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Examining narratives: Conversations between community mentors and pre-service teachers

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Examining narratives: Conversations between community mentors and pre-service teachers

Abstract

State policy and teacher evaluation rubrics increasingly call for attention to family and community engagement. Yet teachers, schools, and families continue to face a number of obstacles preventing collaboration on all sides. Research on culturally responsive teaching, funds of knowledge, and community teaching have identified a number of concrete principles and practices for educators to partner with families and communities. However, teacher education programs continue to struggle in crafting authentic experiences for pre-service teachers to partner with families and communities. This study examines regionally-based, small group discussions– which, were part of a larger programmatic set of experiences–between preservice teachers and partnering community mentors in one teacher education program. Using narrative analysis, the authors found that conversations revealed layered engagement mediated by levels of trust and pre-existing expectations.

Keywords

Teacher Education, Preservice Teachers, Community-Based, Dialectic

Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to acknowledge the many family and community mentors and teacher candidates who made the work described here possible. We also would like to acknowledge the partnership of our university and community based team.

Introduction

Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education ... preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education.

-Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In his seminal work on oppression in education, Freire (1970) argued against a manner of schooling that relies solely upon imposing one's knowledge and silencing others. Instead, he argued for a pedagogy based on the dialectic to inform and mediate learning. There are two guiding ideas that frame an understanding of the dialectic for the purposes of this analysis: 1) dialogue moves towards a new combined knowledge for both parties, and 2) the actual act or process of dialog is what establishes trust, and ultimately solidarity.

This paper takes a closer look at small group conversations between preservice teachers (PSTs), in their third quarter of a four-quarter teacher education secondary program, and mentors from local communities as part of a programmatic strand experience. More about how the conversations fit within the program and how they worked is discussed later in this paper. In examining these conversations, which were grounded in the dialectic, we hope to better understand the development of the new combined knowledge between the PSTs and community mentors and the potential and obstacles around establishing trust. These conversations uncovered deep-seated issues rooted in control, power, race, privilege, and knowledge.

Building partnerships between communities and teacher education programs, attending to what transpires in things as seemingly innocuous as conversations about working with families between PSTs and mentors, requires an examination of deep-seated issues that rise to the surface. We asked: How do the narratives we tell about ourselves and about others,

affect interactions between pre-service teachers and partnering community mentors?

Family and Community Mentor Network (FCMN)

The FCMN was an organized network of mentors from local families and communities. The co-founders—a Black woman and a White woman—described the mentors as being from all walks of life, “grass-roots to grass-tops,” representing a diverse range of experiences, races, and cultural legacies. In 2013-14 (the year prior to the particular conversations presented here) FCMN, through the leadership of the two co-founders, 70 members from local families and communities participated in the teacher education program (Zeichner, Bowman, Guillén, & Napolitan, 2016). These collaborations with the PSTs ranged from panels on particular topics (School to Prison Pipeline), to small group discussions (working collaboratively with families), to advising PSTs about their Capstone projects.

The co-founders were not interested in serving as a diversity requirement or what they called, “checking the box.” Rather, they understood teachers were coming to their neighborhoods of color and culture not ready for their children. Their work with PSTs revolved around sustained conversations about race and relationships with people from local communities.

Programmatic efforts towards a more democratic model of teacher education

Opening up universities in democratic ways is not easy, and communities and scholars of color have long called for a transformative, asset-based approach to community-school partnerships (Delpit, 1995; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978; Siddle Walker, 1996). We argue, like other scholars and practitioners before us, that however difficult these collaborations may be, they are essential in order to better prepare teachers who are ready to not only teach students, but authentically partner with families and communities with care and respect (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Mahan, Fortney, & Garcia, 1983; Murrell, 2001; Zeichner, 2010).

In an effort to better prepare PSTs for these partnerships, in this particular teacher education program, a programmatic strand was developed called the Community Teaching (CT) strand. The strand was based on Murrell's work on community teaching (2001, Murrell, Strauss, Carlson, & Alcoreza Dominguez, 2015) and Cochran Smith's *learning to teach against the grain* (1991). It primarily operated in a seminar that ran through the four quarters of the Master in Teaching (MIT) program in secondary and elementary programs. It was in this seminar space where the mentors from the FCMN largely connected with the PSTs, and university-based instructors.

