Counter-storytelling through service-learning: Future teachers of immigrant students in Texas and California re-tell the "Self" and the "Other"

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Abstract
This article examines the use of Critical Race Pedagogy in two service-learning initiatives that prepare pre-service teachers for working with an increasing immigrant student population in California and Texas. It is not uncommon for teachers to participate in the "Othering" dominant discourse that tends to see those who are of a lower socioeconomic class, immigrant status, or non-English speaking as deficient (Valencia 1999). As professors, we identified the need to use counter-storytelling, a method of Critical Race Pedagogy (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005) to facilitate transformative practices that help pre-service teachers revise their prejudiced assumptions about their future immigrant and ELL students. A transdisciplinary curriculum, coupled with a service-learning context, played a prominent role in implementing counter-storytelling. In this article we present data from the pre-service teachers' service-learning, in-class group discussions, assignments and evaluations related to their fieldwork, and our fieldnotes during participant-observation.

Keywords: Critical Race Pedagogy, Teacher Education, Service-learning

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Introduction

> The use of a master narrative to represent a group is bound to provide a very narrow depiction of what it means to be Mexican-American, African-American, White, and so on . . . A master narrative essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group's cultural life . . . A monovocal account will engender not only stereotyping but also curricular choices that result in representations in which fellow members of a group represented cannot recognize themselves (Montecinos, 1995; pp. 293-294).

This article presents an empirical research study of two teacher education courses, one in Texas and the other in California, that utilizes service-learning to facilitate the participation of pre-service teachers in counter-storytelling as a means for understanding societal inequities. Counter-storytelling, according to Delgado (1989, 1993), is both a method and a tool; as a method, it involves telling the story of those whose experiences are often omitted (i.e. those on the margins of society) and, as a tool, it is used to analyze and challenge those whose stories constitute the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story (Delgado, 1993).

Using counter-stories as a method and a tool is a part of Critical Race Pedagogy, defined by Marvin Lynn (1999: 615) as "an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education . . . [leading] to an articulation and broad interpretation of emancipatory pedagogical strategies and techniques." Critical Race Pedagogues are concerned with four general issues: the endemic nature of racism in the United States; the importance of cultural identity; the necessary interaction of race, class, and gender; and the practice of a liberatory pedagogy (Lynn, 1999).

We chose to incorporate Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) in our teacher education courses in light of the current US social and political climate regarding immigration, as well as our geographical locations: sites with large immigrant populations. Our objective was for pre-service teachers in Texas and California to identify and understand the cultural, political, and social forces at work in this teaching context. We selected service-learning (SL) for the implementation of CRP and counter-storytelling because we did not believe that the student teaching context alone provided sufficient relational time with individual students to allow for the analysis of discourse. First, we wanted pre-service teachers to identify the majoritarian stories, or the "bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462). Second, we wanted them to identify, produce and share the counter-stories, a "biographical analysis of the experiences of people of color . . . in a sociohistorical context" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). SL provided additional and alternative interactions with the community for identifying and discussing majoritarian and counter-stories as well as systemic racism and cultural difference.

Cultural difference (see Carter & Segura, 1979), rather than racism, continues to be cited as the leading cause of the low socioeconomic status and educational

failure of students of color.[1] Indeed, García and Guerra's (2004) research acknowledges that deficit thinking permeates US society; schools and those who work in schools mirror these beliefs. Students who are dominant in a language other than English are often viewed as being deficient, disadvantaged, or disabled, though their difficulties are often more closely related to geography and political climate, rather than actual knowledge (Valencia 1997). In practice, the deficit model is applied in the classroom, passing on beliefs that students of color are culturally deprived and therefore low achievers (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Persell, 1977). García and Guerra (2004) argue that this reality necessitates "a critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds" (155).

Multicultural education addresses cultural difference and deficit thinking as a part of teacher education courses (Banks 2004, Nieto et al., 2007). There are also recent studies regarding the transformative characteristics of community-based teacher education (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Burant & Kirby, 2002). However, Critical Race Theory and Pedagogy have been largely ignored in teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, to date, although teacher educators may have incorporated SL to facilitate CRP, there are no empirical studies on the implementation of CRP in experiential contexts such as service-learning (SL).

To understand the role that SL played in the collection and production of counter-stories within a CRP framework by pre-service teachers, first we introduce the theoretical framework of Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP), which is based on Critical Race Theory (CRT); we then show the ways in which our methodology corresponds or responds to CRP; and finally, we present our findings and conclusions.

Theoretical Framework: CRP and Counter-storytelling

CRP is based on Critical Race Theory, which is a "set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005, p. 69). CRT argues that the United States is and has always been a racialized country founded on a belief in the inherent inferiority and superiority of certain groups of people, based on physical characteristics (Omi & Winant, 1994). Additionally, "racism, sexism, and classism are experienced amidst other layers of subordination based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent and surname" (Yosso, 2002, p. 72). We both knew that we needed to challenge these distorted views towards non-English-speaking, immigrant students and families. CRT, and its accompanying Critical Race Pedagogy, became our framework for selecting readings, reflection activities, and SL that would lead to transformative teacher practices.

