

Developing Cultural Competence to Enact a Culturally Inclusive, Learner-Centered Practice to Promote Learning and Justice In diverse U.S. Urban Schools

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Abstract: Children in diverse urban schools are struggling socially and academically due to a range of unmet social, emotional and academic needs (Greene, 2014). In a small qualitative research study, participants' interpretations of a vignette showed some evidence of using child development but were silent about possible racial, cultural and linguistic dimensions of the interaction. This suggests the need for teacher preparation programs to consistently, explicitly and rigorously attend to the interaction of identity and learning for children in US urban schools to support teacher candidates' ability to develop culturally inclusive, learner-centered, identity-safe classroom practices (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

Keywords: Cultural competence; culturally inclusive practice; culturally relevant teaching; learner-centered teaching; urban teacher education

I. Introduction

Teaching is an intentional act, designed to increase the learner's knowledge and rests on teachers' beliefs about the nature of the learner's mind and readiness to learn. Teachers are moved to teach when they notice a lack of knowledge on the learner's part (Ziv & Frye, 2004). This is grounded in individual teachers' perceptions of children's capacity knowledge base in relation to their age and sociocultural location (Ziv & Frye, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Children may not receive the messages their teachers intend to send because teachers and children may have very different cultural and experiential frames of reference. What teachers and teacher candidates think, believe and perceive about children is important because these culturally based perceptions and beliefs guide their decisions about whether to teach, what to teach and how to teach (Cardwell, 2014).

There is a great deal of concern about children's behavior inside schools but there is little taught in U.S. teacher preparation programs about how to effectively address the range of children's behaviors inside schools situated within each child's sociocultural context. What we do know is that children of color are suspended at higher rates than their white classmates and that children of color are sent through the court system for minor in-school offenses more often than their white classmates (Alexander, 2012; Ferguson, 2001). It is important for teacher candidates to learn how to support children across all identity lines to do their best work before entering the classroom because we know that children will engage and do well academically if their teachers and families can equip them with the social-emotional skills to do so (Greene, 2014; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

II. Conceptual Framework

Teaching is more than telling and learning is more than listening (Darling-Hammond & Branford, 2005). Recent findings in cognitive neuroscience indicate that learners need to be emotionally calm, receptive and attentive in a physically, socially and culturally safe learning environment (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Gay, 2010; Willingham, 2009; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007). Teachers' conscious and tacit beliefs shape their pedagogical choices, often reflecting the ways in which they were taught as children (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Ziv & Frye, 2004; Cuban, 1993; Polanyi, 1968).

2.1 The Sociocultural Context of Schooling: The sociocultural context of schooling positions culture as a set of negotiated attributes that are shaping and being shaped by the interplay of social and economic interactions among human beings (Rao & Walter, 2004:4; Vygotsky/Kozulin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). It also positions schooling and development as fundamentally social, dialogic and situated in multiple cultural contexts that reflect the realities of daily living (Cardwell, 2015; Kuhn, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978). The lives children lead outside the classroom have everything to do with how they feel and what they learn inside the classroom (Cardwell, 2015; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Gay, 2010; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978).

The classroom is an important learning environment that needs to let every child know that who they are as they are, is welcome, safe, seen and valued unconditionally (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Gay, 2010). The sociocultural context of schooling would include the range of beliefs and life experiences every adult and child brings into the classroom. These varied and layered contexts are the individual frames of reference used to attach meaning to what is observed and experienced in the classroom, rendering teaching a highly complex and challenging profession (Vygotsky, 1978). It is the teacher's role to provide materials and resources that welcome and reassure children that they are emotionally safe enough to take the intellectual risks necessary to learn (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007; Piaget, 1968).

2.2 Teacher Beliefs: Teachers teach their conscious and tacit beliefs and life experiences through the learning environment they create, the materials they provide and the curriculum content they teach (Casey, 1993; Foster, 1995). Before teachers can facilitate children's healthy identity development, they need to be conscious of their own identities, pockets of privilege, power and authority (Irving, 2014).