This paper highlights small group conversation meetings, which happened in the third quarter of the four-quarter program. At this point in the program, through the CT strand, PSTs had participated in several community-based panels and discussions with mentors from local families and communities. These conversations were one of the last interactions between PSTs and mentors in the program and they were held in four different locations based on geographic regions where placement schools of PSTs were located.

In the following section, we describe the programmatic strand of which these discussions were a part, who was involved, and the contexts of the discussions. Following these, we discuss methods around participant selection, the data collection, and the analysis of data.

Small Regional Discussions

The Strand

The Community Teacher (CT) strand was a sociopolitical programmatic element in a secondary and elementary, predominantly White, teacher education program in a large research university in the west. Figure 1 outlines what the community mentors referred to as "the journey," which was a series of experiences in a programmatic strand for the PSTs, developed to build upon one another. The mentors specifically asked that our first quarter with PSTs begin with panels. This was to give room for PSTs to process testimonies they heard, with some distance. The mentors felt and understood that some of what the PSTs heard may be new and/or challenging information about race, culture, and privilege. As more

between those members who had worked on the CT stand in the teacher education program (including the authors) and FCMN. The co-founders understood they would be participating in a mutually beneficial endeavor with representatives from the teacher education program. With that understanding, the co-founders agreed to collaborate to bring a series of experiences to teacher candidates.

As stated before, opening up teacher education programs in democratic ways is no easy task. Often, when the university-based team (including the authors) discussed the CT work that was planned with the mentors and the co-founders of FCMN with others in the teacher education program, we were asked, "Why them?"

The first inclination was to justify why—often referring to FCMN as a catalyst organization—one that connected to many individuals from Mountain City's various communities. Then we began to answer instead, "Why not them?" The two co-founders of FCMN had a wide reach to family and community mentors from all walks of life, they came from a long history of community organizing, and were highly visible among the city's communities and political scene. Despite institutional obstacles, our small team co-planned the experiences that were a part of the CT strand.

Contexts

Mountain City is a large city, located on the west coast, surrounded by other metropolitan areas to the north, east, and south. Like many other U.S. cities, Mountain City has a history of residential redlining. Consequently, many communities of color have historically bought homes and lived in the southern and central areas of the city. Mountain City also employs a neighborhood school model in which the student body attending local schools reflect their surrounding neighborhood; both schools and communities remain largely segregated.

Matsko and Hammerness (2013) argue the need for programs to deconstruct and define layers of contextual knowledge through context-specific physical surroundings, noting "specific features of the classroom, school, community, district, and federal contexts all influence teaching and learning" (p. 137). They suggest that preparing teachers for urban

school settings requires knowledge of local contexts and the many histories in an urban center.

Attention to contextual knowledge of Mountain City, however, proved challenging for the PSTs, community mentors, and university-based educators.

During the time of this study, the teacher education program stated its commitment to social justice and urban schools in programmatic materials. It also communicated this commitment to students during the admissions process, during orientation, and across classes. Despite these commitments, many PSTs completed their student teaching practicum in outlying metropolitan areas with less ethnic heterogeneity. During the 2014-2015 academic year, 46 PSTs were placed at 20 different schools around the greater Mountain City area. Six of the 20 schools have a student population with greater than 50% free and reduced lunch. Just 14 of the 46 PSTs were placed in one of these six schools (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of preservice teachers and community mentors by region

Variable	Preservice teachers <i>n</i>	Community Mentors <i>n</i>
Central Cluster		
Self Identified		
Ethnicity		
African	1	5
American		
Asian	1	1
White	6	1
Latinx	0	1
Self Identified		
Gender		
Female	6	6
Male	2	2
Southeast Cluster		
Self Identified		
Ethnicity		
African	0	5

American		
Asian	0	1
White	11	1
Latinx	1	0
Self Identified		
Gender		
Female	9	5
Male	3	2
North Cluster		
Self Identified		
Ethnicity		
African	0	4
American		
Asian	0	1
White	11	2
Latinx	0	0
Self Identified		
Gender		
Female	7	4
Male	4	3
Eastside Cluster		
Self Identified		
Ethnicity		
African	0	4
American		
Asian	3	0
White	6	1
Latinx	0	0
Self Identified		
Gender		
Female	6	3
Male	3	2

Recognizing that teacher-family-community relationships differ depending on context, we organized small group discussions at four schools, each geographically situated in the southeast, east, northern, and central areas around Mountain City. School locations were chosen to host one of these discussions if they had a large number of PSTs completing their student

teaching practicum, and a classroom to which we could gain access after school.

