. “Her family had 3 houses in Toronto, all of them with indoor/outdoor pools, clay tennis courts, and a Mercedes in the garage. When the girl got sad though, her parents would buy her something, give her money, a car, clothes, jewelry. She would smile, and be happy again, for a few days. Sooner rather than later she would be sad again, sad that her parents gave her no attention, sad about the pressure to live up to her family standards, sad that her mom was having an affair. By giving her money her parents were putting a band aid on a much larger cut, and it would always bleed through. There were so many issues in her life that money could do nothing to solve until the deeper issues were solved first.” Jason’s explanation of how he is thinking of funding and education helps me understand how students use personal experiences to construct

meaning. So providing more funding to schools is a paternalistic act where money can't buy happiness, and too much money may in fact create problems where there were none.

"I'm going to have to disagree with you, Jason." Thankfully, Jackie is willing to address this example. I was worried for a moment that everyone agreed with this paternalistic conceptualization of inequality. "As I've stated before, I believe that the lack of funding is only a part of the problem. However, I think you may be underestimating its importance. Funding is important because it's the easiest way to try to make a difference on an administrative level. It's great to think that we can make teachers inspire children better, or make children go out and get a desire to learn, but we can't do that as easily as we can throw money at schools and hope for the best. I agree that this will not solve the problem, but here's how it can help. More jobs than ever before require the use of computers, and there are a lot of opportunities in high-tech jobs these days. If a school is not appropriately funded, then the students there are at a distinct disadvantage in these areas when other students have had the resources to learn early. Essentially, they are denied access to them. It may be the American dream to pull yourself up by your boot straps and overcome adversity to succeed, but it is unfair to expect everyone who is not wealthy to have to struggle. What are we supposed to tell the children who attend these under-funded schools and their parents?"

"Why can't we just learn about the facts in this class? Leave out all the opinions and bias. Every reading in this course is biased, trying to influence us to think a particular way about an issue," asserts Andrea. Andrea always brings up this point in class. She argues strongly for the notion that education can be neutral and is convinced that there is a liberal bias in this university.

Ignoring Andrea's accusations altogether, Christy returns to my original question. "Well, I'm not terribly concerned about the extra reading," explains Christy, "but I am having trouble with the way discussions are conducted in class, though. I definitely get the feeling that if I disagree or even take issue with some of the ideas presented in class, it's perceived that I am naive, sheltered, or somehow, just don't get it. Or, worse, that I am somehow unsympathetic to the plight of the poor child." I knew this was coming. Christy and I went head-to-head in last week's class over this issue. But her statement gives me pause. Am I trying to win them over to my point of view? And if so, am I hiding behind a cloak of objectivity and neutrality?

"Let me give you an example of what I mean." At this, Christy pulls her graded essay from her backpack and flips to the last page. Uh-oh, this can't be good. Christy pulls out her essay with a look on her face like she's been waiting for this moment. "When I had to write about my ideas on funding I wrote this:

While I believe that inadequate funding is a serious issue in our country's poor schools, I don't necessarily believe that simply pouring more money into the school districts is a good solution. As far as I know, there's no guarantee that the taxpayers' money will be used efficiently or effectively. Instead, I think the division of tax money should be restructured. I think a good solution would be to put more support into programs that are proven to be effective, such as Head Start, or various after-school programs. This strategy is proactive rather than reactive, because it heads off the consequences of poor education rather than trying to deal with the problems after they occur.

And Angela wrote this in response: "And meanwhile, while we're questioning whether or not poor school districts are capable of using their money effectively and efficiently, living,

breathing children are being affected.’ This is what I mean, about the implication that I don’t get it, or don’t care. I am fully and completely aware of the miserable conditions that poor children are subjected to, and I don’t need to be reminded that they exist. I have spent the last two years teaching four-year-olds who are very, very, poor, and believe me, I care.”

Ouch! There’s nothing like having your words flung right back at you. But perhaps I deserved that. Sometimes I write comments on students’ essays because I’m responding emotionally to what they’ve written. I don’t always consider that my words can hurt them as well, position them as uncaring or uninformed. I wonder what my other students are thinking about right now? How are they interpreting this series of events in the classroom? I’m not quite ready to be that open and honest with them to ask because I don’t know if I really want to know the answer.

“Sometimes I feel like this class is so depressing. Why can’t we ever just focus on what works in teaching and education? That would be helpful.” George is emphatic in this point every class. Just focus on something that is practical and will help him become a better teacher. I often think of this as “George’s toolbox.”

“What if there isn't an easy answer to what works?” I respond. “What if there isn't a ‘how-to?’ I'm sure that's not the response you're looking for, but what if we looked at models that worked, but only worked in those particular contexts? What if we couldn't apply them to other contexts?”

David seizes hold of this point and emotionally responds, “So are you saying we shouldn't discuss what ‘works’ because there is no clear cut answer? We have certainly NOT

come up with any clear cut answer for why any of these systems don't work either. We haven't come up with an answer for funding, vouchers, tracking, race, culture, etc., but we have only been looking at these topics through the negatives, the problems. If we were to examine both systems that work, and systems that don't work we still will probably not have any clear cut answers, but I am sure we would have a better understanding then we get from just looking at all the negatives.”

Feeling defensive again as my curriculum is attacked I reply, “In the movie, *Children in America's Schools*, we clearly saw schools that were working and were doing a great job providing opportunities for students. The reading on reforms talked about the Kentucky Education Reform Act as an ‘example’ to how reform can work. Janice Hale's reading talked about a model to address the lack of achievement for African American children. Both James Banks and Sonia Nieto support multicultural education for all students to address some of the issues we've been talking about, but it would be difficult to present a fixed model for these ideas - instead they give you ideas and guidelines. So I guess I'm not seeing that we've completely ignored some of the positive aspects of education. This is a social foundations of education course; it is our job to look critically at the social, political, historical and philosophical components of education. This is not a teacher or best methods course. There are courses out there that do what you'd like this class to do, but it's not this one. So while I appreciate your input, what you're asking for isn't what this class was designed to do. I understand that many students get frustrated at looking at what's wrong with school and society or as I'd like to phrase it, looking critically at school and society. It's frustrating for me as well.” I thought I was going to avoid another long tirade, but it seems this argument about the purpose of the class is one I

feel compelled to forcefully address given the precarious state of the field of foundations in teacher preparation programs.

After my last remark, David tears into his backpack looking for something. I groan inwardly as I see him pull out the class syllabus. “Obviously, since you are the teacher and I am the student I am not in too much of a position to argue the direction of the class,” he begins. “It is your class and you are welcome to take it in whatever direction you want. That being said, the course description is located here, and I really do not feel like we have followed this.” He clears his throat and begins reading from the syllabus:

Through class discussions, readings, lectures, films, and various assignments associated with the concept and pedagogy of a democratic classroom, we will explore the philosophical, historical, and social forces that shape education, (a) through a deeper recognition of the range of assumptions that are reflected in one’s own and other’s views of the nature and purposes of education, and (b) through a broader understanding of the historical roots of schooling and teaching in the United States as well as in other countries. Particular attention is given to teachers and the occupational and local, national, and global community contexts in which they work and live.

He stops, looks up and continues, “I do understand that in order to look at social foundations of education we do need to look at things with a critical eye; there is absolutely nothing wrong with this. I do agree that we have taken glances at positive aspects of education. I am simply trying to say that I feel as if we have spent MUCH more time discussing negative aspects and problem areas than we have anything else. I think these problems deserve our attention. I simply feel that a great way to come up with a better understanding of solutions to these problems is to look at schools that are dealing with these problems and doing a good job.

If I am going into the world of education I don't want to go into it with the feeling everything is bad. I would like to know that dealing with these problems is possible, that there is hope." Again, silence. I wait looking to someone else to speak. I am afraid if I address David's comments directly, it will be interpreted as if I am attempting to mute or silence dialogue in the classroom which directly challenges me.

After a couple of minutes of silence, Beth nervously laughs as she states, "Gee, I hope we're not being graded on what we say in the classroom." A few other students laugh as if she's joking, but I wonder if she really is. However, it's too late to continue as we're interrupted by the students who file into the classroom as their class is about to begin. As much as I wanted this class to end, I'm concerned with ending this way. "Let's continue this discussion next week. I want you to think about what we've talked about here today, and write down your thoughts. I'd like to collect these next week, but anonymously. Don't put your names on your papers. Better yet, type your thoughts, and I'll collect them at the end of the next class." With that final statement, I gather my materials quickly, and rush out to meet Deanna. Wait until Deanna hears about my class today.

Part Two

Angela and Deanna uncover the meaning of the democratic classroom

"Really? Was it that uncomfortable?" Deanna asks as I finish telling her all about my class. Actually, I didn't realize how uncomfortable it would feel just telling Deanna. I guess I was worried she would make some kind of judgment about my teaching ability. I wonder if this is what prohibits colleagues from engaging in the process of sharing their experiences in the classroom, particularly when those experiences are problematic or fraught with conflict.

“It was definitely uncomfortable. I felt like I was being constrained by how I thought I *should* act in the classroom. It was difficult in the moment to react or think differently.”

“Well, what about now? What do you think about what happened after the moment? Was today’s class a result of becoming a democratic classroom?”

“I think that we have definitely created a different culture in our classrooms. Why don’t we start by reviewing our conceptualization of the democratic classroom.” Deanna nods in agreement.

“Let’s start with how we think about education and democracy,” Deanna begins. “We wanted to make the distinction between educating *for* a democracy in which citizens work to strengthen democratic ideals and educating *in* a democracy, where procedural models of power sharing take precedence²⁹.”

“I agree, Deanna, but we also wanted to acknowledge that educating for a democracy must address issues of empowerment and access³⁰. Here we drew on Henry Giroux to imagine what educating for democracy might look like when it is tied to empowerment and access. Giroux believed:

‘[I]t must begin with the assumption that its major aim is not ‘to fit’ students into the existing society; instead, its primary purpose must be to stimulate their passions, imaginations, and intellects so that they will be moved to challenge the social, political, and economic forces that weight so heavily upon their lives. In other words, students should be educated to display civic courage, i.e., the willingness to act *as if* they were living in a democratic society. At its core, this form of education is political, and its goal

²⁹ Bradshaw, 2004

³⁰ Kreisberg, 1992; Clark, 1993

is a genuine democratic society, one that is responsive to the needs of all and not just of a privileged few³¹.’

So for us as instructors,” I pause, thinking this through, “educating for a democracy means actively living out the principles of democracy in the classroom, pushing students to engage critically with ideas, and challenging their notion of the status quo.”

“Exactly!” agrees Deanna. “And remember, ‘making schools democratic is not so that they reflect a democratic society, which they often do not, but rather so that they challenge a society with democratic ideals to put them into practice³².’”

“This is also what Amy Gutmann believes,” I add. “She states, ‘the burden of a democratic theory of education is to show how, with the proper will, we could restructure American society to approach the democratic ideal, even if we never realize it entirely³³.’ Further, Deanna, we wanted the democratic classroom to reflect principles of cultural democracy. We defined cultural democracy as ‘the goal of living in a society in which a multiplicity of cultures not only coexists but thrives³⁴.’”

“And ‘from this perspective, monocultural norms and practices must be rejected in favor of a restructuring of cultural and social processes that are broadly inclusive³⁵’ So, I think, Angela, one of the goals of cultural democracy is to challenge the dominant cultural practices in educational settings.”

“But cultural democracy,” I posit, “is more, right? It’s also about culturally relevant pedagogy. Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) define cultural democracy as, ‘a philosophical precept which recognizes that the way a person communicates and relates to others, seeks support and

³¹ Giroux, 2001, p. 201

³² Nieto, 1995, p. 205

³³ Gutmann, 2001, p. 228

³⁴ Guy, 1999, p. 13

³⁵ p. 14

recognition from his environment and thinks and learns is a product of the value system of his home and community³⁶.

“Building on that idea, Angela, cultural democracy then rejects a ‘common culture or ‘monoculturalism. So the principles of cultural democracy reject the goal for citizens to adopt one shared culture while being forced to abandon others.”

“Great point, Deanna! Therefore we can’t ignore the notion that students and teachers need to understand the role of dominant and marginalized cultures in society.”

“I agree,” Deanna adds. “So these first three principles of cultural democracy – culturally relevant pedagogy, rejection of monoculturalism, and recognition of dominant and dominated cultures – are all intertwined. Is that all cultural democracy is?”

“It’s also about agency.” I assert. “Students have a role in their education and the construction of knowledge. Further, the principles of cultural democracy obviate against the acceptance that knowledge and knowledge making are neutral endeavors. Ira Shor rejects the notion that education itself is a neutral practice. He says:

No knowledge or teaching can be neutral because all emerge from some ideological position in society and all influence the development of students in one direction or another. To influence human development is to make political choices about what kind of people and society we should be. In essence, all formal education is politically oriented learning that is organized and directed by one kind of authority or another³⁷.”

“Building on that,” agrees Deanna, “the idea that education should incorporate multiple perspectives is implicit in the notion of cultural democracy. ‘Democracy in education can occur

³⁶ Ramirez and Castaneda, 1974, p. 23

³⁷ Shor, 1996, p. 56

only within a teaching-learning environment that provides opportunities for the articulation and analysis of multiple sociocultural experiences³⁸.”

“Ok, Deanna, so far we’ve addressed our conceptualization of educating for a democracy as well as the principles of cultural democracy. I think we also should recognize that the concept of the democratic classroom is a contested notion and not embraced by all social foundation scholars. Are we ready to look at the pedagogical trope³⁹ we gave to our students, *On Becoming a Democratic Classroom*?” Deanna flips through her binder with our readings for class, stopping when she comes to the pedagogical trope. “Let me get my copy out too so we can look over it together.” I pull my copy out of my binder of classroom readings as well. We gave our students this pedagogical trope because we believed we needed to introduce to students the way in which we imagined a classroom which reflected principles of deliberative and cultural democracy would look and feel. The pedagogical trope invited students to imagine how they might ‘be’ in our classrooms and reminded them that what they thought and said mattered, that knowledge was socially constructed through dialogic activity.

“Well,” started Deanna skimming over the pedagogical trope, “we asked students to: (1) engage in the shared learning of the class, (2) be authentic, (3) warrant positions, (4) strive for balanced participation, (5) care about the health of the group, (6) push for intellectual reasoning, and (7) become active members in the classroom community⁴⁰.”

³⁸ Colin & Heaney, 2001

³⁹ According to Garman (2004), “in poststructural terms, tropes are particular words that are crafted to construct language text for the purpose of emergent knowledge, and, as such, they provide situations of struggle.” Therefore, pedagogical tropes are “intended to be pedagogical possibilities for learners to help them come to an understanding of a conceptual basis for how they might struggle to engage in complex dialectic, deliberative modes of learning.”

(1)

⁴⁰ After our first semester as a democratic classroom, we revised the pedagogical trope. In the revision, we added another imperative, “to consider issues of social justice.” However for this Episode, I focus on the original conceptualization as embodied in the first pedagogical trope. See Appendix C for the full text of the pedagogical trope.

“Deanna, if I can step back from my own personal pride surrounding today’s class, it’s clear that something happened that hasn’t happened to me in the classroom before. Students were willing to risk in my classroom. Look, right here in the pedagogical trope.” I point out a section in the pedagogical trope and begin reading aloud, “As the democratic class continues to evolve, members begin to feel more secure and their contributions may not be seen so much as high risk responses. Most important, group members begin to feel as if they can deal with one another “honestly,” transcending the tendencies to save face or give lip service to ideas. Thus, one important characteristic of a democratic classroom is authenticity.’⁴¹ I guess one of the positive aspects of today’s class was that I’ve made progress in creating an environment in which students felt comfortable enough to critique the class, its objectives as well as to point out the inconsistencies in what I said I was going to do and what actually happened.”

“What do you mean by that, Angela? What inconsistencies?”

“Well, we say in the pedagogical trope that a democratic classroom values multiple perspectives. But the students were pointing out to me that they didn’t feel as if this was true, that I didn’t really value perspectives that differed greatly from my own. This made me really think about whether or not we are encouraging multiple perspectives or just a range of perspectives I find tolerable.”

“That’s a great point, Angela! Students are wary of us when we say, ‘tell us what you really think, not what you think I want to hear.’ You and I have been in many classes in which so-called ‘deliberation’ had been used as a technique to bring students around to the professor’s particular perspective.”

⁴¹ Garman, 2004, pp. 5-6

“You’re right, Deanna. I was thinking that very thought in the classroom today. I was thinking that I know what these students are feeling because it mirrored my own experiences with professors who claimed to promote multiple perspectives and then reneged on their promise to do so. But I’ve found something else with the notion of encouraging honest dialogue in the classroom to be even more problematic for me as an instructor. You know, before we embraced the idea of the democratic classroom, I had a hunch students were holding back during discussions. Yet now it seems as if we’ve opened the floodgate, and I’m faced with different dilemmas as students are brutally honest about how they think and feel about education and society.”

“But at least now,” begins Deanna, “we can address the ideas and beliefs they hold, confront them, challenge them. Before, we could address them only in the abstract.”

“I agree, Deanna, but now there are other dilemmas associated with the democratic classroom. In the pedagogical trope, we ask students also to engage in the shared learning of the group as well as to care for the health of the group. We work to set up an environment in which students feel safe and secure, but our role often feels confrontational. A democratic classroom also requires us to push intellectual reasoning to insightful and theoretic levels, and in order to do this, we often have to challenge students about their own beliefs and perspectives. We have to challenge the way in which they view the world.”

“That’s what’s so difficult about this. Sometimes I feel like a villain,” confesses Deanna. “I want to create an environment where students feel secure enough to say what they’re really thinking, but at the same time, I know I can’t let ideas go unchallenged. And when you’re challenging the very way in which students see the world, you’re placing them in a very uncomfortable place. Is it a set-up?”

