

## **Shared Journaling: A Methodology for Engaging White Preservice Students into Multicultural Education Discourse**

**By Cornel Pewewardy**

Many teachers are faced with limited understanding of diverse cultures and linguistic patterns other than their own, and the possibility exists that this limitation will negatively affect their students' abilities to become successful learners (Montgomery, 2001). In order for teachers to be effective with diverse students, it is crucial that they recognize their own worldviews; only then will they be able to understand the worldviews of their students (Davidman & Davidman, 2001; McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Researchers assert that in order for teachers to interact effectively with their students, they must confront their own biases (Banks, 1994; Gillette & Boyle-Baise, 1995; Nieto & Rolon, 1995); examine issues of race, class, and gender (Pang, 1994); learn about their students' cultures, and perceive the world through diverse cultural lenses (Bennett, 1995; Pewewardy & Frey, 2002;

Sleeter, 1992; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). According to Ladson-Billings (1999), teacher educators must find ways to make the study of diversity an integral part of coursework, field experience, and seminars.

In partial response to Ladson-Billings's (1999) recommendation, I have employed a classroom assignment called "shared journaling" in an undergraduate multicultural education course to help preservice teacher education students reflexively<sup>1</sup>

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consider how interactions between privilege, oppression, and diversity will shape their future students' experiences. The assignment also provides my students with an opportunity to reflect on strategies they can use in their future classrooms to respond to the needs of all their students. Shared journaling cultivates preservice student engagement<sup>2</sup> with diversity by encouraging and facilitating student interaction and learning across differences.

Shared journaling can complement structural and curricular diversity initiatives in higher education institutions by providing students with opportunities for sustained and meaningful engagement across race and other social group boundaries (Zuniga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). Journal writing can serve as a sounding board for students who may be reluctant to express themselves in open classroom discussions. In this article, I describe how I have used a shared journaling assignment to engage a predominantly white student body in critical conversations about issues of privilege and oppression. The purpose of the assignment is to provide students with an opportunity to participate in a written exchange of ideas with one of his or her classmates in the hope that the experience will help students to think reflexively about their own experiences and how their experiences may vary from those of their future students. *Moreover, the shared journaling assignment requires a patient instructor, one who is genuinely interested in engaging preservice teacher education students in the process of self-exploration, self-discovery, and self-disclosure.*

This exercise has proven helpful in building avenues to understanding by providing students with a relatively safe vehicle for reciprocal discussions of the origins of their beliefs and values. Typically, the interactive nature of the shared journaling assignment results in revelations about the partners' similarities and differences and *demonstrates* that the concepts of diversity and social justice<sup>3</sup> are more complex than students realized when they started the course. This exercise assists preservice teachers — particularly white students, who begin the course with little awareness about their own cultural identity — examine and discuss challenging constructs related to multicultural education that promotes social justice.

What follows are the specific learning goals for this assignment, which are communicated to students when they are paired with their journaling partner:

- ◆ develop increased self-awareness of one's own ethnic identity and/or group membership in the context of systems of power and privilege;
- ◆ explore similarities and differences across and within ethnic group memberships;
- ◆ examine the causes of ethnic group differences that result from access to power, resources, and privilege;
- ◆ reflect on one's emerging philosophy of teaching in a multicultural society;

- ◆ foster alliances and other strategies of collaboration across differences; and,
- ◆ identify *deliberate* steps that actively contribute to developing culturally responsive pedagogy and social justice education.

The first part of this article discusses the context and ideas that generated this assignment. This is followed by a description of the assignment and my experiences using this assignment over nine semesters. Excerpts from the students' journals are used to support my interpretations about students' experiences with the shared journaling assignment. The article concludes with a summary of the implications for using this assignment.