Learning to teach is a complex process that rests on teacher candidates' beliefs about themselves and their beliefs about others. It can be argued that teacher candidates' conscious and unconscious beliefs about themselves, others and the world around them shape their beliefs about children's capacities to learn in the classroom (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Polanyi, 1968). Teacher candidates' beliefs about themselves, others and what they can do are mediators of what they allow themselves to learn and try.

The student teaching experience is important because it is an opportunity for student teachers to observe multiple models of good teaching, discuss them with school-based colleagues and college supervisors. Exposure to multiple models of good teaching, in varying stages of development from beginning teachers through master teachers, provides student teachers with models of good teaching they experience as immediately accessible as well as into the future (Lave, 1996; Rogoff, 1991). This model is very effective for student teachers because it helps to build student teachers' confidence in their ability to teach in real time with children (Skovholdt, 2004).

Teachers' beliefs about others are important because they shape perceptions and pedagogical choices (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010). There is a danger when teachers use unconscious beliefs to attach meaning to children's classroom behavior that guide their responses (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Polanyi, 1968) because it can lead them to ignore children's individuality, culture and sociocultural context (Gay, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers' perceptions of children's minds determine whether or not they teach. These perceptions are informed by teachers' conscious and unconscious beliefs about children's knowledge and capacity to learn (Ziv & Frye, 2004; Polanyi, 1968).

2.3 Cultural Competence: Cultural competence is a set of values and principles that allow people to work effectively across cultural boundaries in multicultural contexts that is widely used in medicine and social work (Sears, 2010; Adams & Moio, 2009). In schools, cultural competence is the capacity and expertise to communicate clearly, easily and effectively across multiple cultural boundaries. It requires educators to be aware of themselves and others. Self-awareness means knowing one's own cultural values, beliefs and assumptions. Knowledge of others means learning about their culture, values and beliefs along with an openness and willingness to learn about differences. Cultural competence is demonstrated in many subtle ways that manifest in communication content and styles. Specifically in practice, we use cultural shorthand when addressing people perceived as the same because shared meanings are assumed. However, we speak more explicitly when addressing people who are perceived as different because there is no assumption of shared meanings (Sears, 2012; Adams & Moio, 2009).

Dynamic narratives are vehicles for establishing shared meanings within and across identity boundaries (Daiute, 2014). They are accounts of daily life that include people situated in time and space engaged in meaningful activities that emphasize the relationships among them. In this way, a dynamic narrative is a representation of culture in action (Daiute, 2014). In education settings and classrooms, teachers can invite children into cultural participation by creating opportunities for them to share their varied experiences and perspectives on a shared experience (Daiute, 2014). Cultural competence can help create inclusive systems of interaction with multiple points of entry to support equitable access, using dynamic narratives.

2.4 Culturally Inclusive, Learner-Centered Teaching in Identity-Safe Classrooms: Culturally competent teachers are able to construct culturally inclusive environments based on mutual respect, supportive relationships where people feel connected to one another, clear communication, explicit shared meanings and understandings about expectations and critical self-reflection. A culturally inclusive learning environment moves beyond the physical integration of learners to integrating learners' experiences, knowledge and

perspectives into a cohesive set of resources that make learning personal and relevant. Cultural competence is an essential component of this practice. In culturally inclusive learning environments, people of all backgrounds can,

- freely express who they are, their own opinions and points of view and be received with respect;
- fully participate in teaching, learning, work and social activities; and
- feel safe from abuse, harassment or unfair criticism and treatment.

Cultural competence is an essential component of these capacities. Culturally inclusive practices emphasize the teacher's role in constructing children's learning environments that are welcoming and safe for all children on the first day (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). Learner-centered teaching emphasizes the needs of the learner and employs multiple teaching methods that the teacher adjusts to tailor lessons to sustain student learning (Horowitz, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

III. Methods

I used a reflexive qualitative interview approach to examine the intersection of the participants' beliefs, practices and interpretations of children's behavior in U.S. urban schools. I asked each participant to interpret the same vignette, allowing me to gain insight on what might inform their classroom practice in diverse urban settings (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). I chose this approach to create a guided reflection experience I could learn from and that the participants might find useful for their own professional development. I theorized that the professional teaching knowledge integrated with teacher candidates' beliefs and experiences could help them construct a theory of mind they could use to decode the language of children's behavior (Cardwell, 2002; Lightfoot, 1997; Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Polanyi, 1968).