I start to answer, then pauses for a moment, thinking about the question. “That’s a good question. We encourage students to contribute to the classroom dialogue, and make participation part of their grade. Do we lie in wait for the unsuspecting student to express a particular perspective we want to silence and/or critique? Or assign an extra reading which further supports your own perspective.” I can feel myself blush even as I say this.

“Look at it this way, Angela. If we weren’t engaged in the process of becoming a democratic classroom, we wouldn’t even be having this conversation. We’d go on teaching and purporting to value multiple perspectives, all the while silencing students and their perspectives without even questioning our right to do so. That’s what so great about this process for us as instructors. We can’t turn a blind eye to our practices in the classroom because we have made our pedagogy transparent for our students. The pedagogical trope is like a contract, and the students are holding us to it.”

“I guess that’s what is unsettling for me. My background as a K-12 teacher has reinforced for me certain norms about what it means to be a teacher. One of those norms is authority and power. But what we’re trying to do in the democratic classroom is emphasize that both teachers and students co-construct knowledge. The lines of authority are blurred.”

“But don’t forget what Beth said in your class about being graded on what they say. This is like a ‘catch-22,’ for us. As you said before, in order for students to feel comfortable in expressing their perspectives in the classroom, we have to be able to ensure that they are not penalized for their perspectives. On the other hand, to imply that we are somehow neutral and completely objective when it comes to evaluation is contrary to the very foundation of our classroom; knowledge and schooling are not neutral endeavors.”

“Maybe these lines are only blurred for us, but our students seem to recognize that we still have the power and authority in the democratic classroom. David pointed this out to me as well when he said, ‘It is your class and you are welcome to take it in whatever direction you want.’ Maybe the students are ‘testing the waters,’ pushing the limits, to see how much power they have in the classroom as well. I think this is one of the tensions in the democratic classroom. We as a group chose to define the democratic classroom as something other than a ‘majority-rule’ concept. This was one of the other teaching fellow’s concern. Remember what our co-teaching fellow, Audrey, said.” I flip through the trope to a footnote taken from an email Audrey wrote to the group.

While I agree that deliberation is also a crucial part of democracy(...) Deliberation alone doesn’t necessarily constitute democracy. Because so many things are purported to be ‘democratic’ these days, I guess I feel extra sensitive that people’s ability to move from deliberation to action, with the power to back up their decisions, is critical, and I don’t want to throw around the term, democratic, if I’m talking about a setting in which most of the formal control is largely unaccountable to the group. I see our class as fostering, even fomenting deliberation which is crucial to democracy, but is not democratic in and of itself. I guess the sticking point for me was my concern about representing our classrooms as democratic when the collective decision making aspect of democracy is absent from them⁴².

“And we agreed this was a tension, Angela. We even address this up front with our students when we introduce the concept of the democratic classroom to them, but I still struggle with this.”

⁴² p. 7

“I do as well, Deanna, however, I’m not sure most of what we’re talking about here today is ever supposed to be solved or mastered. The democratic classroom is a continuous struggle; it’s not a static or formulaic idea, but rather, a fluid, continuous process.”

“The process of becoming a democratic classroom,” Deanna continues, “has reinforced for me the belief in reflective pedagogy and the support of other instructors in the field. As instructors, we need to be critical thinkers, self-reflective practitioners, and agents for social justice.”

“Becoming a democratic classroom has allowed us to explore and contest our own pedagogy, including our curriculum choices. Sometimes it is an uncomfortable process.”

At this Deanna pauses and smiles at me. “But has it been worth it?”

“Deanna, I think these dilemmas were always there, simmering beneath the surface. Becoming a democratic classroom has allowed us to peel back the layers and view what lies beneath so that we can engage and wrestle with these complex ideas. I think it has been challenging, but rewarding as well.”

5.2 VIGNETTE #2 - COUNTERING NEUTRALITY

Part One

“Ms. Minnici, I need to speak with you.”

I turn around to see Pamela, one of my students standing in the doorway of my office. “Come on in, Pamela, and have a seat.” I motion for Pamela to sit next to me at my desk. Her visit is unexpected. Pamela’s often very quiet during class, and I haven’t quite been able to figure out how she’s getting along in the class. I wonder sometimes if she feels comfortable participating. I have always been a student who likes to participate in classes so I sometimes assume if a student isn’t participating they’re either uncomfortable or uninterested, yet I know it isn’t this simple. “What brings you here today?” At my question, Pamela looks down and begins folding and unfolding her hands. I get a sense that she wants to say something to me, but is feeling uncomfortable.

“Well, I...” She pauses for a moment, takes a deep breath and begins, “something’s been bothering me about class and I want to bring it up with you.”

“Tell me what’s on your mind.”

“It seems in class that you and the moderator of the day are always guiding us with your own opinions. I do not believe that students can feel the environment is truly democratic in a discussion-based class when the person in charge continually voices what he or she thinks is the right opinion.”

While this catches me off-guard, it's not a new argument. I've heard this one many times before. And I too have felt unsure of what my role in the classroom should be. As a former K-12 educator, my traditional education had also reinforced this same understanding for me; effective teachers are facilitators who avoid voicing their own opinions in the classroom. Many times in my own educational experiences as a teacher I held back voicing my opinions for fear that I would somehow violate what I perceived to be appropriate teaching and pedagogy. I also understand this notion from a student's perspective. In both my undergraduate and graduate education, I sometimes felt as if the professor was looking for a particular perspective in both my oral and written work. I think of it as the 'guess my answer' or 'guess my perspective' quiz. And there were times when I felt I was penalized as a student for having a perspective different from the professor's. I don't know if that was really the case or if it was just how I felt. But this is problematic for me. "Let me honest with you, Pamela. I sometimes feel it is a dilemma too. As an instructor, I am torn between saying too much and not saying enough? Does this make sense? I very much want to voice my opinions on certain topics, but the goal is not to make it seem as if my opinions are the truth. But at the same time, I don't want to be silent."

At this, Pamela looks up at me and counters, "I disagree that your opinions should ever be voiced. You are our teacher; you lead the class and you determine our grades. If we are to feel that every opinion is encouraged, the person in power should only ever guide and not offer opinions. Not only does it create an uncomfortable learning environment, but it is incredibly unprofessional. Teachers should present information, not personal opinions." As she finishes, I'm stung by her use of the term unprofessional and flounder for a response. I attempt to remain calm and reply in what I perceive to be a more academic way:

“Pamela, this reminds me of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Your view point here is quite pertinent to that piece of literature. In *Pedagogy*, he describes the oppressive educational system as that of a ‘banking’ system where teachers just ‘deposit’ information into the heads of students. My professional opinion based on experience is that the role of the teacher is not as a depositer of knowledge but as a facilitator. Additionally, this class is about multiple perspectives. Does my perspective not count? Am I to refrain from contributing to the conversation?” I take a deep breath realizing that I am taking Pamela’s concerns personally. I have to acknowledge it took a great deal of courage to address this to me publicly, and therefore it must be very important for her to voice these concerns. I also remind myself of my experiences as a student, how I thought I was often being penalized when my perspective was different from the professor’s. I begin again more gently this time, “I am not grading you based on your perspectives. Students do not get A's in my class because they think like me. Perhaps this has been your experience as it has been mine in the past. As Paul Gorski⁴³ reminds us, experience ultimately determines our lens. Teachers are human beings who think and make decisions based on values. What you are suggesting in my professional opinion is impossible and quite frankly not desirable. I want students to be critical thinkers. And I'm not comfortable telling students the ‘facts’ because this implies I am in possession of the truth. In this class, I believe there are many truths and that they may conflict with one another.” I sit back in my chair waiting for Pamela to respond. She is visibly agitated and asserts,

“We have had several sessions where many students voiced opinions on a certain side, and then you voiced a personal opinion. My classmates seemed to shrink away and stopped talking. While you as a teacher are entitled to have opinions, no amount of preaching a

⁴³ Gorski, P. (2001)

democratic classroom will make us feel like you don't have more power than us. If you are facilitating a conversation, I think it takes away from your credibility as a facilitator to take a particular side. If we are to think critically, to have a person in a position of power express an opinion can inhibit our ability to equally consider different sides of an argument. And on the most basic level, it creates the sort of classroom environment that makes me want to stay home.” As she concludes, Pamela abruptly jumps up out of her seat and runs out of the office before I can even respond. I’m left thinking about Pamela’s observations, particularly those which imply that I am silencing other’s perspectives when I voice my own. I sit there somewhat shocked as Deanna peaks her head in the door.

“What was that all about? I almost got run over.” Deanna smiles and then slowly walks in the office

Part Two

Angela and Deanna debunk the myth of neutrality

“We seem to always face this dilemma,” Deanna acknowledges as I finish telling her about my conversation with Pamela. “But we know that knowledge and knowledge making are not neutral endeavors. So why is this so difficult to counter?”

“Well the cultural context today,” I begin “reifies this notion. ‘In this pseudo-neutral culture of functionalism, schooling is depicted as an objective purveyor of truth. In such a culture, educators ignore the social construction of knowledge and the dramatic role that forces a power play in knowledge construction.’⁴⁴”

⁴⁴ Kincheloe, 1999, p. 75

“The cultural context today, especially the mantra of ‘fair and balanced,’ definitely plays a role,” agrees Deanna. “But I also think it’s how schooling and knowledge production are presented in education itself.”

“I agree. Shor tells us that when a curriculum ‘does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society’, then we are in fact informing students that ‘knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are.’⁴⁵ And our students are conditioned to this after spending the majority of their lives in school. Furthermore, Deanna, ‘to socialize students, education tries to teach them the shape of knowledge and current society, the meaning of past events, the possibilities for the future, and their place in the world they live in. In forming the students’ conception of self and the world, teachers can present knowledge in several ways, as a celebration of the existing society, as a falsely neutral avoidance of problems rooted in the system, or as a critical inquiry into power and knowledge as they relate to student experience.’⁴⁶ Education today is least likely to present knowledge as something that students and teachers construct together.”

“Or as something related to student experience,” Deanna interjects. “I wonder, Angela, then if there are particular reasons that teachers fiercely claim to be neutral, unbiased and objective?”

“That’s a great question, Deanna. We would both agree that ‘education is political, and that the very act of viewing education as neutral and devoid of politics is, in fact, a political act’⁴⁷.’ Even when we choose not to discuss something...”

“Or not to express our opinion,” Deanna interrupts, eyes twinkling.

⁴⁵ 1992, p. 12

⁴⁶ p. 14

⁴⁷ Macedo, 1995, p.

“Or not to express *my* opinion,” I briefly hesitate and continue, “then we are making a political decision, not a neutral one. For example, I think it was an article written by Agostine-Wilson which examined how we think about political acts in the classroom.⁴⁸ She wrote about how the decision to put up a sticker in the classroom that says ‘Support Our Troops,’ or to hand a yellow ribbon or a flag in the classroom is often not seen as a political act. But if you put a peace sign in the classroom, you are suddenly making a political, non-neutral statement.”

“This points to the status quo, Angela. What is really thought of as neutral knowledge is what is the official or dominant discourse of society.”

“Let’s examine that closer, Deanna. Apple claims that ‘the curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge.’⁴⁹ He believes that ‘the decision to define some groups’ knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups’ knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society.⁵⁰”

“Exactly!” agrees Deanna.

Neutrality is just a ‘code word for the existing system. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be – that’s what neutrality is. Neutrality is just following the crowd. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be⁵¹.’”

Angela and Deanna wrestle with power in the classroom

“So now, Deanna, we can begin to understand why the belief in neutral knowledge and neutral teaching is strongly rooted in society and particularly in education; it’s part of the dominant discourse of society. But I think Pamela also addressed some of the dilemmas we’ve

⁴⁸ Agostine-Wilson, 2005

⁴⁹ Apple, 1993, p. 222

⁵⁰ p. 29

⁵¹ Horton, 1990, p. 102

discussed about silencing, muting and affirming students' speech in the classroom. There are as Glass claims, 'ethical remainders'⁵² that we as teachers have to contend with if we view perspectives not in the abstract but as voiced by real students. We cannot ignore our position of power in the classroom."

"I think we have to be careful to remember that we are not just countering perspectives in the abstract, Angela. These perspectives are espoused by students."

"Deanna," I pause thinking about how to respond. "I think that as instructors in the democratic classroom, we have to be careful and make clear to students our perspective."

"Why is that?"

"Well, there is a danger in relying too heavily on students to speak for us, to express both anti-oppressive perspectives as well as dominant ones. If we allow only students to express the perspectives, we can affirm some and silence or negate others. In this scenario, we can simply sit back and regulate speech so that our own perspectives get expressed by students as if they were simply vessels to be exploited and used for our own agendas. This is troubling to me, Deanna"

"And in the field of social foundations, Angela, where professors are suspected of rewarding students for certain perspectives (i.e., the so-called liberal bias), we might benefit from being upfront about our agenda, and speaking for ourselves."

"I agree, Deanna. It's a balancing act sometimes. I mean, sometimes students say things in the classroom which are oppressive, but if I silence that student's perspective outright, will there be a chance to change the student's perspective?"

"Well, Angela, are we supposed to be changing student's perspectives?"

⁵² Glass, 2004

“I think that our actions have to be guided by principles of social justice. We should not sit back and not challenge perspectives that would oppress, marginalize or denigrate others. The democratic classroom is not merely a space for espousing perspectives. It is not only about creating an environment where students feel comfortable to say whatever they really believe. It is a space of contestation as well. Ideas need to be challenged and interrogated. We have to ask, discussion and dialogue for what purpose? I mean, one misconception about discussion and dialogue is that it is the cure to all ills, right?”

“That’s right, Angela. Remember Allison Jones⁵³ at the 2005 AERA presentation in Montreal questioned ‘the talking cure’ and lamented the onus on marginalized groups when they are expected to educate the dominant culture. So ideas must be challenged in the democratic classroom, even those that we feel affirm diversity and uphold the ideals of social justice.”

“Exactly! Deanna, as instructors, we may believe we are ‘fighting the good fight’, but there is a danger in positioning oneself as the defender of all that is just; it sets up a particularly troubling dichotomy that suggests that all else (and all others) are unjust and bad. The power we have in the classroom is something we cannot just acknowledge and move on. We have to continually wrestle with it and question our own beliefs and ideas that we bring with us in the classroom. Further, we need to reflect on how our own actions in the classroom impact our students. Without rigorous examination of our practice, we may in fact unintentionally reinforce instead of purposely challenge the status quo.”

⁵³ See Jones, 2004 for further discussion.

5.3 VIGNETTE #3 - CONFRONTING THE PERSONAL

Part One

It's ten minutes before class, and I'm sitting in my office. We're going to talk about multicultural education today, and I can't shake the feeling that my identity is problematic. How can a white, privileged woman who never even thought about the gender, race or ethnicity of a single author in her high school curriculum teach multicultural education? I never had a non-white friend in high school.... Oh, let me take that back. I did have a friend who was Vietnamese, but I never even thought of that until now. I just remember always thinking her name was strange (it was Thi). I guess the point is I never even thought about race, ethnicity or gender. I certainly thought about class because where I grew up, money and status were very important. I grew up in a predominantly upper middle and high class neighborhood where money and status was emphasized in the community as well as in the schools I attended. We lived in the "poorer" section of the community which probably in another community would have been a middle class neighborhood. While I never lacked for any of the basic necessities, and we took one vacation a year to fairly exotic places (e.g. Hawaii, St. Thomas), we did not have money to spare. My parents did not buy me the most expensive brand names like Guess and Hilfiger, and I didn't have a Coach handbag. These status symbols were very important in school, particularly middle and high school, and I faced peer pressure to conform. These memories of class are very vivid for me, and I even remember stealing my father's credit card and hiding the bills when they came in. I wanted to buy the clothes with the brand names and the Coach handbag to try and fit in. Class was very important and noticeable.

“Angela, do you have your copy of *American Education*⁵⁴?” Deanna’s question reminds me that class is starting in five minutes. I lost track of time as I was reflecting on my past experiences. “I think I forgot it at home. Are you ready? It’s getting late.” We gather our belongings and walk down the long, common hall towards our rooms, promising to debrief afterwards as we always do. As I walk into the room, the students are frantically scanning over the reading for today. “Good afternoon everyone. Are we ready to start?” Several heads nod yes. “Today we are discussing multicultural education. Who would like to begin today?” Christy raises her hand eagerly.

“I would like to talk about multicultural education and the status quo. Should multicultural education replace some of the ‘traditional’ things that we are being taught in school?”

Lindsay jumps in with, “I think so. Who decided that Shakespeare had to be studied? Or that a unit on Nathaniel Hawthorne was necessary? Would our children truly not be able to function in today’s society without a deep knowledge of them?”

“I should hope not,” responds Gail, “but if so, that says something about the way that we think the world works and who we, as a society, value. And while it is true that children can learn from everyone’s experiences, not just people who look like them, omitting segments of the population, or bringing them up once a year as a special event marginalizes that group of students, and that can help deteriorate the students’ self-image, and in a more homogeneous community, lull them into a false sense of the world.”

Paul, who often dominates the classroom discussion, quickly responds, “Shakespeare is in the canon because he is almost the very beginning of the rise of the idea of the individual in

⁵⁴ Spring, 2002

the Western mind. His thought is far more modern than most of his contemporaries. For example, it is evident in Shakespeare that he has grave doubts as to the existence of God. He mulls these issues over, weighing multiple points of view against each other, virtually creating the internal dialogue as depicted in Western literature. People don't often teach Shakespeare in context, so people miss this. He, whoever *he* was, shaped not only our literature, he shaped the way we think. After Homer, and the author of the first five books of the Bible, we have Shakespeare holding third place for influence of the Western Mind. That's why he is taught. It is about wrestling with the idea of the meaning of life, and our context in society. This is always relevant, in all societies, for all persons. Can we get off the poor dead bard's case already?!?! There are plenty of other fatuous dead white guys to pick on, if that should be your particular academic mission. I strongly suggest that windbag Dickens.”