Solózano and Yosso (2005) advocate Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) in higher education to help eliminate race, racism and other forms of subjugating forces such as gender and class in the classroom and in society. Solórzano and Yosso (2005, p. 70) list the fundamental elements of CRP: "1) the centrality and intersectionality of race

[1] The term "students of color" refers to students from African-American, Asian-American, and Latino backgrounds.

and racism; 2) the challenge to dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the importance of experiential knowledge; and 5) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives." We adopted CRP in the service-learning component of our curriculum to help pre-service teachers examine their position (socioeconomic class, race, language, gender, etc.) and interrogate the dynamics that shape that positionality.

CRP challenges the dominant ideology that social institutions create toward objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, and equal opportunity. These traditional claims, which assume people from certain backgrounds will be "limited" in achieving success in society, "act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups in US society" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005, p. 70). In response, counter-storytelling, using interviews and drawing on the lived experiences of People of Color, is a method that "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.144). It exposes and critiques normalized dialogues that perpetuate the status quo and stereotypes. In other words, counter-storytelling "help[s] us understand what it is like for others, and invite[s] the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). We believe that teacher education instructors (and, therefore, their courses), by and large, lack knowledge and contact with the "unfamiliar world," and this is one major factor that contributes to deficit thinking and "Othering" of those who differ in class, language, immigration status, gender, race, and so forth.

When a person is seen as deficient, "Othering" occurs, as one usually identifies the "Other" by what he/she is not. Different policies and trajectories pertaining to special and mainstream education proliferate and perpetuate this view of the "Self" (mainstream/normal) and the "Other" (special/abnormal). This practice sets up a series of binary oppositions (e.g. normal/abnormal), accentuating the "Othering" images assigned to certain individuals (Liasidou, 2005).

"Othering" is maintained and perpetuated by cultural deficit majoritarian storytellers who advocate cultural assimilation. Specifically, they argue that students of color should assimilate to dominant White, middle-class culture to succeed in school and life (Bernstein, 1977; Schwartz, 1971). Some examples of how this cultural assimilation might take place are: learning English at the expense of losing their native language, loosening community and family ties, and becoming an individual "American" success story. The cultural assimilation solution becomes a part of teacher education programs, school structure and curriculum and, by extension, of cultural deficit storytelling. A successful student of color is an assimilated student of color. Given the current rhetoric of "at-risk" and "disadvantaged" students, it is clear that just as insidiously as racism has changed forms, so has the use of cultural deficit terminology by social scientists (Solórzano, 1998; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997).

Pre-service teachers identified and countered cultural deficit terminology while serving their respective communities. In the California case, pre-service teachers collected counter-stories while tutoring English at a school primarily for recent Hmong immigrants. The Texas case highlights Mexican-origin pre-service teachers who collected counter-stories while providing a career workshop for families of Mexican origin in the community. To prepare the pre-service teachers for counter-

storytelling, the class curriculum was extended beyond the typical teacher education curriculum to address each setting in-depth and holistically. Through readings, film, lecture, guest speakers, small group and class discussion, the pre-service teachers were exposed to local economic, historical, political, cultural, and social issues, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of CRP. In-class oral reflections and discussions were designed to help students identify and understand deficit majoritarian stories about marginalized people and revise some of their internalized hegemonic ideologies regarding families and students who were different from them, particularly in terms of class, language or immigrant status.

We see the combination of CRP with SL as a novel and effective means for moving students beyond acknowledging cultural/social differences to beginning to deconstruct and interrogate power differentials and their roots in the target community and larger society.

Methodology

The strength and uniqueness of this study is the combination of two similar research contexts where two researchers (Blum and de la Piedra) used similar theoretical, methodological and pedagogical tools. In Texas and California, both case studies focus on working with pre-service teachers in settings with high immigration populations. We used SL to identify majoritarian stories and implement counter-storytelling within a CRP framework. Finally, we used an assortment of in-class assignments and activities, in addition to assigned readings, to prepare students for their work in the SL context.

After identifying our concern with the fact that pre-service teachers hold deficit perspectives about students of color, as teacher educators, we consulted CRP for ways to improve our teaching by building cultural identities and social justice. Our research is based on the following data (specific details follow with each case description):

1. Activities where students recount their own biographies to understand how one's positionality and privilege are created and reinforced in society;

2. Activities that allowed students to use transdisciplinary knowledge of history and anthropology to have a deeper understanding of the lives of immigrant children;

3. Service-Learning activities that provide experiential, face-to-face, prolonged, and meaningful interactions with immigrant children to facilitate hearing, collecting and producing counter-stories.

We gathered evidence about how students responded to these pedagogical strategies through: 1) individual oral and written responses by students to course content and assignments (e.g. reflective essays about the service-learning activity), 2) reports of in-class group discussions and assignments, and 3) our fieldnotes during participant-observation of in-class and SL activities.