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis: I used qualitative interviewing and the following vignette to gather data (Daiute, 2014; Lightfoot, 1997; Lightfoot & Davis, 1997),

At the end of the day, Jason's teacher confided to a colleague, "I just can't call his name one more time." Jason attends an academically challenging school. Like a number of his classmates, he has a tutor but isn't in any serious academic trouble. In one-on-one interactions, he is charming and funny.

During large group transitions or class line-ups, there are times when he screams, hits, or pushes his classmates.

The vignette depicts an actual exchange I witnessed that is familiar to many teacher candidates from their clinical experiences. Learning to transition children from one activity to another and from one place to another is a real challenge for many teacher candidates and the exchange described is a familiar one. I made a conscious decision to leave out information about the teacher's identity, experience and intent, providing minimal contextual information to create multiple opportunities for the participants to insert their meanings and experiences into the void. Further, I chose not to provide Jason's age, race, class, culture or linguistic background because I hoped to elicit the participants' perspectives, meanings and interpretations.

I used the same interview protocol with each participant (Weiss, 1995; Seidman, 1991). This study was guided by the following research questions, How might teacher candidates interpret a child's behavior in an urban context? How might teacher candidates' personal theories, life experiences and professional teaching knowledge emerge in their vignette interpretations? The research questions and interview protocol were designed to allow participants to frame their responses in their own ways.

3.2 Population and Sample: I am a teacher educator who teaches child development, supervises student teachers and designed this study to gain insight on how to better support teacher candidates' professional growth and development in coursework and student teaching (Cardwell, 2014; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Erikson, 1979). The population for this study was graduate students enrolled in a teacher education masters degree program located in the Northeastern United States, leading to state certification. There were approximately 80 teacher candidates eligible to participate in this study who completed a course in child development and student teaching. I anticipated a 20% positive response rate but I had a 15% positive response rate with twelve participants (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

3.3 Participants: The twelve participants in this study were teacher candidates who worked in U.S. public, private and charter schools in urban areas. Although the eligible population age range was early 20s to mid 50s, the twelve participants in this study were mostly white, middle-class females between 24 and 35 years old, mirroring the teaching force in the U.S. (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 1990). Historically, teaching has served as a gateway profession where young people from low-income and working class families could gain access to the middle class through hard work and education, which was the case for some of the participants (Lortie, 1975). This was a self-selected group of teacher candidates who had enough interest and time to

participate in the study but they did not constitute a representative sample (Bogdan&Biklen, 2006; Batson, 1989, Erikson, 1979).

3.4 Data Analysis:My approach to data analysis was designed to surface patterns of responses across participants without losing the nuance and complexity present in each participant's response (Bogdan&Biklen, 2006; Bateson, 1989). Due to technical difficulties, I transcribed and analyzed 10 complete interviews. From which, I created analytic charts, enabling me to preserve the participants' unique voices while situating their responses in the context of their own interviews as well as in the context of the other participants' responses (Cresswell& Plano-Clark, 2007; Bogdan&Biklen, 2006; Miles &Huberman, 2004). I generated findings in this study by tracking the convergent patterns of responses among the participants (Bogdan&Biklen, 2006; Schwarz, 1999; Weiss, 1995; Seidman, 1991). Four types of interpretations emerged from my data analysis,

1. No interpretation (1 participant)
2. Summative interpretation (3 participants)
3. Constructs a narrative interpretation (4 participants)
4. Understanding from the inside out (2 participants)

The participants' interpretations of the vignette provided a window on the personal and professional funds of knowledge that might inform their classroom practice.

IV. Results

Understanding children's behavior from the child's perspective requires a thorough understanding of children's lives situated within their unique sociocultural contexts. Child development theory and life experiences can help teacher candidates begin to attach meanings to children's behavior. However, without addressing the cultural and racial dimensions of children's lives, teachers can't fully understand or attend to their students needs. In this study, I found that the participants raised questions about Jason and his teacher but didn't interrogate race, class, culture or language as a part of their interpretations.