Eyes roll during Paul's monologue. Most of the students have learned to either ignore Paul or not react to his statements. I'm not sure what to make of Paul. While he often positions himself as the expert and mentor to his peers (due in part to the fact that he's older than them), he's one of the few students who does not ground his responses solely in personal experience. I want to encourage other students to warrant their positions but realize warrants can also be used as weapons to silence and oppress others. This is a dilemma I haven't yet resolved.

Again, before I have a chance to probe some of the students' thoughts, Abby begins, “I appreciated that insight into Shakespeare, Paul. Thanks. Now does anyone have personal experiences to share about how not learning much from other cultural perspectives impacted their self image or world view? Once again, I'm having trouble relating and would like to get a better insight into how this affects students, rather than having it be an abstract concept.”

Ah, here we go again. We always come back to personal experience. Both the absence and presence of personal experience are problematic in the social foundations classroom. While personal experience is important and a legitimate source of knowledge, it can also be used to deligitimize ideas. But I am reminded that my own personal experiences are probably similar to my students so why do I think differently about these ideas? Are my reactions to their statements somehow grounded in my own personal experiences? Now, how to respond to Abby? Often she has challenged the status quo when it comes to religion and education as she has divulged personal information about her identity as a Jewish woman. Should I make the connection here for her as she has before when others have attempted to pose Christianity as the norm? Instead, regrettably, I avoid drawing on her experience and identity (maybe because it's about religion) and pose a more general question. "Abby, does the absence of personal experience make it difficult for you to understand many of the issues we are attempting to address here? How does your identity as a white female make it difficult for you to understand how curriculum, for example the canon, can privilege a particular group's values and experiences?" I wish I had brought her identity as a Jewish woman into the conversation. Why did I lose my courage?

"I think the lack of personal experience makes it hard for me to understand some of the issues we discuss in here. Remember when we were talking about funding inequities when we read *Savage Inequalities*⁵⁵. After reading the book, I thought to myself, do children there in that kind of school really exist?"

"Why is your personal experience even relevant? As future teachers, we need to ground our understandings in the objective, not subjective," replies Andrea.

⁵⁵ Kozol, 1991

Laurie jumps into the conversation now. “I disagree, Andrea. What else can we draw on but our own personal experience. What was going on in East St. Louis was so far out of my realm of experiences that I don’t quite know how to deal with it.”

“I know exactly what you mean,” Jack replies. “It’s kind of like starving kids; you know they are hungry, but really can’t understand their situation if you have always had food.”

There’s lots of agreement after this statement, heads nodding, sympathetic expressions meant for one another. I am confused about how to counter these ideas, so I ask, “do we just need to take a leap of faith and believe that the quality of schooling in America is drastically diverse and unequal? Or do you need to visibly see with your own eyes a school in disrepair?” A couple of hands shoot up. “Susan, go ahead.”

“I’m sure there are some children who live in those horrible conditions but consider the families’ backgrounds of those kids.”

We always end up here. Someone is to blame. Susan didn’t say it out loud; she didn’t need to because it’s part of the white, middle class code. I interpret her statement to mean that some children - black and Latino children - may live in these conditions because their parents are poor and uneducated and what else can be expected. I have to remember to calm down because I know I thought like this at one time; those from privileged backgrounds understand one another because we share a common perspective, a common experience.

“I’m mystified how we always get sidetracked on these discussions. Look, we know poor kids exist and that we can educate them. What we should be focusing on in this class is identifying best practices to help educate those children. We don’t need to understand anything else; it’s that simple,” asserts George.

George's comments rouse me out of my thoughts. His argument is an old one and part of the discourse in teacher education today. The only thing we need to know in order to be an effective teacher is how to teach – the skills of teaching. I choose to respond to Susan knowing that there has been and will continue to be questions about the legitimacy of social foundations⁵⁶.

“So, Susan, even if we are able to see the very different conditions that students from different communities experience in schooling, it might not be enough? Would you have to almost experience this kind of life, face these kinds of struggles to understand?” To understand that being white and middle class have given you a tremendous lead in the race? I don't say this last thought out loud, but it's ringing in my ears. This argument is frustrating to me. How can I counter the lack of personal experience when my students come from such privileged environments? There is often an excuse when the students can not reconcile their own experiences with the diverse experiences of others. Silence; no one wants to tackle these ideas today. “Let's come back to the cannon debate we began with to relate these ideas to multicultural education. How can we understand very different experiences from our own? Or should we even attempt to understand them?”

Susan, reluctant to answer the previous question, feels more comfortable responding to this one. “I remember reading about the African American culture in some of my high school English classes. In particular, I remember reading parts of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. While it was good that I got exposed to different perspectives by reading the book, our class discussions surrounding the book were not at all in depth. Imagine a group of middle and upper class suburban white students trying to understand what it was like to live in a segregated city

⁵⁶ Hill, 2006

environment. While exposure to different cultural perspectives is important, it means nothing if it is not presented in the correct manner.”

This sounds like my high school experience. I can't imagine reading *Black Boy* in my school. Would our conversations have been stilted as we attempted to understand a very different experience? I hesitate, wanting to let students know I understand their dilemmas because they mirrored my own, but I don't want them to think that personal experience has to be a barrier (or can be used as a barrier) to learning, changing and growing. But I also don't want to position myself as “the good white,” attempting to divorce myself from my privilege and power. As usual, I'm mired down in the muck of personal experience (my own and my students') -- wanting to acknowledge its importance and legitimacy, but at the same time wanting to break free of its chains. Unfortunately, as I look down at my watch, time has run out. Our time to really discuss these issues in-depth always seems so limited.

Part Two

Angela and Deanna discuss the importance of critical consciousness raising

I leave the classroom mulling over today's exchanges. Sometimes I just feel like I want to push the rewind button and get a second chance to navigate the classroom dialogue. Luckily, as I reach the teaching fellows' office, Deanna is already there, grinning as she catches the look on my face. “So, your class went as well as mine?”

I don't say anything at first, trying to figure out how I would describe today's conversation. Sometimes I'm torn between wanting students to honestly engage in ideas in which they reveal their own assumptions and beliefs which influence the way in which they

make meaning in the world and wanting to silence or mute these discourses which I believe oppress others.

“That bad?”

Deanna’s prompting brings me back from my own introspection. “No, bad is not the word to describe it. It’s just troubling to me to feel at a loss pedagogically to address their perspectives. Sometimes I just feel like all I’m doing is providing students with a space to voice their prejudices. It’s like a script I can’t rewrite. I know it’s coming, but I feel powerless to change it. Like today – the students have a difficult time as usual, understanding experiences which are very diverse from their own. Most of these experiences reflect race and class differences. I don’t know how to counter this. Do you think what we’re doing, exposing students to different ideas, is enough? Jonathan Kozol⁵⁷, for example, claims we are more segregated than ever today. So I often wonder how can we teach about diversity and social justice when so many of our students are white, female and middle class? Furthermore, studies like The Education Trust’s report, *Gaining traction, gaining ground: How some high schools accelerate learning for struggling students?* and Edsource’s online study, *Similar students, different results: Why do some schools do better?* are confirming the importance of setting high expectations for students in understanding achievement gaps between white, middle class students and poor and/or non-white students. So if there is a mismatch between teacher candidates and the students they may one day teach, how can we begin to think about addressing the ideas our students bring with them into the classroom?”

“I think, Angela, that first, students need to think about who they are and what experiences they bring to the classroom.”

⁵⁷ Kozol, 1991.

“But I don’t think this is all students need.”

Deanna nods her head in agreement. “I think students need the tools to be able to not only question society but change it as well. How do you think we can do this?”

“Well,” I begin, “critical consciousness raising is one way in which students can begin to examine their own lives and the world they live in. Understanding privilege and how dominant ideology⁵⁸ works in society is a crucial step. Norman Fairclough discusses how ideological power operates in society. He describes this process as “the power to project one’s practices as universal and ‘common sense.’⁵⁹” Those in power strive to ‘impose an ideological common sense which holds for everyone⁶⁰.’ Fairclough also affirms that there are several ways in which individuals become aware of these common sense ideologies: when things go wrong in the discourse, when there is a sufficiently large social or cultural divide between participants in an exchange or by way of a ‘deliberate disturbance of common sense through some form of intervention in discourse⁶¹.’ He refers to this process as the ‘problematizations’ of contradictions⁶².”

“Can you give me an example of that idea, Angela, the problematizations of contradictions?”

“Sure, Deanna. For example, when women find themselves in occupations or roles which have traditionally been thought of as masculine, contradictions or dilemmas may occur which force them to discursively respond. I believe Fairclough’s theory is important in thinking

⁵⁸ Fairclough (2001) describes ideology as, “Institutional practices which people draw upon without thinking often embody assumptions which directly or indirectly legitimize existing power relations. Practices which appear to be universal and commonsensical can often be shown to originate in the dominant class or dominant bloc, and to have become naturalized” (p. 27).

⁵⁹ Fairclough, 2001, p. 27

⁶⁰ p. 71

⁶¹ p. 88

⁶² Fairclough, 1992, p. 96

about privilege. What is privileged in society (knowledge, groups of people, behavior, status, etc.) is what is thought of as common sense.”

“This reminds me of our favorite author, Tim Wise.” Deanna smiles as she says this thinking of the vivid conversations we have with our classes when we read his articles. “When he writes about white privilege, he asserts that white people take things for granted and consider these things as the norm. He describes this norming of society as:

[T]he ability to presume that your reality is the reality; that your experiences, if white, are universal, and not particular to your racial identity. It's the ability to assume that you belong and that others will presume that too; the ability to define reality for others, and expect that definition to stick (because you have the power to ensure that it becomes the dominant narrative). (...) It is Times New Roman font, one inch margins, left hand justified. In other words, it is the default position on the computer of American life.⁶³

“I love that description! It’s such a great metaphor for describing privilege.” I write a post-it note to myself to copy that description for my class.

Angela and Deanna propose the rewriting of scripts

“So, Angela, how do we begin to encourage consciousness raising in our classrooms?”

“Edmundson and Bushnell Greiner suggest that introducing students to theory in education courses is one way in which students can begin to question what is accepted as common sense in society and education. They believe ‘naming the theories we utilize in our

⁶³ Wise, 2004, n.p.#

daily lives can be an awakening experience for students who may come to college having been taught that their own lives have little to do with school knowledge.⁶⁴”

“But that’s not enough right?”

“You’re right, Deanna. Edmundson and Bushnell Greiner also contend that making students aware of theory is not enough. As they state:

We want students to be able to change their assumptions and change their actions in the world – and especially in the classroom. What good will it do them, or their future students, if they can name theory but are unable to rewrite the scripts through which they live and act in the world? Active use of theory involves a potential alteration of one’s attitude and being in the world. Thus, they need to be able to think about and analyze their actions within a framework that offers ethical guidelines as well as analytical ones. Students need to question the scripts in which they have lived, so as to recognize the subjectivity of such scripts and the potential to change them⁶⁵.

I’ve always thought that this is what we encourage students to do in our classes, Deanna. We ask them to begin with an examination of themselves in order to address inequity in society. However, as a social foundations teacher, can I encourage this oftentimes gut-wrenching process without knowing my students? As a former K-12 teacher, this has been the most difficult aspect of teaching in higher education for me. You only meet with students three hours per week. In one section of my multicultural education class last semester, one of my students refuted the importance of knowing your students’ culture - in particular, their religious background. In response to my questioning her statement, she replied that I in fact didn’t know the students in my college classroom very well either.”

⁶⁴ Edmundson and Bushnell Greiner, 2005, p. 152

⁶⁵ p. 152

Deanna smiles imagining my reaction to this student's accusation.

"I responded to her by addressing the difference in a college classroom course that only met half of a semester and an elementary classroom where you had eight hours a day for 180 days with your students. But I admitted it was important for me to know more about my students. How can we address this dilemma?"

"Maybe," Deanna pauses, "maybe we can't. Maybe we have to accept the fact that we have limited time with our students. We also may have to accept the fact that many of our students may not be ready to engage in the classroom in the way in which we want them to because they have had limited opportunity to do so. Magolda (1996) discusses the epistemological growth for undergraduate students, in which she concludes that students may not be ready to experience what she terms 'contextual knowing, the ability to judge evidence in a particular context as a process that determines knowledge.'⁶⁶ Students may not be ready to demonstrate contextual knowing because they have not had enough opportunities to engage in the kinds of experiences which offer them multiple occasions to practice deliberative, democratic dialogue. And many may not be able to because we have not built a strong enough relationship with our students where they trust us or the process."

"But I think we have to model the process for them too, Deanna. We have to be willing to expose ourselves, make ourselves vulnerable in the classroom. We have to model deliberative, democratic dialogue where we reveal our own assumptions and beliefs to our students and allow our students to question and critique our own ideas."

"I think this is a beginning, Angela. But let's admit it; it's challenging and uncomfortable for us too to go through this process."

⁶⁶ Magolda, 1994, p. 26

“I agree, Deanna. It is uncomfortable but necessary if we are to grow as educators ourselves.”

5.4 VIGNETTE #4 - ALL THE WHITE MOVES

Part One

“Are you nervous?” I glance up from the last minute reading I’m trying to get done right before class. Deanna and I are alone in the office, thinking about the upcoming class.

“Not really. I mean, I guess I always am a bit nervous or maybe anxious is a better word. I never know how students will react to these ideas. What about you?”

“Well,” begins Deanna, “you know, this is a difficult subject for me. I often feel like I’m walking on eggshells.”

I wonder how it would be different if I were Deanna teaching my all white class about white privilege. How would it feel to challenge students about privilege and power from the outside rather than from the inside as I usually do?

“Hey you two, I’m heading down,” Audrey, one of the other teaching fellows, pokes her head in the office.

“Alright. We’re coming.” I let Deanna know that I’ll meet her after class and start walking towards my classroom.

Ten minutes into class, the students are staunchly defending their position that race isn’t an issue. As I look around the class, I see mostly white faces. My students who don’t identify themselves as “white,” are sitting there tight-lipped.

“Race isn’t important to me. I don’t say ‘I’m white.’ I think of myself more as Irish than as ‘white’. My family is pretty serious about said Irishness.” Sean has been defending his position vigorously. So far, he hasn’t been challenged about it.

“I agree with you, Sean,” responds Gaby. “I consider myself to be a descendent of many different European cultures like Italian, German, Irish, and Scottish--I don’t really associate myself as being a certain ‘color’ but if I had to fill in the bubble on a survey about my race, I most often mark ‘Caucasian.’”

“I think,” begins Jennifer, “that although many of us don’t see each other in terms of black and white, we as humans have a natural tendency to classify objects and people to better organize information. When we are classifying things, we often try to be objective and in the process forget to consider ourselves when we’re classifying.”

“But that’s really what we should be striving for, Jennifer, complete objectivity. Teachers need to leave their culture at the door when they enter the classroom, and that includes their race,” retorts Andrea. “I think teachers should create a culture of ‘science’ or ‘math’ in their classrooms.”

As I think about Jennifer and Andrea’s statements, I realize they aren’t really that far apart in their perspectives. Both see white as a universal perspective that is neutral and objective. I know that this is how I thought at one time as well. I grew up in a racially homogenous community and attended schools that were mostly white. It was normal to have one student of Asian descent in the whole grade, but it wouldn’t have been unusual to not have any. We never talked about race at home or in school. So I understand where my students are coming from, and I think it makes it easier for me to challenge them and push them to think about their own perspectives because I was once there.

“Do you think it’s possible, Jennifer, that *only* white students don’t think about themselves as in terms of race? Do you believe people are colorblind?” I feel like I have to challenge them with increasing intensity. If I push them too far, they might retreat from the dialogue altogether.

Jennifer is quick to respond. “Race was an issue when I was growing up, but it seems only because certain students and educators made it one.”

“That is such a good point!” agrees Greg. “It is really irritating that race is always about the color of skin. It makes no sense, and yet it seems the idea will always be perpetuated. It would make so much more sense to classify people by culture and heritage than by the color of their skin, as such classifications are considered to be needed for the purposes of addressing social wrongs. But really, classifying simply on skin color is ridiculous if you think about it. What should someone who is very pale, yet has some African American heritage supposed to classify themselves as? Should they fill in White or African American?”

“Ok, let’s work with this example then, Greg. Let’s say that I am bi-racial, both white and black. And let’s say I identify more with being white than African American. Consequently, I fill in the bubble for Caucasian. Am I white?”

“If that’s what you think of yourself, then yes,” responds Greg.

“Does it matter what others think of you?”

Greg pauses for a moment and then replies tentatively, “Well, yes. I mean, if people don’t see you as white I suppose they wouldn’t consider you as white.”

Rachel enters the conversation. “My cousin is in 3rd grade and she considers herself bi-racial. Her mother is white and her father is black. She knows this and makes a point to fill in the ‘other’ circles and write bi-racial. I know she is still young and has yet to face many of the

problems about race, but she knows what she has already experienced from kids her own age, and she is still strong about her heritage.”

“I have a nephew who is biracial also,” adds Jason. “That just goes to show that 'race' is more a social construct than a biological one.”

Wanting to build on Rachel and Jason’s examples I state, “did you know that on the 2000 census, people were allowed to identify themselves as being of more than one race? Also, the definitions for each race are very interesting. Let me get the definitions out so I can share them with you.” I reach down beside my chair to rifle through my briefcase. After a few minutes of fumbling around, I find the census printout. “Ok, for example, the definition for white is ‘A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.’ Is this definition surprising to you?”

Greg replies, “There is no way that people from the Middle East or North Africa are white.”

“Why do you think that, Greg?”

“You can’t just call someone white because of where they live.”

Before I can respond, Tiffany questions, “Aren’t we confusing race with ethnicity?”

“You’re right, Tiffany,” agrees Jennifer. “People don't know the difference between ethnicity and race. It seems that people are trying to cover all ends when they discuss what the labels should be on forms of identification. It looks like they don't want to offend groups so they try to put them in sub groups of the major headings.”