Having these smaller regional discussions were an opportunity for PSTs to engage in conversations about working with families particular to their context. However, the commitment to urban, communities of color and the reality of placements in more affluent areas presented a contradiction. Placements in central and southern areas of Mountain City provided immediate connections to the program's commitments for PSTs. However, to some PSTs placed in the north and east, more affluent and predominantly White communities, topics related to color and culture seemed irrelevant.

Thus, conversations that took place in the northern and eastern regions presented a challenge the team had not anticipated: could FCMN mentors, primarily from the southern and central areas of the city, speak to communities in the northern and eastern regions?

Ultimately, the team decided to have mentors primarily from the southern and central regions of Mountain City. Among the mentors they invited were those like Richard, a school administrator from a southern region school, Lorraine, an award winning retired teacher from the central area, and Jovonna, who brought her experiences as one of the only Black students in her eastside classroom growing up, to attend the eastern and northern regional meetings.

Though the four regionally-based discussions were co-planned and co-facilitated by the team, the discussion sessions began to develop similar structures and familiar routines to classroom teachers. The community mentors appreciated the familiar routines and took ownership of opening inclusion activities, small group guiding questions, share-outs, and closing exit tickets. Though the team crafted guiding questions for each session, each group was free to follow the discussion wherever it went.

Following a Freirean theory of the dialectic, the conversation topics were generative. For example, one topic that arose after a group session was: should/can all students go to college? The question emerged from a discussion in which one PST, placed in northern Mountain City, argued that not all students needed to go to college. The community mentors

were shocked. They challenged this line of thinking as problematic for students of color who have traditionally had lower college-going rates, often tied to a larger systemic gap between class and ethnicity. The team decided to build on this discussion at the next session, held at a school located in a more densely populated and diverse area, by asking the group: what is student success, and what does it look like?

Methods

Participants

Reflecting a common trend in teacher demographics in the United States, the cohort included a White, female majority. Of the 46 pre-service in the secondary cohort, 11 PSTs, or 24% identified as students of color, and 35, or 76% identified as White. Participating community mentors represented a different demographic trend. Of the participating 13 community mentors, 85% identified as a person of color and 15% identified as White (see Table 2).

Table 2. Community mentor demographics

Mentor (pseudonym)	Gender	Ethnicity
Jovonna	Female	African American
Faith	Female	White
Tamika	Female	African American
Saba	Female	East African
Jason	Male	African American
Elijah	Male	African American
Minh	Male	Asian
Shelley	Female	African American
Richard	Male	African American
Natalie	Female	Asian
Lorraine	Female	African American
Luis	Male	Latinx
John	Male	White
Totals	13 Mentors	7 Female 6 Male
		8 Black 1 Latinx 2 White 2 Asian

The 13 mentors that participated in these regionally-based discussions mirrored the same demographics of the larger 70+ mentors with whom we partnered over the two years of the project. For the purposes of these regional discussions, the leaders of the FCMN chose mentors based on 1) their experiences with the communities in that geographic and/or cultural region, 2) their experiences as veteran mentors with the program, and 3) the need to create a diverse representation of perspectives and voices from the community (see Table 3).

Table 3. Demographic comparison of preservice teachers and community mentors

Variable	Preservice teachers (<i>n</i> =46) %	Community Mentors (<i>n</i> =13) %
Self Identified Race		
White	76%	15%
People of Color	24%	85%
Self Identified Gender		
Female	67%	54%
Male	33%	46%

For example, the regional meeting that took place in the southeast, included Natalie, a mentor who, through her job with the department of parks and recreation, also directed the after-school teen programming at the community center in the area. Another mentor in the southeast regional meeting was Shelley, an artist and a lawyer who had worked with the criminal justice system in her community, and who had attended the local high school there. Similarly, the central area meeting included Faith, a member of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) at the school where the meeting took place, and Luis, one of the youth coordinators at the local Latinx community center whose caseload included students attending that school.

Our role as participant observers allowed us the flexibility to authentically partner in co-planning and co-facilitating, as well as the ability to take observational notes during small group discussion time.