### **Context and Ideas that Generated the Shared Journaling Assignment**

I have been engaged in multicultural education since 1987, when I was a full-time doctoral student. The initial graduate course I took was an education curriculum theory and policy elective taught by a senior professor who focused his courses on cultural pluralism. Following my experience *as* a doctoral student, I became an elementary principal and applied the principles of multicultural education in the construction of two, innovative magnet schools in the Saint Paul (MN) Public School System. As my career evolved in higher education, so did my conception of multicultural education through teaching these courses at various universities across the country. My practitioner experience helped me to become critical and analytical about my own pedagogical teaching practices in higher education. My teaching philosophy is to promote diversity and social justice by helping students become culturally and critically conscious of the assumptions that affect their teaching. The basic principles that guide my teaching pedagogy today are *guiding* students and their understanding of multicultural education concepts and integrating those concepts into the curriculum.

Throughout my participation in the multicultural education movement, I have been involved in efforts to explicate the complex interactions between diversity, oppression, and privilege, and I have been an advocate of a critical perspective toward multicultural education that promotes social justice. My perspective has been influenced by Freire's (1970/1997a) conception of critical pedagogy, which promotes social transformation through pedagogical praxis that illuminates the elements of an oppressive society. Freire maintained that only discourse that requires critical thinking is capable of generating higher thought processes.

Reflecting on the evolution of my own beliefs about multicultural education, I recognized that my standpoint developed over time and that my students are typically unfamiliar with critical concepts that I have internalized. As a result, teaching courses in multicultural education has not been easy for me.<sup>4</sup> Actually, it has been difficult for me as an Indigenous male instructor. As Fox (2001) noted:

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For faculty, especially faculty of color, the work [to promote anti-racist education] can be debilitating. For not only are they [as instructors] bringing out students' emotionally charged beliefs and feelings, but the very subject of discussion is the White students' negative reactions to people, real and imagined, who look very much like the professors standing before them. (p. 1)

It is not easy because many students, both white and students of color, question racism's existence and relevance today. Thus, I recognized a need for strategies to engage my students in the learning process.

*Good strategies* seemed especially important with regard to my interactions with white students, because in some cases it seemed that white students misinterpreted discussions of white privilege as indictments of blame for racial oppression specifically directed at them. Evidence of the students' perceptions about conversations regarding white privilege emerged in students' course evaluations. Students rarely expressed feelings and/or concerns during the course of the semester that were consistent with the types of comments made on the course evaluations at the end of a semester. The focus on white privilege caused some students to critique the course negatively or to express many reservations during course evaluations. I felt that the students' anonymous comments at end of semester course evaluations were an important reflection of students' perceptions of the course content, and I began to look for ways to extract this type of information from students during the semester.

Given that most preservice teachers are from white, middle-class backgrounds and have had limited experiences with cultures other than their own (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Schmidt, 1998), I realized the importance of employing strategies that could help *them* work through their defenses that resulted in resistance to critical multicultural content. Research has clearly illustrated that in the United States some white teachers have great difficulty instructing students of color (Scott & Pinto, 2001). According to Bell (2002), most white teachers still graduate with very little knowledge about other cultural groups or about their own racial socialization. Moreover, white preservice teachers have been found to have negative attitudes toward American subcultures, in fact, even more negative than those of their predecessors over the last 60 years (Cooney & Akintunde, 1999; Bollin & Finkel, 1995). Only a few preservice teachers situate their future students' experiences within a broader social context in the classroom, and they can fail to recognize the institutionalized racism manifested in the way cooperating teachers treat their students (Xu, 2000). Even fewer preservice teachers, however well intentioned, challenge their invisible privileges as members of the white middle class (McIntosh, 1988; Sleeter, 1992) and their conscious and tacit assumptions about race and racism (Bell, 2002).

LeCompte (1985) has suggested that inadequate or cursory multicultural training can lead to stereotyping and possibly increased hostility toward students of color. Moreover, Rios and Montecinos (1999) contend that there seems to be an unwillingness or inability of many white middle-class teachers to work in inner-city

schools and to teach children of Color. Most white student teachers prefer instructing white children (Lampe, 1994).