Gauging from his impatient look, Sean has been waiting to address these issues, but hasn’t been quick enough to get in on the conversation. This time, he gets his point across. “There isn't a clear definition between the two. I used to have to register people for the LSAT's over the

phone sometimes at my old job. Lots of times, I would ask people their race, and they would say something like 'Jewish.' And, they were serious about it. They viewed their heritage as being a separate race. As for the census categories we listed, they would later say Caucasian, but many wanted us to list Jewish.”

So far, the conversation has been dominated by a few students who share a similar perspective. I don't feel comfortable asking students who have remained silent to participate. This is a difficult topic for some of my students to address, particularly the two students who are not white. I realize there is a burden being called on to speak for one's entire race. Also, I don't want to reinforce for students that any single person can speak for a race or ethnicity. However, I don't believe I should sit back silently and allow one perspective to dominate. “Why do you think a person who is Jewish might identify with that part of them as the most important part of their identity?”

Anthony responds, “because it is the part of their identity that is most oppressed.”

Finally, another perspective has emerged. “Anthony, can you tell us more about this?”

“It is often the part of our identity that makes us 'other,' the part that people notice most about us.”

Anthony is my deep thinker in the class. When he chooses to speak, it is usually worth the wait. Sometimes I feel that he tries to be patient with his peers, but often cannot remain silent for long. At this point, Tanisha raises her hand.

“Through a series of unfortunate occurrences to females in my family history, I have no clue of what I am. Starting with my grandmother, our complexions began to change, as did our hair color and texture. I can pretty much conclude that I am African-American, but what else? I am not one of those people who considers myself from Africa, per se. None of my family has

been from there in generations. I am more Caribbean than African, but not according to America.”

“See this was my point,” interrupts Greg. “I think that forcing individuals to associate with a nation based on stereotypes and faulty grouping is ridiculous.”

“Let’s try to look at these ideas from yet another perspective. So far, we’ve been looking at this issue from a personal perspective. What do we identify with more, our race, ethnicity, gender and the like. But what about the larger political and economic arena? Does race matter when you apply for a job?”

“I’m not sure how any of this will make us better teachers. Education is what will make us good candidates for a job. Can you tell us how to teach rather than focusing on all this liberal, socialist junk?” asks George.

George’s comments are a reminder of how others might perceive of an education class which asks students to address issues such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and the like. Instead of responding to George, Anthony continues with the discussion of the impact of race and replies, “race is always an issue with job applications. If, when you apply for a job, you have a name that points to an ethnic group or race, you will be evaluated differently. You may even be denied further consideration, strictly because of race. Race will play a major role if you are invited to an interview. The candidates’ responses will be evaluated in a separate context: are the answers to the interview questions spoken with appropriate use of the English language and structure, or were the responses laden with so called improper English? The responses will be placed on a sliding evaluation scale, and the ethnic minority candidate with proper use of English will be favored over an ethnic minority candidate that does not articulate as well. Due to the inequality of education here in America, there are different tiers for evaluating transcripts

also. One scale for white students, one for Asians, one for Hispanics, and one for Black students. The same holds true for the standardized testing used for gate keeping for graduate level and professional programs. Until we have a massive shift in American culture, where race and ethnicity are not predetermining factors for entry into the upper rooms of American society, race and ethnicity will dictate the path of dominated American subcultures.”

“Gate keeping? Please!” snorts Sean in disgust. “I used to work for the LSAC - the company that makes the LSAT's. You cannot possibly believe the amount of work that goes into every question to ensure that it is fair.”

Anthony seems to be getting impatient, “Gate keeping? Yes, standardized testing is a gate keeping device, plain and simple. What other purpose do they serve other than to stratify students, regardless of race? To think otherwise is a bit naïve.”

“Oh, let me guess,” smirks Sean. “Should I assume then that you don't believe that students of greater ability and achievement should be the focus of graduate school?”

“No, that is not the correct assumption, Sean. For the sake of discussion, why does it trouble you so if a person from an under-represented group is given preferential treatment for placement into a graduate program? If progress is to be made, sacrifices have to occur. Why is the price of a few slots too high a price to pay? Here comes the bad words, ‘Affirmative Action.’ The number of slots taken by this program by no means offset the damage done to minority students during the early years of education. We have all-”

“One hundred percent no!” interrupts Sean. “I do not even for one second believe that slots in schools should ever be given up for placement of students from whichever groups are currently deemed disadvantaged. It is of utmost importance that the schooling before college prepare students to be able to compete in a college setting.”

“Let me finish please,” continues Anthony. The students in the rest of the class seem uncomfortable. Most of their peers are looking down, fidgeting with their notebooks. Why are we all so uncomfortable about what is playing out in our classroom. I mean, we’ve all heard this argument scripted for us on the nightly news. Is it too confrontational for a white and black male to confront one another in the discursive place of the classroom?

“As I was saying,” continues Anthony, “we have all learned in this class, the conditions some of these children must endure in order to learn. Tens of thousands of these children never complete high school, and very few ever gain entrance into college. Colleges recruit minority students in order to get federal funding, but do little, if anything to keep them there. Attrition rates for minority students in colleges are very high. I ask again, for the few good students that manage to negotiate all of the obstacles presented to them, why not give a few of them a chance?”

“Yeah, but if America did the right thing up front, Affirmative Action would not need to exist at all.” Kevin, who has remained silent during the entire class period, decides to respond. “More slots are taken by white female students, who gain advantage by Affirmative Action, than all other minority students combined. White females have gained more from Affirmative Action than other ethnic minorities. Why is there no uproar over this phenomenon? It takes time and experience to learn and understand people from other cultures. After you have gained the experience and understanding, it is easier to be compassionate to the struggles of others. It will also be easier not to make strong value judgments without the support of the knowledge gleaned from real life experience.”

“You will not change my mind on this matter,” Sean states emphatically. "Affirmative Action, as you speak of it, in that context, is an injustice to all parties, of whatever flavor

involved.” A few students grimace at Sean’s use of the word flavor. “It gives someone the ability to look at a person from a minority group and question whether they really earned their slot into Princeton, Medical School, etc, because of quotas.”

“I agree,” affirms Greg. “It is 2004. We are in a new century, and it is time for new social theories. Despite the good intentions of such ideas like Affirmative Action, the practice only continues tension. Fair is fair for everyone. College admissions should be via grades, letters of recommendation (a big point), testing (which is waning in value overall - and I think that's best) and an essay. It should be blind - gender and race should be unknown to the admissions board. Anything less is unfair. No doubt about it.”

Greg says this so fact-of-matter that is difficult to think about how to get him to even consider another perspective.

“That's the whole point, the system is not blind to gender or race!” At this point, Anthony’s voice takes on a new higher pitch as he fights to remain in control. “How could there be fairness inside an unfair system? If this is indeed a new millennia, it is time to address these deep, institutionalized issues and move forward. There will not be an advancement in social issues without acknowledging the inherent inequalities of the existing system, and the true causes of those inequalities. Part of the solution is righting the wrongs of the past, and ending the perpetual cycle of racial and gender inequality.”

It is at this point that I feel I can remain silent no longer. I am worried the dialogue will not progress any further than this. “I think part of the problem with this issue is that unfortunately it matters what side of the fence you are sitting on. It has been my experience that white America feels that they have been deeply wronged by Affirmative Action. It is this anger and hatred that blinds them to the inequities that children from minority groups suffer. And here

we are again. The idea of looking at issues from multiple perspectives is essential to bring people together to find solutions. Only when white America is ready to admit they have done something wrong and immoral can we move past the argument that is being played out here in our classroom.”

“You cannot right the wrongs of the past!” Now Greg’s voice raises a pitch. “The past is the past, and not playing fairly with each individual applicant won't change the past. Should we punish students now for the inequalities of the past. The only fair answer is to have blind admissions. Grades, test scores, essays, letters of recommendation for the first round. No gender, name or race on the files. Affirmative action is well intentioned, but fair to no one.”

“Angela, when did "White America" do something wrong?” The rest of the class looks at Sean as he addresses me, or more accurately, challenges me directly. “In the 1700's? The 1860's? The civil rights fights of the 60's? Who did it? You? Me? Why should individuals who did nothing be held accountable for the sins of the past? My family was Irish, I assure you, we didn't own anyone. We could barely be said to own ourselves. Are all white people culpable for slavery? For how long? How many generations? Infinitely? Are Jewish white people exempt, because of the wrongs done them in World War II? Do you see where I am going? Blame doesn't accomplish anything. Who shall we blame? Looking for scapegoats is the sort of narrow political thought that the Bush administration tries to foist off on us. The only solution is just to be as fair as possible now.” Sean’s reference to the Bush administration pushes me to think more about how we label people in terms of perspectives. It also reminds me of the complexity of this issue. While Sean would identify himself as a democrat and liberal, he shares a more conservative perspective on the issue of race.

“I didn't do anything wrong either” agrees Greg. “I've never owned a slave, nor have I ever signed or supported any legislation which condones or bolsters a racially stratified society, etc. Therefore there is no reason for me to feel guilty. The transgression is not my fault.”

I take a deep breath before continuing. I can feel the discussion slipping away. “I am merely voicing another perspective here, that of dominant and dominated groups.” The entire class is looking at me, waiting to see how I will handle the tension in the room. “Both you and Sean speak of this issue as if it is over, a thing of the past. I am not suggesting we look to the past but to the present. You seem to use the lens that the United States is a just society where rewards are given based on merit. Is this ‘the truth?’ Can you envision another perspective where this ‘truth’ is questionable? I realize this is an uncomfortable place to be - we have beliefs we view as sacred, and when they are questioned, we become defensive. I think that we are too often polarized in our views- if we cannot understand and accept another's view, then it is difficult to advance the conversation. In the solution you described, you seem to suggest that basic inequities in education do not matter or simply do not exist. I am making this assumption based on the fact that you would propose a college selection process that does not acknowledge these inequities. I have challenged this assumption.”

Silence. I look down at my watch and realize the class is over. I dismiss my students, and they quickly leave the room.

Part Two

Angela and Deanna examine the role of talk and text in the classroom

Ten minutes later I'm at our favorite coffee spot, filling Deanna in on all the details of today's rollercoaster ride.

“Angela, you’re talking about this as if you should have had an easier time in the classroom today. It is extremely important to recognize the difficult struggle we face when we attempt to challenge students’ beliefs about the way the world works.” Deanna is trying to boost my spirits here, but I’m still going over the course of events, thinking about how I could have done it better.

“Let’s start with the role of student talk in the classroom, Deanna,” I begin hoping that we can deconstruct today’s class. “We can begin by drawing on Fairclough’s notion of discursive strategies⁶⁷. van Dijk believes that socio-cognitive strategies often appear in talk and text which attempts to dominate others⁶⁸. For example, Fairclough’s process of naturalization can appear in talk and text as ‘that’s the way it is,’ or ‘naturally, ...’ Additionally, individuals and groups can also produce talk and text which supports the ideas of colorblindness and the rejection of dominance. ‘We are all equal’ and ‘everyone has the same chance to succeed in the United States’ are examples of discourse which support these ideas.” Beginning to think about the theory behind what has happened in the class draws me out of my funk.

“Right, Angela, and van Dijk describes two complementary discursive strategies used for the justification of inequality.” Deanna leans into the table, clearly excited about the conversation. “The first is the positive representation of one’s own group, and the second is the negative representation of Other⁶⁹. For example, ideas and beliefs about cultural deprivation of minority groups can be used effectively here. Teachers who say, ‘the families of these students don’t really value school’ may in fact be representing ideas about cultural deprivation and thus

⁶⁷ Fairclough, 2001

⁶⁸ van Dijk, 1993

⁶⁹ p. 263

negatively portraying Other in comparison to their group. What is implied here is ‘the families of these students don’t really value school like *my group* does.’”

“I agree, Deanna, and this comparison is also crucial in that it typifies a particular model or authorized way of understanding.⁷⁰”

“What are some of the other persuasive moves that follow the position of an ‘us/them’ stance, Angela?”

I have to think about this for a minute. “Well, there’s argumentation: the negative evaluation follows from the ‘facts.’ Next, rhetorical figures: the hyperbolic enhancement of ‘their’ negative actions and ‘our’ positive actions; euphemisms, denials, understatements of ‘our’ negative actions. There’s also lexical style: choice of words that imply negative (or positive) evaluations. And finally there’s story telling: telling about negative events as personally experienced; giving plausible details about negative features of the events [and] structural emphasis of ‘their’ negative actions, and quoting credible witnesses, sources or experts.⁷¹

“And these persuasive moves strongly imply that one representation is preferred over another, Angela. In addition, the power to persuade individuals to adopt a particular cognitive model helps to explain how Fairclough’s ideas about common sense ideology operate⁷².”

“This is a good point, Deanna which leads me to another discursive strategy that van Dijk describes, victimhood. The example of Affirmative Action from my class today is particularly relevant to illustrate this concept. The policies of Affirmative Action are viewed by the dominant group, white males, as a challenge to privilege and authority in society. Therefore, the ideas of ‘reverse discrimination’ form a notion of victimhood for dominant groups. In

⁷⁰ p. 264

⁷¹ p. 264

⁷² Fairclough, 2001

understanding these discursive modes of production and interpretation used by dominant groups toward dominated groups, van Dijk contends that we can ‘generally expect the discourse to focus on the persuasive marginalization of the ‘Other’ by manipulation of event models and the generalized negative attitudes derived from them.’”⁷³

Angela and Deanna identify the talk and text of white privilege

“So now, Angela, we can begin to understand how talk and text in the classroom as in society, can be used to dominate others.”

“But let’s focus just on talk and text about white privilege. Didn’t we read a dissertation about that, Deanna?”

“Oh yeah, Angela! Who was the author?”

“DiAngelo, I think. Her dissertation was *Whiteness in Racial Dialogue*⁷⁴, and she analyzed talk used by White preservice teachers about race with people of color. Her study examined the talk produced by White preservice teachers in four, two-hour sessions about race, led by a trained interracial team. She defined Whiteness as a dominant social construction which seeks to maintain the status quo and marginalize others. DiAngelo, through the use of discourse analysis, was able to identify three themes which emerged from the talk of preservice teachers. These three themes were individualism, universalism and personal experience. Do you remember how she defined them, Deanna?

“Let me think,” begins Deanna. “DiAngelo describes individualism as ‘no intrinsic barriers to individual success, and that failure is not a consequence of systematic structure but of individual character’⁷⁵.”

⁷³ van Dijk, 1993, p. 265

⁷⁴ DiAngelo, 2004

⁷⁵ p. 215

“This was evident in my classroom dialogue today when both Greg and Sean defended the process by which students were accepted into higher education. This theme hints at the belief in meritocracy which places hard work and rewards at the forefront. What about universalism?” Deanna smiles as she realizes that I’ve completely abandoned sulking about today’s class.

“That’s the second theme she identifies. She also describes it as ‘the human norm’⁷⁶.”

“And she uses Dyer’s concept of universalism to explain its relationship to power.

The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of race⁷⁷.

And I think I heard this in my class today when Jennifer claimed that most people don’t think in terms of black and white. She is claiming her perspective on race as universal.”

“I agree, Angela. Jennifer demonstrated her understanding as a de-raced individual. This common discursive move for Whites allows them to position themselves as the norm. This is particularly important in thinking about how students construct the concept of race. Consequently, some students believe a colorblind approach is best. Whites in general employ this strategy to counter affirmative action policies. But there’s also personal experience.”

“Right, Deanna, in her study, DiAngelo describes how personal experience was used. She posits, “[t]he discourse of personal experience was often used by White participants to protect their positions and preclude attempts to problematize or deconstruct their claims.⁷⁸” DiAngelo contends that these kinds of talk are actually counter moves or challenges by Whites to

⁷⁶ p. 221

⁷⁷ Dyer, 1997, p. 2

⁷⁸ DiAngelo, 2004, p. 94

avoid racializing themselves. I definitely heard that today, particularly when Jennifer said race was an issue only because some educators wanted to make it an issue.”

“Now that we have some understanding of how talk is operating in our classroom and its connection to power structures in society, we can begin to feel as if we address and challenge the ways in which students use talk in our classroom by developing a stance for action.”

Deanna nods her head in agreement as she states, “I know it’s important for me to have this time to really talk to you about what is going on in my classroom and think through the dilemmas we face. It’s as if I don’t feel isolated or alone, and sometimes it just helps to know someone else can relate to what is going on in my classroom.”

“I agree, Deanna. It is important to have a colleague who can push you to examine your practice, but who can also provide a different perspective on what is occurring in the classroom.”

5.5 VIGNETTE #5 - DECONSTRUCTING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Part One

“Where are you off to in such a hurry?” I look behind me to see Deanna standing in the doorway of our office.

“I need to a cup of coffee before class if I’m going to last until tonight. I’ll meet you in the office after class today.” Deanna smiles sympathetically and waves as she turns and heads back into the office. As teaching fellows, we are also doctoral students with other jobs besides the teaching fellowship, and the sometimes grueling schedule of teaching and working full time,

often leaves us exhausted. As I'm waiting in line at the student coffee shop, I begin to think about today's class. We are going to be discussing the concept of the American Dream and the role the educational system plays. I always get excited when we start to explore and deconstruct this idea. I can remember back to when I was in college studying education and the heated discussions my father-in-law (future at that time) and I would have about whether or not the American Dream was a reality anymore or just a myth to perpetuate the status quo. He was a poster boy for the American Dream. He came to this country from Italy at a young age, and was very poor. He couldn't speak the language and had to work. When he was in high school, he had to drop out and support his family. He joined the military, and then applied to go to college. Even though he never finished high school, Carnegie Tech gave him a chance and let him enroll conditionally. The rest is history so to speak as he went on to eventually start his own business and become an entrepreneur.