Data Collection

For logistical reasons, the team grouped PSTs into four regional cluster areas, with each of the four regional discussions hosting between 8 to 15 PSTs per school site. PSTs were then placed into smaller groups of four to five, in conversation with anywhere from one to three community mentors per group.

Ten small group discussions took place across the four region meetings during the fall of 2014. The university-based instructors (one of the authors) rotated between groups as participant observers co-facilitating and participating in conversations. We also documented discussions through observational notes and participant exit tickets. Ultimately, we selected six group discussions for recorded, transcribed, and coded analysis. These six discussions represented the variety of topics that emerged through dialogue, the regional neighborhoods and communities around the city, and the diversity of PST and mentor perspectives.

Analysis

In thinking about ways to analyze the discussions, we realized that much of the conversations were initial meetings between familiar strangers. Although community mentors were partially consistent from one regional meeting to another, PSTs were required to attend only one meeting. Each group discussion was a complex and rich encounter in which participants engaged in discussion around a common theme when it came to working with families and students of color and culture: how to best educate our youth in a socially just manner, while simultaneously engaging in a conversation around education in our society.

Research employing discourse analysis has revealed the use of predictable, or routine, scripts in everyday encounters that create greater hegemonic norms and structures (Erickson, 2004; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). However, there is little research on the types of scripts that exist between teachers and families and ways those conversations shape the larger, hegemonic structures of schooling. Consequently, conversations between PSTs and community mentors, intentionally crafted to disrupt existing scripts around parent-teacher talk, called for a framework that allowed us flexibility the talk happening in the immediate

and present moment, as well as the implications for possible future, imagined discussions between teachers and families.

Inspired by recent work employing an identity as narrative framework, we coded discussions into three broad categories to understand the dialectical nature of the experience (Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Philip & Benin, 2014).

1. Narratives that one tells about oneself (including two sub-categories distinguishing actual from designated identities)
2. Narratives that one tells about others
3. Narratives that one thinks that others tell about him or her

Six small group discussions were transcribed and then coded in a line-by-line analysis of the types of narratives participants told about themselves, about others, and about the narratives they thought others told. These three categories included the broad narratives around schooling we often hear in general discourse around education. For example, in US society, a hotly contested narrative is around the quality of public schools. Some schools are labeled as 'failing schools' or 'bad schools' depending on the narrative being told about the school, and often its students, families of students, teachers, and even surrounding communities. These types of narratives were coded according to either narratives one tells about oneself, about others, or that one thinks that others tell about him or her, depending on the situation.

The identity as narrative framework proved a powerful tool through which to analyze discussion between PSTs and mentors discussing with families, K-12 children, the educational system, and their respective identities, roles, and hopes for the future. Both PSTs and community mentors shaped and were shaped by these discussions. Their identities and experiences informed and were informed by the narratives they employed throughout these discussions. To analyze the conversations in the present moment, as well as to envision ways to prepare PSTs to partner with families and communities in their future classrooms, we understood narrative as a tool used for multiple purposes: to illustrate an idea, give examples, use as evidence, and build common ground through offering affirming stories in response to other stories.

Findings

The following represents examples of ways in which both PSTs and community mentors employed narrative throughout their group discussions. Ironically, though some critiqued the mentors as “just telling stories,” our findings indicate the problems and the promise in focusing on the act of dialogue. The variety of narratives, that is, the dilemmas, illustrations, evidence and examples, told by both PSTs and community mentors, were grouped into the three types of narratives outlined in the narrative as identity framework: narratives one tells about oneself, narratives one tells about others, narratives one thinks that others tell about him or her.

Narratives One Tells About Oneself

The *Conocimiento* is a warm up activity designed to build community and trust, to get strangers to share something substantive, and to have those narratives honored in a community space. These questions, in essence, asked participants to share narratives about themselves. For example, one question classified in the category of an *actual identity* question was: “Tell us your favorite food and why.” A more *designated identity*-focused question was: “If you could go anywhere in the world where would you want to go and why?” Narratives told in response to the first question were factual, whereas narratives responding to the latter required telling of a place one hoped to go. Narratives more often than not, were coded as both sharing of actual identity narratives as well as designated identity narratives. For example, the sole Black male in the cohort began his introduction to the group with this statement in response to the prompt, “if you could have dinner with a historical figure, who would it be and why?”:

John (PST): My name is John, I'm at Franklin Middle School and the person or people I'd like to have dinner with are my great grandparents; I've never met them. They passed away before I was born but they were all from different countries and they each married someone who was outside of their race. They just seem like interesting people so I'd love to have met them.