We conducted thematic coding analysis (Warren and Karner, 2010) in each case, paying attention to the students' interpretations of their experiences in relation to immigrant students, parents, and communities. Later, looking at the data from both cases, we found patterns across both cases, which we present in the Findings section. These themes include: 1) interrogating dominant discourse by reflecting on their own biographies; 2) questioning majoritarian stories through the transdisciplinary knowledge of history and anthropology; 3) producing counter-stories through experiential activities and knowledge gained in the service-learning activities. In the cases that follow, the aforementioned themes and our findings will be highlighted in both cases. Prior to the presentation of the themes and findings, we identify the setting and participants in each case.

Case 1: Texas: Counter-stories about Mexican families on the U.S.-Mexico border

Setting and Participants

de la Piedra conducted her case study in her Parent/Community Advocacy course[2] at a university in El Paso, Texas. Located on the border between Mexico and the U.S., this city is very different from the rest of the state of Texas. The majority of its population is of Mexican descent (76.6%) and speaks a language other than English (71%). Communities along this border are among the poorest in Texas and the nation.

Thirty-four (30 female, 4 male) students took the course during a 15-week semester in 2006; all were of Mexican-origin and bilingual (Spanish and English). Seventy percent were either born in the U.S. or migrated from Mexico as children and attended school in the U.S.. About 30% of the students came from Mexico as adults to attend college.

In previous semesters, de la Piedra observed that even though most pre-service teachers were of Mexican extraction, majoritarian stories about Mexican immigrant, Chicano, and/or low-income families and parents surfaced during in-class discussions about parent involvement in schools. Some students held deficit views specifically about low-income Mexican-American families, while others had deficit views about Mexican immigrant families. "Parents do not care about education", "parents just drop their children at school and leave all the work to the teacher" and "they don't help their children with homework" were some of the many comments voiced during in-class discussions. Therefore, the SL activity in this course offered an opportunity for student interaction with something that students had "Othered"—low-income families of Mexican-origin. The SL component included a total of 7 hours of work: five for the planning and two for the implementation of workshops for participants of the local Mother-Daughter (M/D) program.

The Mother-Daughter (M/D) program serves mainly low-income, Mexican-origin and bilingual sixth grade girls from eight school districts. This program has the goal of promoting the equitable representation of Latino women in professional

[2] The course is required for pre-service teachers enrolled in the elementary and middle school bilingual education preparation program.

careers. As stated in the published monograph about the program, "the girls learn about their many options in life by seeing success firsthand in the form of Hispanic university students and career women from every walk of life who participate as role models." This program organizes different events for the girls and their mothers throughout the year. For example, during "Career Day," participants visit the university for half a day and attend hands–on workshops organized by Latino community leaders, university students and professionals (particularly women). In this context, the pre-service teachers prepared workshops with the goal of showcasing the teaching profession.

Assignments, themes and findings in the Texas case

Three activities were key in fostering CRP: 1) Funds of Knowledge[3] Group Reflection, 2) Case Study: Funds of Knowledge of a Bilingual Immigrant Child, and 3) The SL M/D Career Activity. In preparation for the three activities, students read research studies about US families of Mexican-origin (e.g., Valdés, 1996; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). These activities were designed as opportunities for pre-service teachers to revise their prior assumptions about border families and identify majoritarian stories within their own assumptions.

***Interrogating dominant discourse by reflecting on their own biographies: Funds of Knowledge Group Reflection*:**

In class, reflecting on their childhood, students identified their own funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). After sharing their funds of knowledge with their teams, students reflected orally on the non-traditional knowledge that their border households provided and shared this with the class.

The group discussions revealed an increased awareness of dominant ideologies regarding legitimate knowledge. By looking at their own histories, students interrogated the societal construction of knowledge and power. For many students, this was the first time they thought about their parents' (mainly blue-collar workers) knowledge and skills as being useful in schooling. During the oral reflection process in teams, de la Piedra heard comments such as "I never thought about my life in the *rancho* (farm) [in Mexico] this way." Through the "self-knowledge approach" of the *Funds of Knowledge Group Reflection,* pre-service teachers were able to "examine, perhaps for the first time, their own cultural heritage and identify their feelings about it." (Arias & Poynor, 2001, p. 420)

Drawing on the students' lived experiences through autobiography and family histories, Mexican-origin pre-service teachers were able to see their funds of knowledge in new ways. They became "empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves" (Yosso, 2002, pp. 74-75). After looking at the "self", recognizing their own knowledge as valuable, and orally narrating their own counter-narratives for their classmates, students were better

[3] Funds of knowledge are the bodies of knowledge, skills, and practice that Mexican families and communities on the U.S.-Mexico border circulate among their members in order to survive (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992).

prepared to "understand what it is like for the other" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41).