As I began teaching in the Boston Public Schools, the contradictions with the way I had been brought up to think about the world and what I was experiencing in poor and primarily minority schools began to surface. I felt like reality as I knew it was beginning to unravel. As I reflect back on that time, I remember being angry; angry that I had been told a lie; angry that my life seemed superficial; and angry that my parents, community and school system had allowed me to believe that everyone lived the way I did. So my arguments with my father-in-law over the belief in the American Dream were somewhat cathartic for me. It was at that time though that I first realized how unsettling a process it was to have your beliefs, values and way of understanding the world challenged. I look down at my watch and realize I need to hurry if I'm going to start class on time. As I rush in the building, I try to mentally prepare myself for

today's class. I imagine what students' reactions to challenges about the American Dream will be. Will they begin to feel uncomfortable as I once did?

After walking into the classroom, I ask students to take out their readings and any notes they have about today's article. I start by asking students whether or not they believe the American Dream still exists today.

"I think," begins Doug, "many people believe in the American Dream; this far off goal in which you work so hard to achieve and it pays off in the end. Then you have others that don't work hard and have things handed to them or inherited. Is this fair? I don't think this is fair but it happens; parents are still working hard at their jobs and for many of us, our full-time job is school. Those who work hard should be rewarded with the best that life has to offer. Those who don't work hard are the ones who complain all the time that their lives suck and they are going nowhere. Everyone has control of their own lives, and as they say, you choose the path you want to take, good or bad." This world view is so strong in American society; that there are paths out there for you to take and, you just need to choose the right one. Has that been the case for most of my students? Have they been able to choose the path they wanted to take? I know for myself it was true. I was able to go to the college I wanted to go to; I didn't have to worry about academic credentials or financial constraints. If students have not experienced injustice or even failure will they believe that social institutions unfairly hold some people back regardless of their desires and hard work?

"But Doug," counters Laurie, "I think that Americans actually do not want to provide equal opportunity for all children. The American Dream, to me, is far from encouraging collective responsibility, simply because to fail is your fault because the opportunities are supposed to be everywhere for you to take advantage of. The problem with this is that once

failure is experienced, and it will happen in one form or another, then a survival of the fittest mentality kicks-in.”

“Exactly!” agrees Kristy. “Our economic structure fosters this way of thinking; it’s called capitalism. It has long filtered into our social and educational systems using the framework of democracy to justify it. We all want the best education for our children. However, the focus changes when parents feel their child (who may have the resources and the edge) no longer has a competitive advantage because resources have been re-distributed or taken away for the ‘greater good of all.’ Then it becomes ‘me and mines.’”

“Well,” replies Joe, “I do agree that everyone in this country wants every child to have the American dream, but at the same time I don’t.” I think about Joe’s statement; that he is conflicted with the ideal of the American Dream and how it is not upheld. I think this is another problem for both the students and me. To believe that some people don’t truly want others to succeed is antithetical to believing in the goodness of people. I feel like if I believe that people can’t make the right choices in life or that people can’t change, I’m admitting that I have no control in life. I fiercely resist this fatalistic mentality. Joe continues, “The main reason I don’t agree with that is because of how unequal the money is that different school districts get. However, I do think that if a child is willing to work hard to achieve the American dream, he or she will still be able to obtain it.”

“I agree, Joe,” replies Elena. “I understand that there are rich people with connections that make it easier for them to achieve the American Dream, but that’s just a bump in the road to overcome. No one said that the American Dream is easy for everyone; some just have to work harder than others to achieve it. I mean, look at Oprah for an example. She just wasn’t handed everything she has today, was she? No! She had to work hard for it.” At this last

assertion, I pause, thinking about the numerous times I've heard this example. Everyone loves Oprah. She's like my father-in-law; a living, breathing product of the American Dream. And because she is so universally admired and watched, her image is a strong one to contend with.

"In your argument, Elena," begins Linda, "you believe that a child willing to work hard can have the American dream. That very argument is why the American dream and public education are in direct opposition to one another. Education has become an institution to further increase the divide of the have and have-nots as it pertains to resources. It is clearly documented that resources are unequal in certain communities. How and why is this so if public education is supposed to be the equalizing factor to assist in attaining the American Dream? Remember, in the inception of education for the public, all was not always inclusive of everyone. If you go back to the creation of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, this specifically affected African Americans, immigrants and Native Americans. Oprah Winfrey did not achieve the American Dream because she *overcame* the obstacles of the social conditions that affected her educational pursuits and economic opportunities. She overcame them in spite of them." As Linda finishes, I wait patiently for the next student to enter the conversation. As I remain silent, I wonder about my role in the classroom dialogue. I agree with Linda's statement, yet I am hesitant to let my class know that. I often find myself challenging students' perspectives when I disagree with them even though I try to tell students that we should examine the underlying beliefs of all perspectives. Am I allowing students to speak for me? This leads me to question if I am really fostering an environment where multiple perspectives can flourish.

"I really need to address your statement, Linda," replies Scott. I can tell Scott has been waiting to say something about this issue. His eye rolling was a dead giveaway. "It seems to me that you feel as if saying a child who works hard and can have the American Dream is part of the

problem. I feel that creating an excuse for children to fail is even a greater problem. If an underprivileged child fails, people seems to say, 'it's okay; society never gave you chance; you were supposed to fail.' I think this is a very dangerous message to send. It is a reality that not everyone can be successful. It just can't happen." Scott brings up an interesting point here. How can we address inequality in our society, yet remain optimistic and positive in our expectations for children? On one hand, I understand his concern; teacher expectations have a significant impact on the academic success of a child. But to turn a blind eye and deny that inequality exists in society is irresponsible.

"I think you will be hard pressed to find an American who wants to see a person fail!" exclaims Michael. "I think one thing that may make people less likely to help others succeed because there is no guarantee that anyone will take advantage of the help they get. I am sure that all of us have seen an over privileged 'rich kid' who has everything going for them, and they totally waste it, like they don't even see what they have. I am sure we have all seen an under privileged 'poor kid' defy all odds to succeed through sheer determination."

"But," interrupts Scott, "I also think there are poor kids who someone does everything they can to help, and this kid goes down the wrong path, as if they don't want any help at all. There is the misconception that giving a poor person money is helping them. It's the same with poor schools. If we just give low income schools more money that will solve the problems. Giving an underprivileged child more money at school will not solve their parental problems or give them a better roof over their heads. Haven't we all walked down the streets of Jefferson City and seen a bum begging for change. We reach into our pockets, and feel a few dollar bills, but then we think to ourselves, 'he'll probably jut go spend it on a bottle of Jack Daniels.' Now I

am not saying that every under privileged person will piss away any help they are given, I am sure many of them flourish from the help. But I also feel there are some who will act as if they don't even want the help at all. Even if one kid gets himself off the streets through a better education, it is a good thing, but I feel like the frustration with giving help stems from the fact that some will not take advantage of that help." This discussion always reveals students' stereotypes about the poor.

"I agree," states Becky. "It's like not everyone even has a dream. Some people unfortunately don't know what is outside of the world they live in. I'm sure there are people living in ghettos and bad neighborhoods that want to get out, but I assure you there are people who do drug deals and love the profits. But do I think that everyone has the ability to achieve the American Dream? No matter who wants to argue with me I think the answer is yes!"

"Why do you think that everyone can achieve the American Dream, Becky?" I feel as if I need to get to the heart of why students cling so strongly to this belief even though contradictions present themselves everywhere.

"There are so many resources out there that if you want it, you can get it," answers Becky. "I have been taught since I was so little to be proactive, be knowledgeable. If I don't know the answer, find it. It's just like the homeless don't need to be homeless. There are shelters. They choose to sleep under the bridge, they choose to not find a job program. That really frustrates me!" This belief has been instilled in students from a very young age. This experience was no different for me. My father always told me that if I worked hard at something, I could achieve it. And it's like when people aren't successful, we naturally look to the individual to question what they didn't do or what they did wrong.

I counter with, “yes, but some shelters fill up. I volunteered at one that had a waiting list. You use the word choose. Is it possible that it’s not a choice made by the individual? How have you come to understand this issue?” I hope that by pushing Becky to work through some of the contradictions, a tiny crack might open up for her to begin to challenge her own beliefs.

“It’s the same thing as doing drugs. No one forces people to do drugs. Not even in movies does someone sit down and say you must shoot this heroin. Yes, situations can cause people to do drugs. But it’s a choice. It takes a strong person to survive a very serious situation. Many people who resort to drugs are weak and can not overcome serious situations. Drugs become the only thing people think will pull them out. That is a choice, a decision they make. Maybe I’m crazy, but that seems very logical to me; the American Dream is real as long as you work to make it real.” Sometimes in the dialogue with students, I feel like I hit a brick wall. Becky’s last statement could be a sign that she’s not willing to be pushed any further on this issue. Again, I remember just how discomfoting this process was for myself. I decide to move on and engage others in the class.

“Let’s hear from others on this topic. It seems that some of what we’re talking about today is the dominant narrative about poor people in general and confirms the belief in the American Dream; poor people deserve to fail because some how they didn’t work hard enough. In order to examine poverty, let’s think about class structure in America.”

“I had never really thought about the ‘classes’ in American society, but they do exist,” asserts Lauren. Lauren has been hesitant to contribute to the classroom discussion. As an older student, I imagine it must be more difficult to find a way to engage with your younger, and less experienced peers. “Like in Kozol’s book *Savage Inequalities*, he writes about the underclass,

those ‘least able to pull themselves up by the bootstraps.’ The underclass has no political clout, is insular (even in the middle of huge populations), and has I think, in general, babies raising babies meaning that there is very little real parenting going on.” The use of the term underclass sounds like nails on a chalkboard.

“I know what you mean, Lauren,” agrees Tonya. “Many of those communities are predominantly minorities. It seems that these areas of the country have had people move there for specific reasons in the past, and those jobs, farms, family ties have been broken, and the people remaining there may not have the intellectual capacity to see that they must move on. So even though I don’t like the idea of talking about intelligence levels, I suspect that the average IQ is an average, so some part of the population will have to be below average.” As Tonya concludes, I again think about what my role in the deliberation should be. Am I simply providing students with a place to legitimize dominant narratives? Does saying these things out loud give power and authority to the ideas? I wait to see how other students will respond, hoping that not everyone in the class holds these same beliefs.

“Even if they had the, as you put it, *the intellectual capacity*, could they still really move on, or have they been so completely labeled a failure by the rest of society, that their only realistic option is acceptance?” Sam’s voice raises in pitch as he finishes. I guess I wasn’t the only one bothered by the stereotype of poor people as unintelligent. But Sam’s assertion that poor people have no agency is equally troubling.

In order to help students understand what influences their ideas, I ask, “where do our ideas about the poor come from? How many poor people do you know and interact with regularly? Do rich people have better morals and ethics than poor people? Do rich people care

more about their children than poor people? Who do you imagine when you imagine a poor person? I would like for us to take the last five minutes of the class time and explore some of these ideas.” I want to get at the heart of why students have these kinds of ideas about poor people in order to move the dialogue beyond revealing our stereotypes about *other*, in this case, poor people. I am also aware that by framing the question as rich and poor, I might be creating a false dichotomy for the students as if this is the only valid comparison.

Joe is the first to answer and offers, “my ideas about the poor come from news networks and in movies. When I think of a poor person, I imagine a dirty, messy, old individual who looks sick and emaciated. When I walk down Faragut Avenue, I see a few poor people each day, begging for spare change.”

Kristy continues with, “some stereotypes we as a society hold about the poor are that they are alcoholics, drug dealers, too lazy to get a job and all alone. I agree with Joe in that these images come mostly from the media.” I see other heads nod as Kristy finishes.

Tonya responds with, “I think that just like there are levels of richness, there are levels of poorness. People who are able to qualify for food stamps, welfare, subsidized job training – I guess they would be considered to be poor, even though many of them have some sort of roof over their heads.” As I look down at my watch and realize the time is gone again, I am struck by Tonya’s characterization of poor people and wonder if other students have this same image in their heads as they think about who the category of “poor” represents. Students do not seem to be considering the many poor families, the working poor, people who live paycheck-to-paycheck. Their descriptions of poor people are really those who are destitute, the poorest of the poor. This gives me a glimpse of how little they interact with others outside of their own class

category. I dismiss the students wondering how Deanna's class went today. Did she encounter the same challenges?

Part Two

Angela and Deanna examine the role of meritocracy

“My class discussion went pretty much the same way as yours did, Angela. We also ended up exploring stereotypes about the poor. It's amazing how entrenched these stereotypical images are for our students and in society in general.” Deanna and I have begun to discuss just how very similar our classroom discussions were today.

“It's like every semester when we put the chart on the board where we list stereotypes about Black Men, Black Women, White Men and White Women. The same descriptions come up every semester regardless of who our students are. It's very powerful for me to see that pattern emerge every semester. It reminds me of just how difficult it is to counter these stereotypes and beliefs in the classroom, Deanna. I think that whenever we talk about the American Dream, we have to consider the role of education particularly as it relates to meritocracy. Many of our students come into our classes believing that meritocracy does truly exist, that ‘positions of greatest influence and prestige are filled by those who ‘merit’ them by demonstrated talent.’⁷⁹ The education system plays a significant role in determining how rewards are handed out in society.”

“And I believe, Angela, that many of our students have been on the receiving side of the bargain. Education has helped them get to where they are; it hasn't held them back.”

Angela and Deanna begin to deconstruct the American Dream

⁷⁹ Tozer, Senes & Violas, 2006, p. 41

“Today in class, my students began to hint at perhaps a cause of inequality. I’m not so sure they believe that social institutions are at the root of inequality, but rather that individuals or maybe even groups are deficient. How can we begin to understand this?”

“I think this is important to think about, Angela. We can think about it as a belief in radical individualism: individuals can choose to be successful. We also can think about how cultural deficit theory helps to explain students’ thinking.”

“Well I agree, Deanna, that the belief in personal choice and responsibility is a very important tenet of the American Dream. Several of my students today believed that if you’re homeless or if you’re a drug user it is because you chose to do those things, that you somehow weren’t strong enough. This is always puzzling to me. I know again that some of this is the student’s lack of personal knowledge about these kinds of experiences.”

“Why do you think, Angela that students still cling to the belief in the American Dream?”

I pause, thinking about this question and then reply, “I think one reason is the need to believe in social mobility. Even though we know social mobility is decreasing,⁸⁰ students resist believing that they can’t achieve what they want through hard work and determination. And I guess, as you said earlier, that this has been the experience for many of our students. Although I imagine if we pushed them to think about this, they would be able to identify ways in which they have been denied something that they worked hard for which had nothing to do with what they did but rather who they were.”

“You’re probably right, Angela, but I think it may also have to do with their social circles as well.”

“That’s a great point! I read an article in the Economist that addressed this very concern:

⁸⁰ Ever higher society, 2004

Members of the American elite live in an intensely competitive universe. As children, they are ferried from piano lessons to ballet lessons to early-reading classes. As adolescents, they cram in as much after-school coaching as possible. As students, they compete to get into the best graduate schools. As young professionals, they burn the midnight oil for their employers. And as parents, they agonize about getting their children into the best universities. It is hard for such people to imagine that America is anything but a meritocracy: their lives are a perpetual competition. Yet it is a competition among people very much like themselves – the offspring of a tiny slither of society – rather than among the full range of talents that the country has to offer⁸¹.

“This makes sense to me, Angela. Within our own social group which often mirrors our race and class, we do have some mobility. I mean, one of the activities I used to do with students was to deconstruct the American Dream by picking three well known individuals like George Bush, Paris Hilton, and even John Kerry. These are all individuals who have attained what they have in life because of who they are rather than by only working hard. But this was never a really compelling argument for students because these individuals aren’t in their social group, and they figure there are always going to be celebrities who get ahead just because of who their parents are.”

“I think this also helps explain why policies such as Affirmative Action are so hotly contested. These policies actually impact people in the same social circles, and people perceive this as truly unfair and undemocratic. I also think, Deanna, that students falsely believe that mobility in general exists in this country.”

“What do you mean, Angela?”

⁸¹ The Economist, 2001

“I think part of the American Dream as it has been portrayed in various mediums like books, television and in movies is this belief in the ability to just move to wherever opportunity exists. We know this isn’t happening today. A study by Joseph Ferrie⁸² examined the geographic and occupational mobility of more than 75,000 American-born men from the 1850’s to the 1920’s as well as longitudinal census data from the 19th and 20th centuries. The conclusions of the study are important for us to consider. First, there is a positive relationship between geographic mobility and upward mobility, and second, geographic mobility seems to have ended for the majority of Americans by the 1950’s.”

Deanna pauses, thinking about this and replies, “yet, we know this image still persists, and is an important part of the belief in the American Dream.”

Angela and Deanna interrogate stereotypes about the poor

“Students in both of our classes today, Angela, referred to beliefs they held about the poor. I think we need to at least consider how these stereotypes feed into the belief in the American Dream and radical individualism. Even though students pointed to the media as the main perpetrator of stereotypical portrayals of the poor, public education has reinforced for students the belief in America as a classless society.⁸³”

“That’s a great point, Deanna. However, I agree with the students that the media has a crucial role in creating and maintaining stereotypes about the poor. That was one of the main arguments in Martin Gilen’s⁸⁴ book about why Americans hate welfare. He contends that the media uses images of African Americans as poor, lazy and welfare recipients. Gilen believes

⁸² Ferrie, 2005.

⁸³ Zinn, 2005

⁸⁴ Gilen, 2000

these repetitive images form the basis for American's stereotypes about poor people as well as encourage Americans to be unsympathetic to the poor. So it's not just about class, but about race too."

"That reminds me, Angela, of the essay we read, *Responding to Social Injustice* by Amy Gutmann⁸⁵. She believes that both class conscious and race conscious policies are needed today in order to address inequality."