4.1 No Interpretation:The participant in this category, Ron, sought additional information about the interaction, context and child but didn't offer an interpretation of what was going on, I was...wondering about what pieces of basic scene setting information, I don't have here. How old is the child? What does the teacher mean by, "I can't call his name"? Does it mean that this kid raises his hand so often that it's too much, or by calling the name does that mean the teacher has to speak to the child for whatever reasons? ...I'm trained to want to find out more...until I know more about how old the kid is and what's the history... (Ron)Ron focuses on the significant missing details in the vignette from his perspective. He was careful not to rush to a premature conclusion or judgment. His questions about Jason's age and the school context suggest that he might be looking to use child development and the social context of the class as an interpretive lens. At the same time, by focusing on seeking more information, he doesn't move to figure out what might be going on with Jason and his teacher in the moment. This is an example of a bind many learning professionals and, specifically, teacher candidates face, which is the need to appear expert without the expertise (Skovholt, 2004). I was surprised that there were no questions about the possible cultural dynamics in the vignette.

4.2 Summative Interpretation: The three participants in this category came to fast conclusions about what was going on for Jason and his teacher. Katalina, Michael and Heather kept their interpretations close to the vignette text,

...when she's having to call his name a lot because it seems like there are times where he, like during one-on-one interactions where there are difficulties. But it seems like during large group transitions that there are more difficulties...and then to think about things to put in place to make those times less challenging for him so that she's a little bit more proactive and less reactive. (Katalina)

Katalina perceived Jason's difficulties in large group transitions as an indicator of pervasive social challenges that varied in degree based on the context. She thinks the teacher needs to put things in place to reduce Jason's behavioral and social challenges but didn't offer hypotheses about why Jason might be acting in the ways described in the vignette.

Michael seems to take a more cautious approach and begins his interpretation attending to the teacher's frustration,

The teacher seems frustrated with his student, and that frustration could stem from some misunderstandings I think. And then, there is the student and the student having some sort of social issues in class, but those social issues could stem from any number of things. (Michael)

Michael appears to identify with the teacher in the vignette because he assigns the teacher's gender as 'he', which could indicate that Michael identifies with the situation but it isn't clear how because he doesn't delve

into possible motivations for Jason's behavior or the teacher's response. In some ways, this response might be constrained by the desire to 'get it right' (Skovholt, 2004).

Heather notes the teacher's frustration as she begins attending to Jason's behavior,

...the teacher is obviously frustrated with the student, and the student seems to have positive qualities in the fact that it says in one-on-one interactions he's charming and funny. So it doesn't seem to be his character in general but the fact that during transitions or large group movement, he can't really control himself. So it would seem that the teacher isn't quite sure of how to handle that. (Heather)

Heather sees Jason as a complex individual who struggles in large group transitions. Unlike Katalina, Heather thinks that Jason's transition struggles are not an indication of his character in general but are an indication of his inability to 'control' himself during transitions. However, she doesn't talk about why this might be the case. Even though Heather doesn't offer specific hypotheses about why Jason and his teacher are struggling with each other, she seems to step back a bit, saying the teacher seemed unsure of how to handle it.

Among this group, there was little inference used to attach meaning to the information outlined in the vignette, which seemed to curtail their capacity to construct a theory of mind and advance hypotheses about what might be going on. This group began to insert themselves in small ways into the vignette and their conclusions served as pivot points for their subsequent assessments of the situation. The participants in this category were silent about possible issues of race, class, culture and language in the vignette.

4.3 Constructs an Interpretive Narrative: The four participants in this group, Emily, Valerie, Melanie and Anjali, began figuring out what Jason might be feeling and why, using a combination of experience-based inference and evolving professional teaching knowledge. Emily uses a systemic approach to consider ways to provide supports so that Jason can become more adept at regulating himself without hypothesizing about why Jason might be struggling with self-regulation,

My sense of Jason is that he might be overwhelmed within transitional moments...he might have trouble regulating himself... I guess. There might be some social dynamics going on within the classroom as well that come out in those interactions. ... I guess I would wonder about conflicts with other children and I think he might have some trouble regulating – when there's too much input he gets revved up and can't calm down and becomes impulsive. (Emily)