Questioning majoritarian stories through transdisciplinary knowledges: The Case Study

The *Case Study: Funds of Knowledge of a bilingual immigrant child* was a second assignment which was significant to revising majoritarian stories about border families. Each student wrote a case study of a bilingual child and his/her family's funds of knowledge. de la Piedra taught her pre-service teachers to use ethnographic methods; they kept a journal and recorded fieldnotes. The pre-service teachers then made a household visit, interviewed family members and recorded observations. Their case study was a written reflection, used to document new understandings and possible practical applications for their future classrooms.

Through the case studies, students individually wrote a counter-story that helped dispel the myth that low-income immigrant families lack important knowledge to help their children succeed in school. For example, Camila wrote in her reflection of this project:

> I was sincerely impressed by the amount of information that Maria [case study child] was exposed to. It really brought into perspective just how these sources can transfer to school activities and content.

Camila identified the diverse funds of knowledge that this border family provided for María. She also reflected on how these funds of knowledge can be utilized in curriculum, teaching strategies, and concrete activities in the classroom:

> For example, since Maria has been exposed to banking procedures, her knowledge can be used to introduce a simulated banking system for the classroom to work with money. Knowing that Maria enjoys stories about her family's work background can be used to raise her interest and connect subjects such as math, science, and social studies to her experiences. Also, her exposure to different homes and family lifestyles and large groups can be used to develop her leadership skills or can be reason to use group activities when she is having trouble understanding concepts. Her travels to Mexican cities can be used as a topic for narratives or for oral storytelling to develop language.

Furthermore, Camila communicates the possibility that María's teacher might not see these funds of knowledge as relevant:

> I can think of countless ways in which Maria's funds of knowledge can be used in the school setting. Unfortunately, her exposure and knowledge serve little in the school if the teacher does not see them as relevant to the curriculum. Without scaffolding and encouragement from her teachers, Maria is not really synthesizing all the information she has gathered from her experiences.

Camila's final words in her case study reveal an understanding of the power that recognizing a student's funds of knowledge can have and how detrimental it can be for a student when these assets go unacknowledged. Many other students wrote and shared similar counter-stories.

Pre-service teachers gave an oral presentation of individual case studies and shared abundant examples of how parents or older siblings assisted young children during hands-on learning activities in home and community contexts. These counter-stories portrayed Mexican-origin parents assisting their children learning new skills, such as making, packing, and sorting tamales for sale, the use of measurement concepts (ounces) for preparing milk and the mathematical notions related to carpentry. Being able to identify the linguistic and cultural resources in these families helped the students view parents and children as experts who can contribute academically to the learning process.

Students also discovered transnational funds of knowledge related to festivities and ceremonies celebrated in Mexico, working in the *ranchos* (farms) and marketplaces across the border, *folklórico* dancing, music, and acting, which were shared between families across the border. These counter-stories, told by pre-service teachers, are powerful alternatives to the dominant narratives that situate Mexican families as deficient or "uneducated."

After these presentations, students also participated in collective counter-storytelling. They concluded that border families had a wealth of knowledge, which was shared among social networks on and across the border. The class came up with the following categories of funds of knowledge based on the case studies presented: 1) the use of Spanish for oral and written language development, 2) the parents' jobs and activities inside and outside the home, and 3) transnational funds of knowledge related to activities in Mexico that families shared across the border.

This transdisciplinary knowledge base, constructed through anthropological methods and perspectives, was necessary to better understand the community (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005). Besides some differences in terms of class or immigration, pre-service teachers found both differences and points of connection between their respective case studies and themselves. They discovered that they shared similar experiences of racism, when they realized that their own funds of knowledge had also been ignored in their schooling experience.

Producing counter-stories through experiential activities in SL

During "Career Day" at the university, on the last week of class, teams of five pre-service teachers conducted one-hour workshops on diverse topics to address local needs in the Latino community. Latino mothers and daughters participants of the Mother/Daughter program were invited. In a workshop on gender equity, the women made a collage of pictures of men and women taken from magazines and discussed how the media portrays gender roles. Later, the team of pre-service teachers shared statistics about economic and educational disparities between men and women. Finally, each group presented its collage and discussed the topic of gender equity with the information provided in the workshop. This was just one example of the

workshops the pre-service teachers organized to serve the Latino community, identify majoritarian stories and counter-stories.

The following quotes are examples of counter-stories that students wrote about families of Mexican origin, after the SL experience. In both reflections, we see how this SL assignment of M/D Career Day helped students question the widely held assumption that "immigrant families do not care about their students' education":

> *Reflection #1:* "As a presenter, my goal was to educate the young audience and their mothers about how to fight gender stereotypes. But, as time went by, they made my view and perspective of them [the parents and children] change... Usually we hear that parents do not care about their children's education, they do not participate or they do not have valid arguments in topics related to the educational system; at least I believed in that. Thanks to the parents and the words I heard from them, I could break the stereotype. I see that on the contrary, they want to become informed about the educational system in the U.S., but [can't] because of difficulties such as not knowing the language or working long hours. The parents and children actively participated and even made suggestions to us as future teachers. For example, they asked us to advocate for dual language programs (Sandra)."