"However, Deanna, I agree with your earlier statement that we cannot blame everything on the media. The dominant narratives of education in this country legitimize the views the media puts out. Let's take Ruby Payne's⁸⁶ framework for example."

"Oh not Ruby Payne again!" At the mention of Ruby Payne, Deanna lets out a noticeable sigh. "Teachers, administrators, even State officials everywhere just rave about how informative and helpful Ruby Payne's framework is to understanding the 'culture' of poverty."

"Exactly! That's why we need to examine her framework, Deanna - because of the impact her ideas are having on educators and administrators. Payne's main premise is that 'economic realities create 'hidden rules,' unspoken cueing mechanisms that reflect agreed upon *tacit* understandings, which the group uses to negotiate reality.'⁸⁷ Paul Gorski analyzes her framework though, citing three critiques: '(1) Payne's framework fails to consider the class inequities that pervade U.S. schools; (2) Payne draws from a deficit perspective; and (3) Payne's values are fundamentally conservative (as in conserving the status quo), and not transformative, in nature'⁸⁸.' Gorski also asserts that Payne in fact reinforces existing stereotypes about the poor in this country."

⁸⁵ Gutmann, 1996

⁸⁶ Payne, 2001

⁸⁷ p. 1

⁸⁸ Gorski, 2006

“Not to mention, Angela, that she represents poor people as a single unified group, all thinking, acting and feeling alike. We see this often with race as well. African Americans or Hispanics are often portrayed in this same way.”

“I agree, Deanna. The deficit perspective is still rampant in education today. This perspective claims that certain cultures are not ‘biologically inferior, but [come] from inferior home environment[s]. Poor and minority children [do] not have the same social, cultural, and intellectual opportunities as middle-class white children⁸⁹. This perspective places the blame, once again on individuals rather than institutions. It is easy to buy into because it allows our society to continue with the status quo. It is not society that needs to change; parents need to raise their children better.”

“Or even worse, Angela, there is nothing you can do about it. For example, your student who said in class today that the poor do not have the intellectual capacity to even know they should leave their impoverished surroundings was hinting at this idea. She was saying, ‘these poor people will always be poor, and we can’t do anything about it because they’re just not smart enough.’ That was a really powerful statement!”

“Troubling but powerful, Deanna.”

“So,” begins Deanna, “where do these ideas about poor people fit into the American Dream?”

“Well, if you believe all the stereotypes about poor people, and that there is a ‘culture of poverty,’ then it’s easier to buy into the belief in radical individualism. It is about personal choice and responsibility. Meritocracy works to naturally reward individuals for their hard work, and those who either don’t or can’t work hard are sifted down to the bottom. We don’t really

⁸⁹ Tozer, Senese, Violas, 2006, p. 403

feel sorry for poor people because the media depicts poor people as Black, lazy, and criminals and certainly characterizes them as personally irresponsible. I know it's not this simple, Deanna, but it does give me a new perspective on just how many different ideas, theories, and institutions are involved in perpetuating this 'common sense'⁹⁰ ideology."

"And it gives us, Angela, some new ways to think of addressing and challenging the concept of the American Dream!"

⁹⁰ Fairclough, 2001

6.0 MOVING BEYOND A PEDAGOGICAL CRISIS

Change, in fact, is hard work. The status quo, with its acknowledged weakness, is the situation we have come to know and learned to live with. In a sense we all embrace the illnesses and limitations we have, and change, while it opens to possibility, also steps into the unknown and in that way suggests chaos.

(Ayers, 1988, p. 41)

Introduction

The troubling events and experiences in my social foundations classroom pushed me to examine my pedagogy in hopes of making meaning of my experiences so that I could move beyond a pedagogical crisis. I understood the study was about change. At the beginning, I believed it was about how to change my students. But in the end, I discovered it was about change for myself as a teacher and as a researcher. I was stuck in the status quo of unexamined meaning; I had become complacent in my practice. The study has pushed me to change the way I think about pedagogy and to imagine how I might engage in practice in a more meaningful and thoughtful way. As Ayers asserts, change is often “disruptive, sometimes rude, usually messy” (p. 41). Reflexive thinking in pedagogy has been all of these things.

As I reflect on my experience teaching social foundations, I realize that the nature of the course and curriculum was significant to my experiences. I believe the field of social foundations is unique in that its purpose is to examine education from interpretive, normative,

and critical perspectives (CLSE, 1996), which encourage teachers to create space within the classroom for contestation. In these spaces for dialogue, students can “take initiatives and uncover humanizing possibilities” (Greene, 1988, p. 14). Creating these spaces in the classroom push students and teachers to question and ultimately deconstruct social constructions like gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and religion. Further, creating spaces for contestation in my classroom pushes me to move beyond polarizing issues as positive/negative; right/wrong; and liberal/conservative. Instead, opening up the classroom to contestation through dialogue and deliberation complicates these issues and reveals dilemmas experienced in a democracy. For example, when I create space within my classroom to contest and deliberate the social construction of gender, we can examine how we receive messages continually about what it means to be masculine or feminine in the context of schooling and how this social construction continues to influence the decisions we make in a single day (e.g. what to wear, how to interact with someone from the same or opposite sex) as well as decisions we have made for ourselves regarding our future (e.g. where to go to college, what career to pursue). This process avoids dichotomizing ideas (e.g. to accept or reject) and naturally complicates taken-for-granted beliefs about the way the world works. Admittedly, the process of challenging belief systems can be uncomfortable. However, these spaces for contestation are essential for the longevity of a democracy which holds dear ideals such as inclusivity and equality for its diverse citizenry. Creating spaces of contestation and deliberation in the classroom allows us to imagine how a democracy ought to be even if we believe such spaces are not currently accessible to all citizens in our democratic society (Giroux, 2001, Gutmann, 2001; Nieto, 1995).

In the following sections, I reexamine reflexive thinking in pedagogy and discuss the outcomes of the study. In the next section, I provide a rationale for the study and discuss why

reflexive thinking in pedagogy is important to undertake. I then review dimensions of reflexive thinking in pedagogy and how these dimensions guided the recreation of my teaching experience in the crafting of the vignettes. I also highlight the importance of fictionalizing the vignettes and discuss how this process led me to a deeper understanding of reflexivity as a process of self-conscious consideration. Next, I posit that creating stable teaching texts is essential in reflexive thinking and make suggestions for other practitioners who might want to create their own teaching texts. Finally, I address several insights gleaned from reflexive thinking in pedagogy.

6.1 A RATIONALE FOR REFLEXIVE THINKING IN PEDAGOGY: MOVING TOWARD ACTION AND CHANGE

In this section, I draw on Dewey and Freire to understand the implications of and provide a rationale for reflexive thinking in pedagogy as a pedagogical act which can be a first step toward change in the classroom. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy as a pedagogical act makes possible more thoughtful and meaningful interaction with students in the classroom. As Dewey (1916) asserted, "the sole direct path to enduring improvement of methods of instruction and learning consists in centering on the conditions which exact, promote, and test thinking. Thinking is the method of intelligent learning" (p. 153). Thus for Dewey, thinking and reflection were not separate from the behaviors of teaching; the act of thinking and reflection informed the behaviors in the classroom. From this perspective, education is the "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct subsequent experience" (p. 76). Therefore, reflection provides insights and understanding into practice for future actions and behaviors in the classroom.

In the dissertation, I undertook reflexive thinking in order to reconstruct and make meaning of my experiences in the classroom. This was not something I could have undertaken in my daily practice alone. The crafting of the vignettes allowed me to grapple with and make meaning of the experience in order to find a particular stance for future action in the classroom. Ayers (2004) believes that teaching is a form of activism and activists are those who “take a particular stance in the world” (p. 109). In order to take a particular stance, it is important that theoretic meaning be constructed from experience. As in pedagogy, action in the classroom comes from thinking, and stances emerge from reflexive thinking. Shor (1992) describes this process as “reflective action.” Reflexive thinking in pedagogy allowed me to first understand the theoretic underpinnings of my teaching experience which constituted a pedagogical act. These theoretic understandings have assisted me to develop stances for future actions and interactions with students in the classroom. As Greene (1988) proclaims, “It is through and by means of education that [we] may become empowered to think about what [we] are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of [our] lived worlds” (p. 12). Reflexive thinking in pedagogy attempts to respond to Greene’s call for active examination of lived experience.

Developing a stance for action through reflexive thinking in pedagogy, can lead to Freire’s notion of “conscientization” or critical social consciousness. Conscientization refers to the process by which individuals become “empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities that shape their lives and discover their own capacities to create them” (Darder, et. al, 2003, p. 15). As Freire explained, “As conscious human beings, we can discover *how* (original emphasis) we are conditioned by the dominant ideology. We can gain distance on our moment of existence...We can struggle to become free precisely because we can know we

are not free! That is why we can think of transformation” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 13). Conscientization is a dialectical process of reflection and action “in which one’s perception of reality may change” (Blackburn, 2000, p.7) thus encouraging professionals to redesign and reconstruct their world (Wellington, 1991, p. 5).

6.2 REFLEXIVE THINKING IN PEDAGOGY

In the dissertation, I demonstrate reflexive thinking in pedagogy by fictionalizing vignettes based on my own experiences in the social foundations classroom. The recreation of the texts brought to the surface an array of emotions: anger, embarrassment, joy, sadness, frustration, disbelief, surprise, doubt, confidence. As I began to craft the vignettes, I wanted to capture my emotional as well as intellectual reaction to the texts. The process sometimes followed a predictable pattern. As I reread the texts, I often had an initial reaction like, “I remember when this student posted this response; I was really surprised” and then, “I can’t believe I responded to that text in that way! Why was I so angry?” This initial layer of reaction and interpretation, led me to another layer where I began to probe deeper into the experience.

6.2.1 Dimensions of Reflexive Thinking in Pedagogy

As I began to further examine the texts, I was guided by dimensions of reflexive thinking. At the first dimension of reflexive thinking, recollection, I attempted to remember and capture my initial reaction to and understanding of the text. Sometimes I was able to use my journal text and/or email communication to provide additional insights. When I initially fictionalized the vignettes, often the first iteration appeared at the level of recollection only.

The second dimension of reflexive thinking, introspection, is where I began to uncover not only my emotional and mental response to the text at that particular moment in time, but within a more broader sense of what the text meant to me as a teacher, mother, student, citizen, etc. I attempted to uncover the meaning or multiple meanings of the text and how my own experiences, values and beliefs were intricately woven throughout the interpretation of the texts. When I turned to another iteration of the fictionalized vignette, I began to account for myself within the vignette. Sometimes this dimension took the form of explanatory text where I felt it was necessary to explain my orientation to the texts through the recollection of my own memories of experiences or the explanation of my values, beliefs and biases. For example, in the vignette *All the White Moves*, I briefly describe for the reader the community in which I grew up. I felt it was necessary for me to explain how I believed that I shared a common background with my students as well as to consider how growing up in a community that was racially and ethnically homogeneous was important to my interpretation of the texts. Further, I believe that examining the diversity that did exist within my community -- diversity of class -- pushes me to think differently about these issues. It was most important for me though to recognize that my background and experiences growing up in an affluent, primarily white community were influencing not only my interpretation of the students' texts during the writing of the dissertation, but also influenced my initial interaction with the students in my class.

At other times in the vignette, the dimension of introspection was imbedded in my responses to the texts. This layer of the vignette was the most difficult to craft. There were many times when I was unsure of what to disclose knowing that I wrote for an audience and that audience may judge me. There were times when I was surprised by what I wrote. Even though I would have readily admitted that who I was as a person influenced my reaction to and interpretation of

the texts, I was surprised at the magnitude of the influence. For example, I knew that my education as a K-12 teacher as well as my experiences teaching in the classroom were important in my understanding of education and teaching in general. However, I was startled at how this part of myself often came into conflict or created tension in my teaching in the social foundations classroom. Throughout many of the vignettes, there is a tension surrounding authority and control. My education as an elementary and special education teacher emphasized the importance of maintaining control of one's students. In special education, this might mean mental as well as physical control over students. In my teacher preparation programs, I took classes in classroom management and behavior management. Advice I often received from veteran teachers focused on the importance of immediately establishing and maintaining control of the students. So I spent the first few years of my teaching career striving to get my students under control. My understanding of authority and control changed as I progressed in my career, and I began to think about this notion in different and more caring ways. When I started my doctoral studies and when I began teaching social foundations, I became immersed into the literature of teaching and pedagogy and was strongly moved by the texts of authors like Paulo Freire, Parker Palmer, Ira Shor and Nel Noddings. These authors expanded my limited understanding of authority and control in the classroom beyond causality (i.e. the teacher establishes control and then students are in control and manageable). As I began teaching social foundations, I found myself questioning my interactions with the students which reflected a different understanding of authority and control. I wondered if I was "acting" in the classroom in a particular way in order to establish authority. This occurred both in the classroom and on Blackboard, and fictionalizing the vignettes allowed me to capture this tension and create a running dialogue with myself.

At the third dimension of reflexive thinking, conceptualization, I initially wrote to understand the texts theoretically. As I began to read the texts, I wondered how theory might help me understand and make meaning of the texts. I examined theories that I both accepted and rejected and attempted to write about these theories and my orientation to them. This was the first layer of incorporating theory within the vignette. I chose to write the conceptual dimension of reflexive thinking as a separate part of the vignette to emphasize the importance to me of coming to understand the experience at the theoretic level. This signaled a departure for me from understanding my students' and my own actions in the classroom as recollection and anecdotal memory only. I also chose to write the conceptual dimension as a dialogue between characters to reveal my own creation of theoretic text as a split persona. The two characters are both meant to represent myself and the continual quest to understand experience at the theoretic level.

6.2.2 Recreating Experience: Crafting the Vignettes

Fictionalizing the vignettes was a conduit to imagination. In fictionalizing the vignettes, I was no longer constrained by the “what” and the “how” of my interactions with the text; I could move beyond this and imagine a different interpretation of the texts. For example, I was not constrained by understanding my interaction with the text at a particular moment in time and did not have to write only about that moment. When I fictionalized the vignettes, I could interpret that moment but could also consider the “what if” of the text. I found myself asking questions like, “what if I had thought about Fairclough’s notion of common sense ideology? How might I have reacted to this particular text then?” or “what if I could *see* this response which occurred later on the Blackboard when I was crafting a previous response? Would that have changed how

I responded to or initially thought about the text?” The “what ifs” opened up new avenues for me to explore in my pedagogy.

The crafting of the vignettes was an emotional as well as intellectual process for me. In writing the vignettes, I attempted to interpret a time and space that occurred within my experiences of teaching social foundations. As I interpreted and thus recreated these experiences, I was confronted by my own beliefs, ideas and values while attempting to make meaning of the texts. I could not look analytically at the texts; I needed to place myself within the texts in order to understand them. The very nature of recreating this experience forced me to contend reflexively with myself as both a teacher and researcher. As I began to craft the vignettes, the idea of thinking reflexively pushed me to consider how my beliefs, my biases, and my opinions might have influenced and shaped the meanings I interpreted from the texts. As Danielewicz (2001) contends,

Reflexivity is an act of self-conscious consideration that can lead people to a deepened understanding of themselves and others, not in the abstract, but in relation to specific social environments (...) [and] foster a more profound awareness (...) of how social contexts influence who people are and how they behave. It involves a person’s active analysis of past situations, events, and products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the explicit purpose of achieving and understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior. (pp. 155-156)

I undertook this act of self-conscious consideration by imagining the interaction between myself, the texts, the social situations I have encountered, my own history as well as political, economic and social events. The process of reflexivity as self-conscious consideration emphasized the complexity of my interaction with the texts; I was negotiating many different aspects of myself

within a particular socio-cultural period as I recreated these experiences. This complex notion of reflexive self made the reinterpretation of the experience a dynamic process whereby I attempted to get at many different layers of an experience through the writing of the vignettes.

6.2.3 Creating Stable Teaching Texts

As a teaching fellow, I was emerged in teaching texts all the time. I recollected particular events of my teaching day and retold these stories to colleagues, peers and family. These stories were often examples of the most dramatic events of the day. They often took the form of, “guess what happened today;” “you won’t believe what a student said;” “I never expected to hear that in my classroom.” This level of recollection of one’s teaching experience was an emotional release only. In retelling my experiences this way, I looked for sympathy and understanding from others and emotional release for myself. Even when my colleagues and I would come together to examine and reflect on our experiences in the classroom, the reflection was shallow; we were still retelling the same stories and memories as snippets of our teaching experience. This process changed when we incorporated the electronic discussion board into our class. Suddenly, I had texts to actually examine – conversations, dialogues, reactions. Incorporating the discussion board was important because it highlighted for me the importance of creating stable teaching texts which I could read and examine. Stable teaching texts are texts which capture experience(s) over a period of time and have meaning for the reader. Stable teaching texts can take many forms including journal entries, think pieces and email correspondence. Cochran-Smith (1990) believes that in order “to make teaching into readable text, it is necessary to establish space between teachers and their everyday work” (p.). Creating stable teaching texts

for examination provides a space that McDonald (1992) names “apartness” Further, he elaborates on the benefit of creating teaching texts:

This is the gist of reading teaching, its minimal core: to step outside the room, figuratively speaking, and to search for perspective on the events inside. It is simple work on its face, private and comparatively safe, the consequence perhaps of deliberately noticing one’s own practice (...) By such means, teachers may spot the uncertainty in their own practice. They may spot it, as I did, in unexpected tangles of conflicting values, in stubborn ambivalence, in a surprising prevalence of half-steps. (p. 11)

As I began to see the importance of examining my teaching texts, I looked to other texts such as journal writings, student work, evaluations and feedback, and think pieces. As I began to collect more texts, I also wrote more about the texts. Writing was for me a way of understanding what was occurring in my classroom, and it was also a way of incorporating reflexivity into my own practice as a practitioner and researcher. Thus I created other stable teaching texts which captured my initial reactions to and interpretation of the events in my classroom. Creating and examining stable teaching texts was essential in coming to a deeper understanding of my practice.