For Emily, Jason seems to struggle on multiple levels and has a hard time regulating himself. In trying to figure out why he is struggling, she wonders about how the social dynamic of the classroom is reflected in his behavior. This is an example of the beginnings of systemic thinking that can lead to considering how individual children are connected to each other and perhaps the influence of their relationships outside of school. This line of thinking could have lead Emily to consider the race, class, culture and language dynamics possibly at work. From her systemic analysis, Emily quickly pivots from wondering to consider supports for Jason to reduce classroom 'input' so that he doesn't feel overwhelmed and act out without hypothesizing about why he might be feeling overwhelmed.

Valerie takes a different approach. She seems to use experience-based inference and professional funds of knowledge to begin constructing a theory of mind for Jason,

...I think he might feel a little lost at school. The screaming and the hitting and the pushing is definitely a means of acting out and I don't know if he's calling out for the attention his classmates, or his teachers, or all of it. The fact that he's not in serious academic trouble, well he might be in emotional trouble that nobody might know about, or he might be also be more academically precarious, he might just be really hard on himself. He might not feel like he's just not getting it and just kind of taking it out on himself or on the people around him. (Valerie)

Valerie sees Jason enacting his emotions but, unlike Emily, Valerie focuses on why and considers some reasons located within Jason. Reaching beyond her interpretation that Jason might be seeking attention from his classmates and/or teacher, Valerie hypothesizes that Jason's behavior is a cry for help that may be linked to emergent emotional problems he may be trying to hide. This leads her to another hypothesis that Jason's social struggles may be linked to Jason's inner feelings of academic struggle.

Valerie's interpretation indicates a weave of experience-based inference, personal insight and professional understanding. As children attending school, we have experienced the self-doubt and emotional struggle that comes with taking the intellectual risks necessary to learn (Cardwell, 2014; Piaget, 1968). Valerie's interpretation reveals her personal connection with taking the emotional risk required to learn in her description of the inner feeling and her professional understanding of the learning process emerged in her hypothesis about Jason's possible inner conversation and frustration over not fully understanding his academic work.

Anjali seems to draw on her teaching experiences to attach meaning to the range of Jason's behavior in the classroom,

...maybe the child is experiencing some anxiety around a change in schedule, since the student doesn't seem to scream or hit or push classmates during class sessions, but it tends to happen during transitions. So maybe there is some anxiety around those transitions or the changes in schedule that this child is not able to handle... (Anjali)

Although the vignette doesn't specify Jason's age, Anjali seems to locate him in the 3 to 5 year old range, a group she has worked with. As such, her hypotheses seem to rest on her professional teaching knowledge. Anjali locates the source of Jason's anxiety in the transitions. Transitions are significant moments in classrooms and can be very difficult for teachers and children to navigate, an understanding grounded in professional teaching knowledge (Hirsch, 1975). A tenet of a safe, reassuring learning environment for very young children is to create a consistent, predictable environment because changes can be unsettling (Smith & Martinez, 2015). Anjali suspects Jason feels anxious and that he struggles to manage his feelings during large group transitions.

Melanie focuses on the intersection of Jason's age and gender as an entry point because, drawing on her professional teaching knowledge of child development and systemic thinking, without his age Melanie has a hard time figuring out what Jason's behavior means,

I think his age is significant 'cause with any little kid you would expect that, especially in a new school experience. If it was an older kid, transitions are really tough and there could be some social anxiety going on... you might wonder if something is going on at home, if it's something that's just happening now or if it's been...ongoing. I would imagine that these are social pressures that he's trying to find his place in the social group by being a little disruptive and that brings great credit at that age. So I think anticipating those kind of events is really good... without being too heavy handed, putting him with people who kind of mellowed that out a little bit. (Melanie)

Melanie seeks to locate Jason developmentally by age in order to focus on the intersection of age and gender. Her interpretation and hypotheses seem to draw on her personal knowledge as a sister with brothers and as the mother of a son integrated with her professional teaching knowledge of child development. She hypothesized that if Jason were 'older' then he would be trying to construct his masculine identity and locate himself within the social context of the boys in his class. While Melanie does wonder what might be going on at home or if it is something at school that is motivating Jason to struggle during transitions, she doesn't go any further to consider specific possibilities. She wants to reduce his anxiety by partnering Jason with children who are calm during transitions.