> *Reflection #2:* "Parents and kids were working together to create wonderful stories. It was great to be able to include the parents into our lesson. We realized that parents can be indeed part of the curriculum. Teachers need to think about ways to include parents into the classroom. (Claudia)."

Reflecting on her experience as a child, Daniela recalls the opportunity to participate in a LULAC Leadership conference. She hopes to provide the girls with a positive image (counter-story) about Latino identity similar to that she had from the conference, equipping them to challenge deficit discourses (majoritarian stories) about Latino/a students:

> I shared my thoughts about this with them about my own experience visiting [the local university] for a LULAC youth leadership conference when I was about the same age as the students were. I think that my experience [as a LULAC conference participant] gave me an image that I could refer to when I was talked to about going on to a university. I hope I had a part in creating this image for the students and the parents that participated in our discussion.

This quote shows how experiences can create "images" or counter-stories for both Latino children and pre-service teachers. In sharing and helping the female participants create counter-stories, Daniela is able to "open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and that they are not alone in their position" (Delgado cited in Solórzano and Yosso 2001, p. 70).

María shares the pivotal role that service-learning played in facilitating counter-storytelling:

> My [SL] experience helped put into practice what we have learned in class throughout the semester. In class discussion, we talked about the different levels of parent involvement, the funds of knowledge that students bring with them and that they all have in order to provide culturally relevant pedagogy that would give meaning to their education. However, I discovered that we learn more when we actually implement our knowledge into a hands-on activity like this one (María).

For pre-service teachers, the experiential knowledge they acquired through this hands-on SL context provided in-depth understandings of the cultural wealth of families of Mexican origin.

Case 2: Hmong newcomer school in California

Blum also found that SL facilitated counter-storytelling. In this case, pre-service teachers worked with Hmong elementary and high school students who arrived in the California Central Valley with little or no schooling.

Historical background:

A newcomer school was constructed in the southeast of the city in 2004 in response to the arrival of the last wave of Hmong refugees to Central California. The Hmong played a pivotal role for the U.S. in the "Secret War" that took place in Laos, along with the Vietnam War, to stave off communism. Since 1975, the U.S. government has promised the Hmong resettlement in the United States.

Having participated in the Vietnam War, the Hmong refugees arrive to the U.S. quite surprised that their heroic history is generally unknown or ignored. Solórzano and Yosso (2005) argue that this type of silence reflects racialized and classed dimensions underlying "standard" understandings of a community. Additionally, coming from an agrarian society and having to adjust to starkly different cultural norms, Hmong resettlement in the U.S. has been more precarious than that of many immigrant groups. In fact, between 1998-2002, eight Hmong adolescents in Fresno County committed suicide: four of them within six months. The deaths accounted for nearly half the county's teenage suicides (US Department of Health and Human Services, State Letter #02-38). In response, Assembly Bill 78 was passed in 2003, requiring that the role of the Hmong in the Vietnam War be taught in California's public schools.

As very few non-Hmong speak Hmong or understand Hmong culture, and in light of the teenage suicides and imminent new arrivals, a transdisciplinary curriculum was incorporated so that pre-service teachers acquired an in-depth knowledge of Hmong history and culture—knowledge of counter-stories. Also, by working with a non-English-speaking immigrant population, the intention was that this SL experience would encourage the pre-service teachers to act and think in new ways when interacting with immigrant populations.

Setting

While pre-service teachers met once a week for class at the university, they participated in a minimum of six hours of SL at the school tutoring Hmong children in English. Pre-service teachers could tutor during school hours, sitting quietly in one of the classrooms, or after school (3:30PM-5:00PM) in one of the designated portables. The principal at the newcomer school and her schoolteachers were anxious and appreciative of our offering and, were open to their students receiving assistance at any time during the school day.

The newcomer school had employed only teachers who were bilingual in Hmong and English to ease the Hmong children's cultural and language transition. Walking on the campus of portable classrooms, it was a rarity to see a non-Hmong student or teacher. In a "sink or swim" context, where the only language and people the pre-service teachers saw and heard were Hmong, the reflections of these pre-service teachers indicated an intense sense of "sticking out," "not belonging," and not understanding anything.

Participants

The profile of the pre-service teachers in the courses is approximately 54% Caucasian, 40% Latino/a, 5% Asian, and 1% African American. The data presented was collected between January 2005-May 2006 and represents responses from students in three 28-student courses.

Students commonly meet attempts to acknowledge race and racism with resistance. This may be why many teacher educators settle for a pedagogy that celebrates diversity instead. One pre-service teacher's comment echoed the prevailing classroom attitude: "I'm so sick of these diversity courses. I don't know why we have to take so many. We already 'get *it*'."