Even though I acknowledge the importance of creating and examining stable teaching texts, I recognize that it is impractical to suggest for others to attempt the intensive and rigorous process of examination as is demanded by a dissertation in their daily practice. Further, I am not advocating a definite way or method to engage with stable teaching texts, nor do I believe that stable teaching texts need to be fictionalized in the same way as I have chosen to do so in the dissertation. However, I do believe that creating and examining stable teaching texts is both

possible and practical. One example would be the use of journaling about one's practice. When I was teaching Multicultural Education for undergraduate students, I asked students to journal about the topics we were discussing in the classroom. I would respond to the students in their journals every three weeks, thus writing about four entries of my own. Every semester I choose to "follow" seven or eight students' journal entries, photocopying their entries and my responses to their entries. I sometimes chose students whose entries were difficult for me to respond to and took time for me to think of how I wanted to respond to them. I also chose students who wrote about emotional reactions to the course and how they thought the course was or was not changing how they thought. I sometimes chose students based on the insight of their thinking. And I always chose a student who did not write very much or wrote superficially. I examined these entries and my responses to them both during the semester and after. I also wrote additional journal entries and think pieces attempting to understand the texts and my interaction with them. While this was not the same process I undertook for the dissertation, creating this stable text allowed me examine my practice in a concrete and practical manner. Creating stable teaching texts to study also provided me with a way in which to reflexively examine the talk and text of students. Creating stable teaching texts is one way in which reflexive thinking in pedagogy can be undertaken.

6.3 LESSONS LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

My own experiences have led me to several insights about the need to be reflexive in my work, particularly within the field of social foundations. Social foundations can take up contested positions and ideas and push students to examine education and society through many different

lenses. At the same time, as an instructor, I too was pushed to examine education and society through many different lenses; I could no longer position myself outside of students' experiences in the classroom nor could I assume a neutral stance in the classroom. I was also pushed to examine and question my position within the classroom and my role with regard to affirming, silencing and muting dialogue in the classroom and on the Blackboard. Therefore I posit there were several lessons I learned from the study which I share below.

1. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy reaffirms the belief that education and teaching are political and rejects the notion of neutrality.

I have to openly reject the notion that instructors can be neutral and impartial in any classroom discussion, and that education is always political. Delia Bradshaw (2004) illustrates this idea by highlighting key questions about curriculum and teaching which demonstrate how education is always political. She asks:

- Who draws the boundaries?
- Who gets in the picture? And who doesn't?
- What gets in the picture? And what doesn't?
- What do we bring back into view that has gone out of view?
- Whose story gets told? And whose doesn't?
- Are counter-stories heard? (p. 328-9)

These questions reify the idea that education has always been and will always be political.

Furthermore, teachers and teaching are neither neutral nor objective. Although this idea is taken for granted in my field (Apple, 1993; Macedo, 1995; Shor, 1996; Kincheloe, 1999; Bigelow, 2002), I need to make this clear to students. It would be unethical to take up a position of neutrality which would by the very nature of the stance, communicate to students that the way

in which they have come to understand the world is wrong or negative if it is not the same way in which I, as the instructor, am representing the world. Rejecting neutrality communicates to students that ideas are open to contestation.

Further, to claim to be neutral, impartial, unbiased and/or objective also implies that the instructor is the giver of knowledge and meaning and affirms a banking system of education (Freire, 1970). In my classroom, I want to encourage knowledge making as a constructive process whereby the students and the teacher construct meaning together. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy illuminates the worldviews of my students as well as my own worldview.

Social foundations scholars cite student resistance as one of the essential challenges they face in the classroom (Abowitz, 2005; Butin, 2005d; Doyle, 2003; Garmon, 2005; Lea, 2004; Major & Brock, 2003; Pohan & Mathison, 1999). Butin (2005d) asserts that students are resistant to the “theoretically complex, politically volatile, and culturally debated educational issues” (p. 110) in society. Student resistance often stems from the unsettling process of having their way of constructing meaning about the world challenged. If I am to address the ways in which students represent their world, I must first understand what those ways are before I can begin to question and challenge them. In addition, it is important for me to understand *why* it is that students have come to represent their world in a particular way. Palmer (1997) argues that reflexivity plays an important role in knowing and understanding students:

[K]nowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. (p. 2)

Thus I should attempt to know my students first by knowing myself. This is a complicated and sometimes painful process that highlights for me the complexity of identity. Who I am as an individual is shaped both by how I conceive of “self” and how self is reflected back to me by others (Tatum, 2000). Who I am influences how I see others (my students) and being reflexive acknowledges my disposition and orientation toward others. Thus, in order to know my students, I need to first know myself and the worldviews I bring with me to my teaching practice.

2. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy encourages problematizing interactions with students.

The role of dialogue and deliberation in the social foundations classroom can have varied effects on my learners. I cannot assume that the way in which I challenge students’ beliefs and values is positive. I recognize the limitations of its use and struggle with both the purpose of its use as well as the intended and unintended outcomes that result from the use of dialogue and deliberation. I agree with political scientists like Sanders (1997) who question the inherent good of deliberation in a democracy because deliberation necessitates that citizens treat one another with mutual respect and have comparable skills in articulation. In the classroom, meeting these prerequisites would be impractical if not impossible. Furthermore, Boler’s (2004) discussion about the instructors’ role in confronting student dialogue in the classroom complicates an already difficult position for instructors who are committed to principles of social justice. She contends that student speech can be muted, silenced or affirmed in order to ensure a “critical analysis within higher education classrooms of any expression of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, ableism, and classism” (p. 4). Other scholars further complicate this issue (Mayo, 2004; deCastell, 2004) by questioning Boler’s focus on talk as opposed to the underlying attitudes and prejudices that do the damage. Jones (2004) casts doubt on “the talking cure” altogether and laments the onus on marginalized groups when they are expected to educate the

dominant culture. Both in and out of the classroom, I wrestle with how to interact with my students; I need to move beyond the simplistic and convenient ways in which I often labeled students in the past as “racist,” “sexist,” “naïve,” “privileged,” or the like and adopt more constructive and compassionate views of my students (Noddings, 1984). At the same time, I feel as if I cannot allow my classroom to become a vehicle for espousing dominant and oppressive speech without critically engaging the ideas students put forth. The heart of this issue for me is how to interact with students’ talk and text while adhering to both of these principles.

Reflexive thinking in pedagogy naturally highlights these dilemmas by forefronting my own beliefs, values and experiences in my interactions with students. This process forces me to contend with how I use dialogue and deliberation in the classroom and what kind of influence it may have on my students.

3. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy encourages an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of practice.

Reflexive thinking in pedagogy emphasizes the importance of systematically examining my practice and understanding how theory operates in my practice. As Edmundson and Greiner (2005) contend, I must “walk the talk” (p. 156) and show students how theory operates in the university classroom. They caution, “students are quick to smell hypocrisy if we read Dewey and talk about the importance of democratic community while lecturing and imposing top-down structure on the students” (p. 157). Further, I must allow students to point out the contradictions in the theories I present and the way in which I conduct myself in the classroom. If I am to highlight the importance of theory, I must begin in my classrooms where I stress to students that they need to critically engage in ideas about everything including my own pedagogy.

Second, I need to ask challenging questions about my teaching practice. What influence do I have on my students? Does my social foundations classroom accomplish the goals I set out to accomplish (e.g. to prepare students to critically engage with ideas from multiple perspectives)? While I can not definitively know the answers to these questions, there are several reasons I should attempt to complicate my understanding of teaching and learning. First, there are moral implications for what I do in the classroom. Turning students' worlds upside-down by challenging and providing alternate explanations for the way the world works should not be taken lightly. In addition, when I recommend to students to question, critique and ultimately change the status quo, I may place them at jeopardy both personally and professionally. As an ethical practitioner, I need to engage in inquiry which seeks to understand the influence my pedagogy has on my students.

Finally, as an educator committed to the principles of social justice, I need strategies to use in the classroom. This is not meant to imply that I need a fixed curriculum or a model that I can carry out for every student. However, strategies, frameworks and pedagogies such as reflective journaling, peer mentoring, aesthetic education and community education are all ways in which social foundations' educators have envisioned their practice. In what ways do these strategies and frameworks support the principles of social justice and prepare teachers to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population? What have other teachers reported about both the intended as well as unintended outcomes of these practices? As a researcher in the field of social foundations, I believe this inquiry should be undertaken in order to strive to create a more just and equitable society rather than assuming that what I am doing naturally works and is inherently positive. Without rigorous examination of my practice and my field, I may in fact unintentionally reinforce instead of purposely challenge the status quo. As Bredo (2005) asserts:

Those in social foundations also have no guaranteed high ground for claiming that their conceptions are more correct or unconfused than others. Our insights need to be seen as partial and hypothetical, like any others, for the worst thing one concerned with improving conceptual sensitivity and flexibility can do is to replace blindly or dogmatically held conceptions with others. Those in social foundations must take great care to be self-critical and to search out criticism from others, as we would like others to be responsive to our criticism. (p. 236)

Reflexive thinking in pedagogy promotes active examination rather than acceptance of my practice.

4. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy illuminates the potential of learning from aesthetic experience.

This study pushed me into the realm of aesthetic experience as I was introduced to arts-based research. This is not something I imagined at the beginning of the study and was reticent to undertake. However, as I reflect on the dissertation process, this was perhaps the most powerful experience for me captured within this dissertation.

Reflexive thinking in pedagogy is not limited to crafting vignettes. However the reconstruction of experience in the form of reflection is an aesthetic experience in itself. Neumann (2005) describes how scholarly learning can be aesthetic awareness as one experiences “moments of fused insight and emotion, dazzling sensations of coming to know, [and] frustration over ideas that unravel or that will not gel” (p. 69). Aesthetic experience is interactive and stresses multiple ways of knowing and “enables individuals to perceive connections they might otherwise overlook” (Kerdeman, 2005, p. 92). Learning occurs then through the experience of creating a story, play, poem, piece of artwork or the like. Aesthetic experience can be powerful

and can be “sufficiently resonant to cause us to call into question the fundamental value premises and ideological bases upon which educational decisions are made” (Barone, 1995, p. 174).

As I reflect on the experience of creating the fictionalized vignettes, I wonder about the potential of scholarly learning through aesthetic experience. Given today’s educational climate of scientifically-based research, the kind of scholarship that emerges from aesthetic experience faces threats of legitimacy and value. However, as Granger (2006) posits, there is a need to “expand our perception of the meaning and value of what occurs in our schools and classrooms beyond what can be articulated and known according to the tenets of scientific rationality” (p. 64). Reflexive thinking in pedagogy affirms the importance of how other ways of making meaning and understanding educational experience can lead to powerful insights that might not be gained from more traditional notions of learning and scholarship.

5. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy is a pathway to agency in the classroom and in the field.

The daily practice of teaching in the social foundations classroom can be a draining and sometimes discouraging experience especially when I encounter student resistance. Without a way of understanding my experiences in the classroom in a more conceptual and theoretic way, “pedagogical crises” can leave me feeling as if I have no agency in my classroom, no way to counter the pervasive common-sense ideologies (Fairclough, 2001) that manifest within my classroom. Understanding how and why students are representing the world the way they do as well as how and why I represent the world the way I do allows me to move beyond crisis and towards understanding and action in the classroom.

Teaching social foundations in today’s cultural context is intimidating and not without personal and professional risks. For example, when a student submits a post online at noindoctrination.org about a professor who is “biased” in the classroom, does this have any

impact on the individual's bid for tenure? A cursory examination of professors' rebuttals to students' claims may lend credence to this idea. Further, given the shrinking size of the field itself, teaching social foundations can be lonely. Once flourishing social foundations departments have been reduced to a couple (or even one) faculty members who are to teach these daunting courses. Social foundations teachers need the support and encouragement of other social foundations faculty who understand the dilemmas they face in the classroom and in schools of education. Agency comes not only from understanding how to counter common-sense ideologies in the classroom, but also from the emotional and intellectual support of other scholar-practitioners in the field.

The exploration of theoretic interpretations in students' talk and text through reflexive thinking in pedagogy has provided me with an awareness and understanding of the many ways I might act and respond in the classroom. As Gutmann (2001) reminds me, empowered citizens are those who engage in critical reflection and deliberation to *consciously* construct society. Reflexive thinking in pedagogy has allowed me to develop stances for action in my teaching practice in which I hope to contribute to the construction of a more just and equitable society.

EPILOGUE

In the Prologue, we introduced readers to our companion dissertation studies. Angela's dissertation, *Dimensions of Reflexive Thinking in Social Foundations Pedagogy: Complicating Student Responses for Theoretic Understandings*, explores the pedagogical challenges of teaching social foundations through an examination of student talk and text. She presents a framework for reflexive thinking in social foundations pedagogy as a way to respond to a pedagogical crisis and develop a stance for action. Deanna's dissertation, *(Re)Imagining a Place and Curricular Space for the Field of Social Foundations in Teacher Education: A Call for Communication and Collaboration*, addresses perennial challenges to the field through an exploration of the controversy over Basic Education at Jefferson University. In her dissertation she begins to reimagine a place and curricular space for social foundations in teacher education through communication and collaboration.

In the epilogue, we begin with a discussion of two important developments that have occurred nationally which we believe will significantly impact the field of social foundations. The first event was the release of the report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The second event was the publication of Arthur Levine's report on schools of education. Our epilogue discusses these two events and how a change in the culture of academia may impact the field and those who teach it.

We then discuss some lessons we learned in the process of writing companion dissertations. We reflect on the process of writing companion dissertations and discuss the ways in which we pushed each other to think differently about our related but separate inquiries. We also reflect on some of the challenges we faced in the process of writing companion dissertations.

A tale of two reports

In September of 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings established the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The commission's task was to create a "comprehensive national strategy" for postsecondary education in the United States. Over the course of the next year, the commission (comprised of 19 national leaders) heard proposals and perspectives from scholars and policy makers about higher education. The report was approved by 18 out of 19 members on the commission. The lone dissenter was David Ward, President of the American Council on Education – an organization that considers itself to most-broadly represents colleges and universities. In dissenting, Ward rejected what he characterized as the commission's "one size fits all solutions" to problems in higher education but worried that his action might contribute to the perception that colleges and universities are "reluctant to acknowledge their flaws and unwilling to undertake significant changes" (Lederman, August 11, 2006, n.p.,#).

Secretary Spellings was quick to react to the report and issued a statement which included an action plan based on the findings. Spellings proposed to:

- Expand 'the effective principles' of the No Child Left Behind Act to high schools, while continuing 'efforts to align high-school standards with college work' and increasing 'access to college-prep classes such as Advanced Placement.'

- Streamline the process of applying for federal student aid, to ‘cut the application time in half’ and notify students of their eligibility ‘earlier than the spring of their senior year, to help families plan.’
- Create a federal database to track students’ academic progress.
- Provide matching funds to colleges, universities, and states that collect and publicly report student ‘learning outcomes.’
- Convene members of accrediting groups in November ‘to move toward measures that place more emphasis on learning. (Field, 2006, p. A25)

These recommendations reaffirm the Department’s commitment to accountability and research-based programs and expand that commitment into the realm of higher education.

In September of 2006, Arthur Levine, former president of Teachers College, Columbia University, released a report based on his study of schools of education. His report criticized schools of education today claiming they are “‘unruly and chaotic’ Wild West towns that lack a standard approach to preparing teachers” (Honawar, 2006, p. 1). Levine’s report advises that schools of education take heed from the alternative teacher preparation programs that are appearing all over the country and warns, “There is a real danger that if we do not clean our own house, America’s university-based teacher education programs will disappear” (Levine, 2005). Current ideas represented in NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) provisions support Levine’s claims. In recent articles and press releases, the Department of Education has emphasized the importance of teacher preparation programs in addressing the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions (Henig, 2006; USDOE, 2006). Levine’s report outlines several ways to improve the preparation of teachers including the following recommendations:

- Transform education schools from ivory towers into professional schools focused on classroom practice;
- Focus on student achievement as the primary measure of teacher education program success;
- Rebuild teacher education programs around the skills and knowledge that promote classroom learning; make five-year teacher education programs the norm;
- Establish effective mechanisms for teacher education quality control; [and]
- Close failing teacher education programs, strengthen promising ones, and expand excellent ones by creating incentives for outstanding students and career-changers to enter teacher education at doctoral universities. (Honawar, 2006, p. 18)

Despite the criticism that the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) garner in Levine's report, both organizations support Levine's recommendation that teacher preparation programs transform from "ivory towers into professional schools focused on classroom practice" (Honawar, 2006, p. 19).

Both of these reports share the same goals for higher education: more accountability and more focus on effective teaching practices or researched-based teaching skills. While we agree that these goals should be included in comprehensive reform for higher education and teacher preparation programs specifically, a narrow focus on these goals is detrimental to the field of social foundations. As discussed in our studies, the field of social foundations is often criticized by both teacher educators and students as irrelevant to practice. Thus, the increasing focus on "classroom-based practice" as the key to improving student achievement could further exacerbate the field of social foundations' precarious place in teacher education programs. As

we conclude our companion studies, we wonder how the current climate of higher education reform will impact the future direction of the field of social foundations and those who teach it.

The companion dissertation experience: Lessons learned

As we reflect on our companion dissertations and the nature of our engagement, we believe that several insights might be gleaned from the experience. First, the way in which we thought about the inquiry changed as we challenged each other to “think otherwise” (Greene, 1988) and pushed each other to new intellectual insights. We both recognize that our studies would have looked different had we conducted them without the benefit of our continuing dialogic.

We pushed one another to consider more meaningful ways in which to portray the complexity of our studies. For example, when Angela wondered whether she could do so through fictionalized vignettes, Deanna suggested she read the fictive narratives of legal scholars Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado. Reading these stories inspired Angela to think beyond a traditional narrative portrayal and imagine fictionalized narratives of the student texts.