This group began with the vignette description, located an entry point and began to construct a dynamic narrative (Daiute, 2014) about what Jason was doing, how he might be feeling and why. In the process, many of the participants in this group used a weave of their experience-based inferences, some personal and some professional, with their evolving professional teaching knowledge to begin figuring out what might be going on in the vignette. They raised questions about the relationships among the students as the context for the teacher's response to his behavior but the majority of this group's attention focused on Jason and trying to piece together what might be going on inside and around him. As they tried to unpack the system of social dynamics among the children in the class, there is continuing silence about the possible cultural dynamics at work, even though they raised questions about the social context in and outside school.

4.4 Understanding from the Inside Out: Two participants, Liz and Jessica, placed themselves inside the vignette to begin to understand what might be going on for Jason and his teacher from the inside out. Jessica begins with herself and her own, teaching struggle,

I think a lot of things could be going on and I know that I struggle with this a lot as a teacher that idea of having to single out one student by name. One student, and they're not a bad kid, doing fine otherwise, but maybe he likes to chat. He's used to having the freedom to talk when he's not in a structured place and you have to keep making him the bad kid. Maybe nothing is going on. It's probably *OKAY*. Maybe he has ADHD. It could be a lot of things but I think the teacher probably needs to find different ways to deal with the problem she's having with the student. There could be a one-on-one chat discussion about being line leader or having a role in the back of the line or something like that to make those transitions. It sounds like the transitions are stressing out the teacher more than they're stressing out the student. (Jessica)

Jessica describes her own struggle with calling a child's name repeatedly and making that child 'a bad kid' with classmates. She continues, acknowledging that Jason's behavior may stem from inadequate structures put in place by the teacher, which is both Jessica's and the teacher's challenge in the vignette. It is a difficult admission because Jessica sees Jason's difficulty during large group transitions as evidence of the teacher's inability to place sufficient, supportive structures in place to prevent his behavior. In this, Jessica demonstrates what it means to be a reflective teacher and a willingness to learn in public, which is an important example to set for her students. Jessica draws on her personal experiential knowledge in hypothesizing about what might be going on. She can see some connections between Jason's behaviors and her brother, who has ADHD, without

imposing her experience and frame of reference on Jason because even though ADHD came to her mind first Jessica is mindful that it may not be the case with Jason.

Liz takes a similar approach of drawing on her own teaching experiences and struggles to offer some hypotheses about the reasons for Jason's behavior,

I immediately take it as a student who is engaged in school, but maybe there's something about large group settings that throws him off and it could be so many different things that it's hard to tell, like, just right off the bat... he could actually be bored... maybe he is annoyed that he has a tutor and so is acting out... Another thing may be in terms of the group itself, sort of if he is charming and funny in a small group – one on one interactions – if he doesn't see himself in that role within the group setting and wanting to put that role out there as "I am the funny one; they should like me", but it comes off as misbehavior. I can really think of students who are so great one on one and I love engaging with them, but, during class, I'm just constantly calling on their name and saying, "Sit down, behave, do this, do that, don't do that, please don't do that." But, for multitudes of reasons and it could be that he can engage really well one on one because he can focus that way, but can't in a big group setting. Too much is going on; too much stimulation and he can't focus at all. (Liz)

Liz uses her own teaching experiences to begin figuring out what might be going on for Jason. She offers a few ideas that seem quite different. For example, Liz sees Jason as an engaged student who might be bored or perhaps annoyed that he has a tutor. Similar to Jessica, Liz hypothesizes indirectly focus attention on the teacher's capacity to sustain engagement with routines and content that is interesting to all the students at the appropriate levels of difficulty. Liz seems to locate Jason in upper elementary school, constructing his social role and location in the class. Liz describes her own struggle with calling her student's name repeatedly and she takes responsibility for her students' behavior because she wasn't able to construct adequate developmental or social supports to sustain engagement in productive ways.