To foster openness to these challenging issues, sequencing and pacing were pivotal. Initially, pre-service teachers participated by collecting heritage interviews and creating identity collages. After they shared their own immigration/heritage stories, they were more receptive to seeking and hearing the stories of others. Locally-made digital stories about Hmong community members were then screened in class. The pre-service teachers learned about the Hmong struggle to survive Vietnam as well as immigration and acculturation in the United States. Finally, at the newcomer school, the pre-service teachers spent time with their Hmong students, comparing biographies and connecting them to readings about acculturation in theory and practice (e.g. Banks, 2004; Nieto et al, 2007; Olsen, 1997; Santa Ana, 2004).

Interrogating dominant discourse by reflecting on own biographies: Heritage interviews

The family heritage interviews and identity collages were part of an autobiographical piece to analyze "Self" (one's own history and position in society). In small groups, the pre-service teachers, collage in hand, shared their stories while other group members listened. After everyone shared, they wrote "quick writes," documenting insights and possible applications to future teaching. By sharing, one's

history (or Self) was juxtaposed with the histories of the "Other" (those who might be deemed as "different" from oneself). "Other" for these students was their family's story, which they may have heard many times but oftentimes thought irrelevant to their current reality. The "Other" was also in the stories of classmates, which they assumed that they could accurately guess at first glance. Through reflection and dialogue they develop a critical consciousness that begins to dispel societal myths, or majoritarian stories.

The following is a sample of their ("quick write") responses: "You think someone looks one way but when you hear about where they come [from] they take on a different identity." "I want *all* my students to see that they have a story whether it was yesterday or 300 years ago." "I believe this activity helps us as teachers by appreciating the family histories of others and to realize that we are all immigrants, regardless of when we arrived." "This really fills in important gaps in history textbooks. You get a heartfelt understanding of how struggle has always been a part of a newcomer's history. I am now interested in doing this with my own students. I definitely have more compassion as a result of this activity." This exercise allows students' histories to be affirmed. Assumptions about classmates are frequently challenged. Once one's story and, consequently, one's identity (Self) was acknowledged and validated, this usually paved the way for a more open interaction with and understanding of the "Other."

Through the heritage interview, collage and small group discussions, students participated in a knowledge approach to the "Self" and the "Other", examined their feelings (both pride and loss) and fostered a cross-cultural understanding that would prepare them for a SL setting (Arias & Poynor, 2001). Like in the Texas case, the pre-service teachers became "empowered participants, hearing their stories and the stories of others," (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005, p.75). They became aware of their power (or lack thereof) and position in society. Recognizing the value of oral histories and counter-stories through their own practice in the classroom, they were prepared to "understand what it was like for the other" and document the counter-stories that might emerge in their SL experience with the Hmong students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41).

Questioning majoritarian stories through transdisciplinary knowledges: Digital stories

The use of digital stories followed the heritage interviews and identity collages as part of an interdisciplinary approach to provide the pre-service teachers with needed historical, cultural and political knowledge about the community they would be serving. The digital stories, *Hmong Voices*[4], were produced as a result of Assembly Bill 78 in 2003 to recognize the contributions of the Hmong and to ensure that the Hmong's role in Vietnam became a part of California curriculum.

One six-minute digital story that the pre-service teachers watched in class was about a Hmong man, the storyteller, who, as a result of the Vietnam War, was orphaned at twelve years old. He recounts his recruitment for the US military as a child and his stint as a pilot during the war. As an adult trying to protect his family

[4] Produced by the Center for Multicultural Cooperation, Fresno, CA.

and escape danger, his family was one of the few to cross the Mekong River successfully to a refugee camp in Thailand. Full of hope, the class watches the film as the family reaches the refugee camp only to hear about the miserably unsanitary and inadequate conditions. After a year at the camp the man's newborn son dies and the family decides they must leave the camp in order to survive. The storyteller then narrates with excitement, the fulfilment of the promise to guarantee safe passage to the U.S. for those who supported the war effort. Boarding an airplane to go to a country that represents freedom and safety, the man and his family never expected to be confronted with such difficulty in navigating the language and culture. His family's arrival in the United States was met with indifference by the citizens of the country for which he sacrificed his life. This indifference, if not at times discrimination, coupled with not knowing English, impeded his leadership and his ability to take proper care of his family, causing him and his wife to consider the possibility of returning to the refugee camp in Thailand. Eventually he succeeds in learning English, gaining employment, and becoming a civic leader. This was one of three digital stories pre-service teachers watched and reflected upon in class as part of transdisciplinary curriculum that provides the necessary historical, political, and cultural background for working with the Hmong. At the same time, pre-service teachers hear a non-majoritarian story that draws on biographical data from a group that has been marginalized by society, viewing "this knowledge as a strength" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 473).

After the screening of each digital story, the pre-service teachers were asked to write about what made an impression on them and why, and in what ways they would apply this knowledge to their future as teachers. In their reflections, the pre-service teachers talked about going to school with Hmong students and knowing very little about their heritage and history. This pre-service teacher's "quick write" reflects what many students wrote:

I would have to conclude that the film on the Hmong that we watched was unbelievable and directly affected my joy and heart for the students in the classroom. It definitely went hand-in-hand with my new perception and understanding of the Hmong people. Before the film, I had no idea and was clueless to anything that they represented as a culture and a community. It reminds me of the countless other groups and communities of people who have been and still continue to be misunderstood and persecuted.