We also questioned each other’s assumptions, beliefs and interpretations in the inquiry process. This critical questioning led us to different explanations and alternate ways to interpret the texts. For example, when Deanna wondered whether one of the reasons social foundations was in jeopardy in teacher education at Jefferson University was due to a perceived lack of quality in the teaching of such courses, Angela challenged her to think about the logic of the argument. She questioned, “Would another department be disbanded because students complained about a couple of faculty members in that department? Would we eliminate the math education department if students complained about the faculty who taught in that department?” This kind of critical questioning led both of us to reexamine and sometimes

reinterpret our findings. Thus we believe that sustaining a dialogic relationship throughout the dissertation process influenced every phase of the inquiry including the portrayal and interpretation of our studies.

While the experience of writing companion studies was thought-provoking and engaging, there were some challenges to approaching the dissertation process as a shared experience. First, time was an issue. Often during the study, we were at different stages of the inquiry. Sometimes this was beneficial as we could guide and/or encourage one another during the various phases of the dissertation. At other times, this was problematic because we felt the pressure to not let each other down with our progress (or lack thereof).

We also speculate that the process of writing companion studies would have been more difficult had we not had an extensive working relationship prior to embarking on this experience. Our working relationship has encompassed many diverse experiences, both personal and professional. Most importantly, we had co-authored articles prior to this experience and were comfortable critiquing one another's thinking and writing. We are not sure how common of a relationship ours is, but we think it has been the foundation for our success in these studies.

Throughout the process, we were guided by Elie Wiesel's (2006) proposition that we are all partners in a quest. Thinking of the inquiries in this way freed us to move forward and to feel comfortable dwelling in uncertainty. We became each other's questions, which spawned dialogue and pushed us toward new theoretical insights.

In writing this Epilogue, we recognize that the quest is not over. Our questioning has led us to more questioning and continues to unite us. And so the journey continues.

APPENDIX A

TABLE OF SHARED TEXT

Title of Section	Deanna Hill's Dissertation (page numbers)	Angela Minnici's Dissertation (page numbers)
Social Foundations of Education as a Field of Study	31-33	3-5
The climate within Teacher Education and the field of Social Foundations	48-51	21-24

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF BLACKBOARD TEXT

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.	Read 37 times
Date: Thu Apr 1 2004 8:19 am	
Author: *****	
Subject: Can we change the canon?	
	Remove
<hr/>	
<p>In our course packet, chapter 9 reading it talks about tentative knowledge and that there are multiple truths and perspectives. If this is the case, then can the canon of reading materials in curriculum be changed or added to according to the effects of time and globalization? Is this too daunting a task or one that would require constant change? Or is curriculum difficult to innovate upon simply because he who has the gold has the final say?</p>	
	Reply
<hr/>	

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.	Read 30 times
Date: Thu Apr 1 2004 8:54 am	
Author: *****	
Subject: Re: Can we change the canon?	
	Remove
<hr/>	
<p>See other thread for discussion about this. Harold Bloom has a really interesting book called</p>	

“The Western Canon” about this.

He suggests that the Women’s studies groups (among others) creat their own canon. Once all of these departmental canons are in place, then assessment becomes easier.

My suggestion is getting over the inherently divisive ideas of Postmodernism. It’s a new millennium, it’s time to move onto a more constructive form of thought. Instead of this relentless subject/object play, and including all perspectives. Christ!

Think of it – if your concrete gender, gender orientation, racial description, etc has this big effect on your identity, isn’t that an abstraction? Do you really have anything (internally) in common with other women? Other people with the same color skin? With anyone dead? (Most of the authors)

We all die alone, regardless of whether you believe in an afterlife. Life is a journey done in, through a land where no one truly knows us.

Are the ideas of the Enlightenment not more constructive? When Jefferson was reading Voltaire and Rousseau to form the ideas in the Declaration, the ideas were that all men are illenn equal.

We use those words now to mean all persons. Even though, they are obviously not. Everyone has different talents and skills, etc. What it should say is that the only possible way a state can be fair is to treat all persons as though they are equal.

My point is that yes, a family of humanity perspective is a big abstraction, but it is a much more constructive abstraction than what fragmentary thought from identity politic has left us with. It was the original aim of the civil rights movement, and it has been lost, and turned into a divisive form of self isolationism, especially in academia.

I suggest a Neo-Enlightenment for the millennium.

(Here’s where I yell, “Who’s with me?!?! And run off alone, like John Belushi.)

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 35 times

Date: Fri Apr 2 2004 11:42 am

Author: *****

Subject: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

The general population of schools have school boards where the community elects them in to that position. I know there are a few out there that don't do this but for the most part lets just go with the elected ones. Those elected onto the school board are to represent the community in the school. They choose what they think should be taught in the classes. So whatever the majority of that community thinks is appropriate or important is what will be taught to the kids in that community so just from that we can see that normally the kids are sheltered to what that community does.

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 27 times

Date: Sat Apr 3 2004 10:21 am

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

Good point about schoolboards.

I never recall seeing the school board candidates positions posted on election day.

Related topic: Is anyone concerned about how influential Schwarnegger is now? He's the governor of a state that buys a lot of text books.

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 25 times

Date: Sat Apr 3 2004 8:27 pm

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

Hey *****, what's going on in California regarding that? I don't exactly follow what's going on way over there, so could you fill me (and anyone else who doesn't know the situation)in on this topic?

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 28 times

Date: Sun Apr 4 2004 1:34 pm

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

Well, Texas and california buy a whole lot of textbooks, yes? I am pretty sure (can anyone back this up?) that they purchase books for the whole state. As in, public schools all use the same books.

So, if they have that kind of buying power, publishing companies sit up and notice. Everyone wants their dollar, so then they will cater to the content and format that these big power states want in their curriculum.

Thusly, the agenda and content of textbooks is strongly influenced by whoever is in power in these states. In California, now, we have Schwarzenegger running things. Though he seems like he might be the alright sort to get a beer with (You can picture it. If he called up and said "Hey, Do - why dawn't yoo und ***** come ovah to Pee-tah's for a beeyah.", you wouldn't be all that surprised.) -I do have worries about the agenda he sets for the schools. He is not really, what one would call socially progressive, and has made some fairly gnomish statements in the press years before political aspirations.

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 24 times

Date: Sun Apr 4 2004 2:48 pm

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

Ah, I see now. Well hopefully Governor Schwarzenegger has wisened up since then. He needs to realize that he's responsible for a lot of important things now, including the textbook situation.

By the way, nice impression of "Ahhold."

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 16 times

Date: Tue Apr 6 2004 11:30 pm

Author: *****

Subject: Textbook Publishers are winning

[Remove](#)

After listening to the TIMSS presentation, I think that textbook publishers have a lot to do with the material that we learn in the classroom.

I thought that the speaker brought up a very good point about why textbooks are so big--In order to please everyone, the publishers include information about as many topics as they can find.

If the textbooks are bigger, then textbook companies can charge more money for their products, and then they rake in the profits when California or Texas decides to use their textbooks.

This whole situation results in students with back problems because they have too many large textbooks to carry, yet they don't even get to learn the majority of the material in those books---It's kind of ironic--many people think that just because they give their students a textbook that covers all of the "important" topics, they are "educating" them....Those extra 1000 pages of material in a textbook mean nothing to the student if they don't get to talk about them in the classroom.

Any opinions?

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 11 times

Date: Wed Apr 7 2004 2:21 pm

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbook Publishers are winning

[Remove](#)

i agree with ***** on this one. If you teach the students a lot of info on a lot of material, they arent learning. Learning is all about retaining knowledge and this becomes difficult when students have to swallow all that material.

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 11 times

Date: Wed Apr 7 2004 8:25 pm

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbook Publishers are winning

[Remove](#)

That is even happening to me this semester. (Not in this class...) I have two classes in particular (*****, heads up here.) where the professors are just piling the reading on in such a level that there is no way i can retain it all. What a waste of my time, money and efforts.

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 16 times

Date: Wed Apr 7 2004 8:44 pm

Author: Minnici, Angela <amz16@pitt.edu>

Subject: Re: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

I believe Arnold is considering raising taxes - this is the last thing I heard about gov. Arnold. Why do you think we haven't heard too much about what he's doing when it was all you could find on the news not too long ago?

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Textbooks, Curriculum, etc.

Read 8 times

Date: Wed Apr 14 2004 10:15 am

Author: *****

Subject: Re: Textbooks in General

[Remove](#)

I Dont think its right for a community to shelter its kids just to instill there values on them. Having said that, I dont know what anyone could do to stop it.

[Reply](#)

[OK](#)

APPENDIX C

DRAFT OF *ON BECOMING A DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM* Noreen Garman, 2004

For more than two centuries, democracy in the United States has been predicated on citizens' informed engagement in civic life and community affairs. For much of that time public schools and universities have been seen as essential to support the development of such citizens. However, all too often schools have taught *about* democracy in institutions that do not attempt to *live out* democratic principles in their daily activities. Yet we realize that it's what we do, not what we say, that matters in teaching. In the last decade there has been a renewed emphasis on democratic schooling and democratic classrooms. Educators are making concerted efforts to explore the practices associated with democratic classrooms (see *Teaching Education Journal*, Fall/Winter, 1995).

Admittedly formal educational endeavors, for the most part, assume that teachers will be in charge of the what is taught and how students will be evaluated...seemingly not an environment where democracy, as we commonly think about it, can thrive. In the university, the concept of *professorial privilege* obtains. As Colin and Heaney (2001) describe:

It is the university's mission not only to disseminate knowledge, but also to legitimize those who acquire it and fail those who have not met dominant norms. The power to

name what it is that constitutes knowledge and to stand in judgment over those who seek to attain it is the ground and substance of professorial privilege. (pg.31)

Still the authors argue that it is important for teachers to strive for a practice that includes principles necessary for a democratic society. They suggest that, “At its root, the development of a democratic practice is about balancing and negotiating power among groups that embody diverse cultural and gendered norms.” Guy (1999) emphasizes that pedagogy can reflect *cultural democracy* which refers to the “goal of living in a society in which multiplicity of cultures not only exist, but thrive.”

In our Instructional Team meetings about the Social Foundation of Education class, we have been addressing the issues related to *cultural democracy*, what it means to us specifically and how might we help engender it in our pedagogy. We asked ourselves if there are signs of danger in recent years that alarm us and is this why we’ve been concerned. Many teachers have reported that students come with cultural and ideological differences, which, in the past were celebrated as rich multicultural resources for learning. Currently however, there seemed to be an increasing climate of intolerance. Some students appear to be unable to hear and respect contrary ideas. Some students seem to carry with them a familiar view of the world and suggest that their views are “really the way the world is” in general. Other students seem unable to know how to respond to unsubstantiated claims of their class members. What often results are class sessions where discussion becomes a series of monologues—rather than authentic deliberative dialogue where class members advance each other’s thinking.

So we wondered out loud whether the current climate of our culture is actually obviating against cultural democracy. The national media has made *hate* a household word. *Time Magazine* (December 1, 2003) featured articles on why the public either “loves or hates” the President. In the same issue, Dickerson and Tumulty posit “The Rise of the Anger Industry,” describing how media pundits such as Rush Limbaugh on one side and those like Al Franken on the other have reveled in strong, negative language with great success. *Sports Illustrated on Campus* (November 18, 2003), in bold front cover headlines, shouted, “Hate Thy Neighbor,” about college rivalries. In a recent brochure for the *National Review*, William F. Buckley, Jr. invited readers to “Be Sinfully Judgmental.” (Unfortunately he didn’t bother to make the distinction between the meanings of “making judgments” and “being judgmental.”) Under a *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* headline, “Ignorance Has Killed American Democracy,” William Pillar wrote a letter to the editor about the killing of Nathaniel Jones by the Cincinnati police. Pillar laments that:

America has lost its passion for justice, equality and fair returns. We have become indifferent, intolerant. That’s what killed Nathaniel Jones. That’s what has destroyed democracy. Our hearse is on its way to the cemetery.(p. A20)

There is, of course, a danger for educators to dwell too heavily on the negative aspects of today’s culture, wringing our hands as if there isn’t much we can do. We are obliged, however, to pay attention to warning signs and struggle harder to shape our practice to educate for an intelligent and compassionate citizenry of the future.

Knowledge Generating in a Democratic Classroom:

Current thinking about the nature of learning suggests that knowledge is socially constructed. Educators recognize the significant (and elusive) relationship between individual and social structures in determining how humans come to know their world. And although we recognize that reality is individual and each one of us interprets (and thereby constructs) knowledge individually, we are continually influenced by our social structures. The classroom seminar provides a social structure to maximize learning through deliberative dialogue.

It is important here to make the distinction between discussion and deliberative dialogue. During discussion, it's quite possible for participants to air their views on a particular subject didactically in order to get their positions heard, yet having no intention of engaging in a deliberative exchange by considering alternative views. Genuine deliberative dialogue requires that members of the group engage in and with each other's ideas, hearing, acknowledging, and considering facets of their own positions as well as the others. Class members embody diverse backgrounds which include cultural and ideological experiences. Perhaps most important, university students are thought to bring with them their curiosity and capacity for learning. This means that a class member brings her/his ability and energy to reason, to inquire, to interpret, to argue, to critique, to theorize....and above all, the desire to push the bounds of "everyday" intellectual activity. A member also brings the capacity to care about others, to find compassion in judgments and to see the humor, irony and inconsistencies in the human condition generally. These "capacities" are but a few that serve as the wellspring of energy for the time and space of the democratic classroom deliberations.

Sharing a Common Will:

Jerome Bruner reminds us that:

Education must, then, be not only a transmission of culture, but also a provider of alternative views of the world and a strengthener of the will to explore them.

Although class members embody the rich capacities mentioned above, they may, for whatever reason, lack the will to bring them to the group. Thus, the following imperatives might allow these capacities to develop into personal commitments and eventually into a class commitment.

•• willingness to engage in the shared learning of the class members.

Educators talk a lot these days about “engagement” as a critical characteristic of learning. Among other things, it means being present . The notion of “being present” has both a literal and figurative meaning.

In literal terms “being present” means physically sharing the same time and space with an understanding that when one is not there, even for a short period of time, the class seminar suffers. There is a group rupture, and in some cases a serious violation, that diminishes the class’ energy and potential.

Being there, in figurative terms, means being connected. Members are willing, not only to listen, but also to struggle to understand and extend the individual and class deliberations. This happens when class members begin to develop a genuine respect for “the other” and are willing to consider ideas that are contrary to their own.

•• willingness to risk.

In educational literature, risk is often associated with deliberative dialogue (and knowledge generating.) However, it’s tough to share a tenuous idea that hasn’t been well thought-out or documented (which, for many of us, happens daily.) Yet, some of the most powerful insights can come from the stance and counterstance that we take as we exchange (often contradict) ideas. In doing so we run the risk of sounding naive, uninformed, or even downright foolish.

In challenging others, we risk being thought of as inconsiderate, arrogant, even heartless. Thus groups, when they first come together, often attempt to establish harmony by, what Goffman (1967) calls “working acceptance” (p.11). The prevailing mood is politeness, in which members strive to “save face” for themselves and others, while at the same time, some members are attempting to establish their identities through self promotion. (It may be that there is a delicate balance between self-promoting and sharing of self.)

As the democratic class continues to evolve, members begin to feel more secure and their contributions may not be seen so much as high risk responses. Most important, group members begin to feel as if they can deal with one another “honestly,” transcending the tendencies to save face or give lip service to ideas. Thus, one important characteristic of a democratic classroom is authenticity.

...willingness to strive for warranted positions

Foundations of Education coursework encourages the identification of complex relationships in education between and among various interest groups and the analysis of the sociocultural factors of race, gender and class. These educational issues represent various positions, many of which are sensitive and/or contentious, often debatable. It is important, in presenting one’s point of view, to warrant the argument, in other words, to provide specific documentation of the source of one’s ideas. (Note: a personal opinion is considered a warrant, albeit, a weak one.)

••• willingness to struggle for balanced participation.

When diverse group of class members first form, often the participation is uneven. Some members initiate the discussion, some are willing to add to a topic (even though they are not particularly interested), and some remain relatively silent. As members feel more confident in the discussion, the balance may change. In a democratic class, members are concerned about “focused dialogue”. Each member is conscious of his/her responsibility to initiate, to give

responses, to ask, to clarify and challenge, to summarize, etc. Balanced participation means that class members work to create spaces so that the group is productive for all.

••• willingness to care about the health of the group

As class members develop mutual respect for one another, through patience and curiosity they become interested in the topics and ideas of others that may not seem to relate to their own. Democratic class members recognize that the health of the group has a direct relationship to the quality of their own work.

••• willingness to push intellectual reasoning to insightful and theoretic levels.

This is a central quality of democratic classrooms. The purpose of the group is to advance knowledge by drawing on the learning resources of the group. In order to carry on productive deliberations, each member is obliged to come to the discussion prepared to grapple with challenging ideas. This often requires more than a first reading of the article(s) under discussion. It may even require members at times to consult other resources in order to help interpret the topic as framed.

....willingness to become an active member in a community.

American democracy depends on its citizens to accept the responsibilities of active engagement in community affairs. The academic seminar is a community of learners where

scholarly reasoning is imperative. Each class member has a role in this important accomplishment. Members not only offer information, they also “represent” perspectives. People represent ideas and, as class members share ideas, they become embodiments of ideas and perspectives for other members to understand and reflect. This kind of understanding can come only if members are willing to suspend judgment of the “right and wrong” of the idea expressed by another. Class members are encouraged to move beyond the “I agree or disagree with you” to a place of hearing the perspective that the other might represent.

Challenges

Becoming a democratic classroom is a tough challenge. It’s quite an accomplishment when class members actually begin to sense their authenticity in their endeavors. It takes time and hard work. The Foundations of Education Instructional Team is willing to accept the struggle toward “becoming” with the hope for a better understanding of potential for American education.

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