All participants were given a choice of what narratives they wanted to tell from a selection of prompts. Some chose to respond with simple actual identity narratives, while others chose the more complex multi-layered actual and designated identity response. Community mentors across the groups chose to use this first introduction as both a space to share narrative about their own identity, but also to include a designated identity as a step forward in creating trust among the group.

In this case, John shared that he had never met his grandparents but that if he could, he would have wanted to discuss marrying someone outside of their race. In previous encounters with community mentors during in-class panels, this PST had a number of conversations with Jovonna, a Black woman who had also attended school in a predominantly affluent White community. In subsequent events, John sought out this community member as a true mentor who shared similar experiences with him. For example, he also attended school in a predominantly White community and felt self-conscious that his Black students were judging him. In this case, he was taking a risk in adding narrative about mixed-race identities in his family. John shared that he not only had a mixed-race family, but that he wanted to know more about why that was. In offering a designated narrative, John was complicating his own identity and putting that forward for others to see.

In another striking example, one mentor, noticing silence and slouching postures from PSTs, took the time to break what might have been a script by simply asking: Why are you here? The narratives PSTs told about themselves proved to be more engaging to them than previous dialogues about students or school.

Richard (Community Mentor): Can I break this for a minute and just ask a question around the table, and you guys can take whatever. Why are you doing this? Why teaching? I mean, it's really for all you guys, but I'm just curious as to why.

Paul (PST): Well, I mean, I've worked in other jobs before ... I worked in marketing for a while. I just felt like it lacked meaning and lacked purpose ... At the end of the day, I feel like I was just working to make money and not necessarily to do anything that made me feel good ... I said, well, education ... at least I feel like I'm doing something that I can be proud of.

Richard (Community Mentor): I asked that for most of the reasons, but just because like to be real with you guys, you guys all lit up in a very different way when I asked you why you teach, as opposed to any other parts of the conversation.

Narratives PSTs told about themselves were the focus of much of their talk in these discussions. During his final project at the end of the year, Paul confessed struggling in connecting with students during his time student teaching. His disciplinary methods, he noted, were distancing students and not creating the resulting changes for which he had hoped. He took risks with different identities in the classroom and during his final project presentation he reflected on his own growth; learning how to build relationships with students by learning how to be authentic.

Narratives One Tells About Others

There were many occasions for which community mentors played out the role of the imaginary teacher. They would tell a story as a hypothetical in which they spoke as if they were the teacher. Though they were telling narratives about imagined or real teachers, or the K-12 students in the classroom, the turn in using a first person to tell the story became a way to mitigate “othering” others. The transcriptions demonstrate that community mentors made consistent efforts to put themselves in the shoes of the teacher, to tell the story from their point of view, to empathize with the perspective of the teacher.

Mentors also often illustrated a point, or the moral of the story, through taking on this imaginary role in narrative form. They were able to present problems of practice through imagined narrative as well as to illustrate, through story, suggestions for interactions in and outside of school. They often wanted to tell the story of how they saw or interpreted the dilemmas that teachers face.

These imagined narratives about others included imaginary K-12 students. Often, as in the following example, the narrative adds another layered dimension by including narrative about multiple others in what equated to a teachable moment for the community mentor:

Sarah (PST): My students are all ELL and ... They can graduate from this school... [but] A lot of them end up coming back because they transfer to their school and then their language level is a different issue, like if they just academically can't handle the workload. A lot of them just say the kids are mean to them because they have accents ...

Luis (Community Mentor): ... the way I work with students is I'm really up front and really real with them. I've had an instance, actually a couple days ago, where one student was trying to say a couple words in English, a new word, and somebody laughed at him. He was like, "Why are they laughing?" ... People tend to forget about bullying as far as language and how that, in itself, really does affect ELL students; but it's going to happen too. That's one thing that I tell my students that, 'This is going to happen...'