The pre-service teacher's ignorance of the Hmong story in a context where she attended school with Hmong students, illustrates the "silencing" or subordination and oppression of one group's story to maintain the dominant discourse. Watching the digital story, the pre-service teacher encountered a counter-story; one that exposed and critiqued normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes and also provided new information about the reality of those who are at the margins of society. The margin can be "more than a site of deprivation . . . it is also the site of radical possibility" (hooks, 1990, p. 149). The pre-service teacher's acknowledgement of "new perception and knowledge" recognizes the potential for counter-stories to "challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475).

In a classroom context, through critical readings and sharing personal stories, students made connections between the readings, discussions and digital stories. As a part of CRP, this transdisciplinary approach, showed the Hmong's participation in the Vietnam War, and their plight, and provided opportunities for pre-service teachers "to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts" and "to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005, p. 74).

Producing counter-stories through experiential activities in SL: Tutoring

The SL experience was so powerful that there were students who tutored for more than the six required hours (the average was 17 hours). One pre-service teacher commented, "Whenever my student teaching experience would get me down, I would try to go to the newcomer school. There is such excitement and joy in being with each other. The innocence is still there. Apathy has not set in." Nearing the end of the semester, pre-service teachers had put "a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). However, this was not the way the SL started.

Initially, the pre-service teachers were very frustrated with not being able to communicate with the students. They had taken a methods course prior to the class, but when faced with reality, they seemed traumatized and Blum refused to help. Blum wanted them to experience the struggle of communication first-hand and to see, to the best of their ability, what Hmong students were experiencing. There were times when the teachers displayed anger, resistance, and resentment towards Blum, but, in the end, they became resourceful: bringing toys and items from home, drawing pictures to bridge the communication gap, smiling and laughing.

The pre-service teachers kept a journal while mentoring/tutoring students and were given a list of questions to answer about their student (sometimes consulting the Hmong teacher). Pre-service teachers were to juxtapose their autobiographical information and contemplate similarities and differences with the student: family background, parents' employment and education, schooling experience, hobbies, and aspirations. The class debriefed on a regular basis. The final assignment was to write a reflective essay detailing the results of the ongoing interviews, observations, and making connections between readings, majoritarian and counter-stories.

The community context and service facilitated understandings of power that went beyond academic abstractions, resonating with heritage counter narratives and digital stories they shared with each other in class. Melissa writes:

> "I, being an American, am what they are learning to be, so even I wasn't what you might think of as a minority because I was still the dominating "culture" at the school. Still it was interesting to be the "outsider" . . .When I would try to speak Hmong or try to communicate with them they would just laugh. It made me feel stupid. I found that I became much more quiet and intimidated. The worst part I think, was that I was trying to "teach" them but I felt like I was the one with little knowledge... Not knowing was so demeaning. If I knew exactly what this all felt like then I guess I wouldn't need to learn this lesson. I

> think that when I really thought about teaching all students I only thought of English-speaking students, whether I realized it or not.

Melissa's story demonstrates the role SL played in facilitating her understanding of dominant discourse and its impact on her worldview. Prior to this field experience and counter-story activity, she thought she was prepared to teach all students. This experience revealed her own internalized hegemonic biases. Within the SL newcomer school context pre-service teachers discovered a counter context where their inherent privilege and power were challenged by not speaking Hmong, resulting in a new awareness of the power of language.

Another pre-service teacher, Carlos, expressed resistance from the beginning of the course because he came from an immigrant farming family and commented that he had already learned everything about diversity. At the end of the course he wrote:

> I began to relate to what was being told to me about the refugees' living situations and my family's background. As she [administrator at the newcomer school] talked about the living situations and persecution they endured, I began to remember about my grandparents and how their stories were somewhat similar. This experience was a rude awakening to my naiveness. There is some kind of intrapersonal exploration that one endures in such a setting. In order to effectively teach students about cultural diversity, it is necessary for them to experience diversity in ways they are not accustomed to. It is very difficult for students in college to experience a true minority status, regardless of background.

Carlos' previous statement regarding diversity and later acknowledgement of the difficulty of teaching it are evidence of the permanence of race, racism, and other forms of oppression. Educated People of Color can also find it difficult to identify how these forms of domination function to subordinate others, as Allen illustrates: "One of the major concepts I learned is that education is still not equal for all, which I had not thought about much before." The permanence of racism is facilitated by its normalization, which makes it invisible, just as Carlos mentions not giving much thought to issues of equity before. This is particularly important given that he comes from a farming family and is of Mexican-origin.