The participants in this category placed themselves inside the vignette, blurring the boundaries between themselves and the people in the vignette as they reflected on their own struggles with individual children. This reflective approach allowed these participants to consider a range of equally plausible possibilities without moving to 'diagnose' Jason or their students by holding open the possibility of being wrong. They began to interrogate the power dynamics of the situation and the ways in which teachers can participate in constructing children's social identities in the classroom. They seemed to hold their interpretations lightly so that they could consider multiple possibilities that may not be congruent. Despite this reflective stance and flexible thinking, there was a continuing silence about the cultural dimensions of the classroom dynamic.

V. Discussion

It was striking to note that none of the participants examined the race, class, culture and language dimensions of the vignette. These silences perhaps suggest a pervasive, US cultural value to avoid the conflict attached to noticing and naming differences in race, class, culture and language. This pervasive value may also silence these issues in the participants' teacher preparation program curriculum, which impedes their capacity to frequently, confidently and respectfully interrogate the culturally-based, tacit dimensions of classroom interactions and social dynamics (Polanyi, 1968).

The context of the research interview may have also influenced the participants to not take the risk to explore the race, class, culture and linguistic aspects of the vignette because they weren't named in the vignette (Weiss, 1995; Seidman, 1991). The gender was assigned to Jason and there were a few participants who began to examine the process of constructing a masculine identity. At the same time, there was no mention of gender identity or sexual identity difficulties, which can be noticed and sometimes named -- quietly. The hushed or silenced aspects of children's identities can interfere with their capacity to feel safe enough to take the intellectual risk required to learn (Cardwell, 2014; King & Cardwell, 2008).

Perhaps, the lack of content and attention to race, class, culture, language, gender and sexuality in their teacher preparation program provided insufficient support for the participants to feel comfortable raising it or they didn't consider it. Based on the participants' responses, I suspect that the silence was due to discomfort because they raised questions about the intersection of age, gender and masculine identity construction. They also 'wondered' about what might be going on at home, the social dynamics of the classroom, which has deep roots in race, class, culture and language. Given this, the participants may have thought and understood more than they were willing to say in the interview (Cardwell, 2015; Vygotsky/Kozulin, 1986), which indicates that they may have thought about race, class, culture and language but didn't raise it on their own. This silence is particularly concerning because the participants are predominantly white and work with children of color, some of whom come from low-income families. The results of this study offer some insights on why children of color may struggle inside urban schools because they may not feel fully seen, accepted, understood and safe (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Noddings, 1992).

VI. Conclusion

Children attending U.S. urban schools deserve to feel safe, seen heard and valued in their classrooms. To provide these learning contexts, teacher education has an opportunity to identify and use reading materials in every course that surface race and culture to build cultural competence among all teachers. It would then be important to use those materials for text-based conversations about the personal and professional connections teacher candidates make with the content to examine their own issues of race, class, power, privilege and authority in the classroom while experiencing pedagogical models of culturally inclusive, learner-centered practices to use in their classrooms with children.

Teaching and learning, at its best, is a purposeful, relational interactive process expressed in identity safe classrooms that are culturally inclusive and learner-centered. To accomplish this, teacher educators need to be equipped with the expertise to prepare teacher candidates with the capacity to raise questions about race, class, culture, language, gender and sexuality in respectful ways that further children's learning. It is difficult to be an effective teacher using an intentional, relational practice that addresses the needs of the whole child when only certain parts of children's identities and life experiences are welcomed and safe inside the classroom (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

The findings in this study further suggest that teacher education programs need to create frequent opportunities for guided reflections that allow teacher candidates to surface and interrogate their beliefs, personal theories and life experiences in light of their evolving professional teaching knowledge, to expand their sociocultural understanding of themselves, their identities, the world and their students' lives (Cardwell, 2014; Cardwell, 2002; Kendall & Randall, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). In this way, teacher candidates can use their developing cultural competence to begin to create culturally inclusive, learner-centered classrooms in urban schools equipped with the professional confidence to adjust their teaching approaches and academic content to meet each child's individual learning needs, leading to increased learning and justice for every child (Young, 2011; Horowitz, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Harvey, 1999).

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