In this example, Sarah's students were transitioning from a "newcomer's school" to a mainstream school only to return due to feelings of loneliness, of being bullied because of their accents, or singled out for other cultural markers. Luis was a Latino male who, through his job in an academic support program, specialized in working with Latina/o students. Though the larger societal problem of discriminating against immigrants was one he affirmed, validated, and acknowledged, his narration offered a type of solution for Sarah. This mentor chose to focus on solutions a teacher might use to support an English Language Learner needing to navigate the unjust world in which they found themselves. Eventually the discussion involved a number of community mentors engaging in narrative solutions. Mentors would play out scenarios by taking on both the role of teacher and K-12 student, in the imagined discussions they might engage.

At other times, mentors would step into the role of the PST in proposing solutions about navigating relationships with their guiding teachers. During the time of this study, many of the mentors were in their second year with the FCMN. They had experiences listening to PSTs talk about dilemmas in working with guiding teachers. On these occasions, mentors often took on the role of the PST, imagining a conversation or scenario between the PST and their guiding teacher to help model the kinds of things one might say or ask. In a sense, mentors were scaffolding ways

for PST to feel some agency in engaging with issues, even during their student teaching practicum.

Narratives One Thinks Others Tell About Them

There were less examples of narratives one thinks others tell about them. Both PSTs and mentors were careful to speak from their experiences or those they perceived in their classrooms. There were some examples from mentors sharing narratives one thinks others tell about them during the warm up *conocimiento*, but no PSTs took the opportunity to do so as well. In this excerpt, Lorraine—a community mentor—relates a story about a former district superintendent with whom she had worked. As an elder in the African-American community, she shared a story she knew the former superintendent told others about things she had said to him.

Lorraine (Community Mentor): When he [the former superintendent] came to Thorncrest Public Schools, he did not know a lot about education... and he asked the question: 'What do I need to know? What do I need to know?' I told him that African-American students do not learn from people that they don't perceive that love them. That's why they start acting out and rebelling because they can't feel....As you teach, know that it's important not only for African-American kids, but specifically for African-American kids. If you connect with them emotionally and let them know you care about them, and you believe in them, and you know they can succeed, you will give them a belief that they may not have in themselves.

Lorraine was not only sharing a piece of Thorncrest School District's history, she was also, and perhaps unintentionally, letting the group know that these words of wisdom about loving African-American students were those of the people gathered in that room.

Discussion

In focusing on small group discussions, the leaders of the FCMN and university-based teacher educators were working towards hegemonic change in developing positive relationships between families, communities, schools, and teachers. Through a Freirean sense of the

dialectic, the hope was to move towards collective new knowledge and, in the act or process of dialogue, to establish trust and ultimately solidarity between future teachers and the communities in which they will serve.

With respect to new knowledge, the small group conversations between PSTs and community mentors were engaged in the “mutual creation and re-creation of knowledge” (Freire, 1970, p.8). Freire essentially argues that act of knowing is sealed through dialogue, an idea often unsettling as each party must be prepared to change their position, or be open to new ideas they previously may not have considered. New knowledge, however, was not created when some chose not to engage.

Second, if dialogue establishes trust, then addressing historical distrust on all sides begins with dialogue. Freire suggests that the process of establishing trust through dialogue, dependent upon creating new knowledge, leads to solidarity. “Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary: it is a radical posture” (Freire, 1970, p. 49). Though trust and solidarity are not always a result of every conversation, we would offer that there are a number of reasons for it proved an attainable goal.

Mentors often used narratives about others to illustrate their own understanding, as well as to give examples to PSTs to help support solutions. This focus on solutions was understood by PSTs, but to varying degrees. Many appreciated the wisdom from mentors, while others felt these narratives were not helpful. PSTs often missed cues for uptake with mentors, or did not engage in a verbal back and forth. That is, invitations to questions or suggestions posed by mentors were not always taken up by PSTs; some chose to remain silent. Unfortunately, this type of disengagement prevented the development of trust between some PSTs and community mentors.

Conversely, community mentors often affirmed or took up suggestions by their colleagues in conversation. Community mentors often built off one another’s narrative with similar narratives to affirm as well deepen the conversation with an added layer of complexity to the topic. This surfaced in the form of remembered narratives from their own experiences; providing another perspective as well as a variety of contextual situations/scenarios. Often, community mentors gained new knowledge

about the ways PSTs were already enacting social justice curriculum in their classrooms.