Pre-service teachers recognized the complex identity issues that immigrant students have to negotiate to be accepted, as illustrated by Susan: "Immigrant students too often suffer from a double-edged sword of contempt. American students don't want to interact with them because they are too foreign, but if they start to act American and 'take off their turbans' (Olsen, 1997, p.39), those students are rejected by their immigrant peers." As Susan and other pre-service teachers unpacked the unequal distribution of power and privilege, they began to recognize how much more these students have to negotiate to "fit in" in a context where they don't even know the language and their identities, if different from the dominant norms, are rarely supported.

Noticing these challenges and the permanence of racism, Moises contemplated how to construct reality in a different way for immigrant students.

> My goal is to ensure students know that they do not have to assimilate to the "dominant" culture (White, middle class) in order to be successful. I want my students to feel comfortable and take pride in who they are as people. Unfortunately, traditional textbooks and curricula seem to promote the idea that, 'Skin color, religion, and language seem to define being 'American' or not' (Olsen, 1997, p. 40). They do this by teaching the values and cultural myths of the dominant culture. When other cultures are included, they are represented in fragmented, superficial, even stereotypical ways—making the 'subordinate' cultures seem unimportant and not worth learning about.

The reflections of pre-service teachers reveal a critical consciousness that acknowledges that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, potentially marginalizing and empowering at the same time. Many of them commented on the different activities and the ways they opened their minds to understand reality in a new way. Cindy's reflection shows a connection from the heritage interview and collage to her interaction at the newcomer school:

> It also amazes me to think of how these students must have felt leaving everything behind to come to America. Then, once they arrived, they often find it is not what they expect. Unfortunately, we forget that many of our family members traveled to the Americas and were faced with similar hardships. But we still alienate newcomers because of our differences and don't provide the same opportunities that we feel we deserve because we have been in the country longer. It is not about giving everyone the same things; it is about being fair and giving everyone what they need.

Cindy shared her written reflection with the class. She enumerates racist practices and identifies their origin, drawing from CRP (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The SL provided an additional means of sharing and supports critically processing their experiences both formally and informally. Furthermore, classmates created collective memories and bonded more so than in a traditional classroom, thus creating a safe and comfortable climate for sharing stories—some not so easy to share as others.

Conclusion

In our teacher education courses, using CRP within a SL context facilitated counter-storytelling. In California, tutoring at a primarily Hmong newcomer school was combined with a classroom method of constant historical and political comparisons using heritage interviews and collages, digital stories, and classroom dialogue. In Texas, students processed their own biographies and "funds of knowledge" while seeking the same information from the community they served. In both cases, anthropological methods were applied to seek, produce and share counter-stories that recognized systemic racism and the hegemonic ideologies that generate the prevalent majoritarian stories.

In both cases, we were able to accomplish what Delgado (cited in Solórzano and Yosso, 2001) states as the five pedagogical functions of counter-stories. We built "community among those at the margins of society": low-income families of Mexican-origin and the Hmong. Through an interdisciplinary curriculum we were able to have our pre-service teachers engage in "challenging the perceived wisdom of those at society's center." Our pre-service teachers' involvement in counter-

storytelling allowed them to "open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities [opportunities for further education and careers] beyond their current living situation and that they are not alone [the pre-service teachers are their advocates] in their position." "By combining elements from both the story and the current reality," our pre-service teachers learned that "one can construct another world that is richer than either story or the reality alone." Lastly, the counter-stories provided "a context to understand and transform established belief systems" (p. 70).

The analysis of the two cases shows that majoritarian stories are everywhere, regardless of the ethnic, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds of pre-service teachers. In the California case, the pre-service teachers, in their assignments, revealed having had the typical deficit-thinking majoritarian stories that prevail among pre-service teachers who come from backgrounds different to those of their future students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paley 2000). However, a deficit or majoritarian perspective was also prevalent in the Texas case, where pre-service teachers shared similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with their students. This study, in the Texas case, showed that educators need to identify and question majoritarian stories, even in contexts where teachers and students share the same ethnic background.

Looking at the pre-service teachers' own biographies was key in both contexts. In the Texas case, future teachers became aware of majoritarian stories that ignored their own biographies and knowledges. In the California case, students examined their position in society, looked at their feelings of pride and loss, thus fostering cross-cultural understanding. In both cases, they became aware of one's power (or lack thereof) and position in society. Deficit understandings of "Self" and "Other" were challenged in the SL context as they became attuned to the counter-stories of their respective communities. The SL context enabled pre-service teachers, while mining for and producing counter-stories, to examine the factors that shape and create both majoritarian and counter-stories of immigrant families in-depth and holistically. As teacher educators work towards a society and schooling system that takes into account the assets that each cultural, racial, and ethnic group has to offer, counter-storytelling is a pedagogical tool that could potentially help us create a more just system.

Our work as teacher educators is a social justice project that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling (Freire, 1970). We acknowledge the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools frequently oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower. Based on our research, counter-storytelling within a CRP framework, used strategically with SL, has the potential to unify existing critical explanations of educational phenomena. Together, they provide more theoretical and experiential grounding and direction for educators concerned with issues of equality and equity in schooling and society; one that incorporates all citizenry.

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