A complicating factor, as many candidates observed in reflective exit tickets, was that participating community mentors were not necessarily family members of specific students in the classrooms of PSTs. The situation raised a number of pedagogical and philosophical dilemmas, and consequently presented challenges. One of the challenges for mentors, PSTs, and university-based educators proved to be the variety of school site placements around the region. In exit tickets, largely from the eastern regional meeting, PSTs questioned whether some mentors were able to speak to particular schools and communities in which they were teaching. This might have contributed to a few reports that some sessions were irrelevant.

However, many exit tickets from individual PSTs were positive, reflecting interactions in which PSTs felt connected to community mentors, indicating a sense of trust and a move towards future solidarity in developing relationships between teachers, families, and communities. A few cases for discussion in regional meetings were about specific students with whom PSTs were struggling. In some instances, the visiting community mentor knew the student and family of specific students in the classes of PSTs. One PST, close to tears, was relieved and empowered learning that a particular student had a history of struggling to engage in class. After leaving this discussion, the community mentor quite literally became a mentor for the PST.

At that same school site, another group struggled with demographics. Some PSTs from this group felt that the mentors, mostly from the south of the city, had no expertise with their particular communities in the north and east. PSTs were sometimes silent or reluctant when mentors asked questions of the candidates about their specific needs or questions. These questions, intended to invite conversation through sharing a problem the group might discuss together, were sometimes met with moments of silence.

Some PSTs in the discussion that took place in the northern region, noted that their students were largely compliant; "normal" or "non-problematic" because they behaved and followed rules. Because of their commitment to

communities of color, mentors had not anticipated some of the questions or topics that arose in the eastern regional meeting. This prompted community mentors to wonder: do PSTs think that a social justice education is only for students of color? Do pre-service teachers believe that social justice is for White students too? This led to another question beyond the scope of the project and that of this study: what does teaching for social justice look like in predominantly White, suburban, or more affluent communities?

Implications

Due to the layers around curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, and the realization that some PSTs understood social justice as largely for students of color, the planning team questioned whether we built trust, solidarity, awareness, or a strengthened ability to read the situation on the part of PSTs. Trust was built for some, as in John's example of a complex narrative shared with the group that moved towards building trusting relationships. The question remains whether he would have taken this step forward had the community mentors not already taken that step in their contact with the cohort first.

Ultimately, many PSTs took up the commitment to solidarity, while others did not feel that same responsibility. Meanwhile, community mentors felt a responsibility for the K-12 students in their communities but did not always feel a sense of commitment from some PSTs. Despite this and through consistent efforts to imagine scenarios where mentors put themselves in the position of the teacher, mentors were able to sympathize.

In the interest of space, we will focus the remaining research implications into three broad categories. These issues appeared the most pressing in considering future work honoring the dialectic as it might evolve in teacher education.

The first implication we connect to the design of these opportunities for conversations between the mentors and PSTs. We are reminded of the importance of the delicate balance between our knowledge as teacher educators and the knowledge held by community mentors. The importance of considering how to support PSTs in appropriate ways, while

also equally supporting mentors, is essential. We are not advocating for unplanned opportunities for dialogue, but neither are we advocating for scripted ones. Preparing for small group discussions requires a thoughtful and respectful approach from teacher educators—a way to lesson plan, without lesson planning too much—and careful attention to mediation.

The second implication in this work is preparation for uncovering the seams of any teacher education program. In our program, the central vision included social justice and placement in urban schools. In fact, these elements were somewhat problematic; definitions of social justice were inconsistent for PSTs and there were PSTs placed in predominantly White and affluent schools. Questions about working in and for communities in these spaces became persistent ones for particular PSTs—and they were questions for which we were not well prepared.

Lastly, this “rub” between the stated design of our program and some of its actuality had ramifications for all involved on many different levels. Mentors had to put themselves on the line during these small group discussions and some reflected that they thought PSTs would be “further along” in issues around race and social justice. Mentors sometimes would leave some conversations feeling used, deflated, and even “gross.” Similarly, not all PSTs were involved in the same level of risk, for some were able to use privilege as a way not to engage. Given that areas of the program were inconsistent in the questioning of privilege, we suspect that for some PSTs it was easy for them to couch the work. An example of this was how they would engage in this work to a degree, but would not prioritize it when planning or connecting to their content areas.

The solid articulation and execution of a teacher education program that ‘walks the talk,’ is essential in the appropriate and respectful engagement of mentors, as well as the thoughtful and scaffolded support of its PSTs. These aspects deserve focused attention by any program considering this type of dialectical education.

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