Paley (1979) strongly asserts that teachers must take care not to ignore color. On the other hand, Landsman (2001) contends that white teachers can teach students of color effectively, but they need support. Like all teachers, they need parents and business people, workers in community agencies and those in the legal and medical fields to become involved in the classroom, to push for small class sizes for all public school students, and to advocate for adequate technology and decent working conditions for everyone.

Overall, Bringelson (1997) believes that whiteness and white people play a key role in both the maintenance and the destruction of racism. According to Leisytna (1998): "Racialized ethnic patterns are embedded in the cultures and institutions of the United States, but few whites recognize the impact that such racism has had on shaping our own values, beliefs, personal and social interests, and actions. Nor do we question how such identities are passed down from generation to generation" (p. 42). Whiteness is both homogeneous and fractured. But today, "in mainstream white bread America, the borders around whiteness are assumed to be clear" (Alcoff, 1998, p. 9). Giroux (1997) asserts that there is a need for white students to recognize their own agency and their own legitimate place within the struggle for social change and bringing about an anti-racist society. Sustained emotional work is, therefore, required for individuals (students and teachers) who desire to free themselves from racism.

It is in this light that I bring to surface the voices of white preservice education students. Their perspectives are relevant in the ongoing struggle for education that is transformative and socially just. These students' journal entries reflect a growing cultural awareness and understanding of their identities and of their roles in a multicultural society. This type of awareness will become even more relevant in the future because an increasing number of mainstream white teachers will be working with culturally and linguistically different learners in their classrooms. In this article I will highlight a few of the entries from my students' shared journaling assignment taken from the many recorded dialogues, written reflections, and informal discussions in the class, entries that reflect and reveal multiple, complex issues regarding their perceptions of their roles as white teacher education students in multicultural education. The goal behind this assignment is to provide students with a catalyst for developing a more complete vision of *multicultural realities*. It is designed as a vehicle for promoting debate and critical thinking skills as well as for enhancing students' analytical abilities.

I have been teaching an undergraduate (junior level) multicultural education course in a teacher education program at a predominantly white public university in the Midwest for seven years. The course that I teach calls for an approach to multicultural education that is both transformative and geared toward the promotion of social action. This level of curricular *integration* necessitates a comprehensive

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intervention in the mindset of mainstream preservice teachers. Therefore, the course is designed to increase preservice education students' knowledge base of *multicultural education concepts* with regard to the interactions among diversity, oppression, and privilege. *The journal* assignment was designed to raise the students' consciousness about the sociopolitical context of multicultural education by having them examine their beliefs about identity, race, and representation in the curriculum.

Each semester, up to 40 preservice teacher education *students (undergraduate)* are enrolled in the course, which meets one day a week for a two-hour lecture/discussion facilitated by the instructor. The students in the course are overwhelmingly white (95%), predominantly female (65%), and in their early twenties. Many of the students are graduates of suburban public high schools supported with a strong tax base. Each semester a few of the students come from rural, parochial, or private schools. Many of these students describe having only limited experiences with people who are culturally and/or linguistically different from themselves. Occasionally over these seven years, there have been self-identified ethnic minority students in my courses (*one or two per semester* in a class of 40).

Typically, when the class begins, the relatively privileged, white future teachers can scarcely imagine that there is anything lacking in public education in the United States. I have had many students suggest that they have no need for a course in multicultural education. Many of those students have stated that they have no desire to "engage" in education that is multicultural and do not intend to teach in schools with a diverse student body. My attempts to engage students in the discourse of multicultural education have often been met with defensive tactics consistent with behavioral patterns that King (1991) attributed to "dysconscious racism," which reflects an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given.

As I *searched* for teaching strategies (Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994; Hollins & Oliver, 1999) I could use in my courses, it became apparent that the topic of engaging white, preservice, teacher education students in multicultural education had received very little attention in comparison to writings that focus on engaging diverse students in mainstream curriculum (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998). Fortunately, I did discover that some bold educators were exploring how white privilege impacts public education, and their scholarship proved very helpful. Scholarship from Lisa Delpit (1995), Gary Howard (1999), Judith Katz (1989), Paul Kivel (1996), George Lipsitz (1998), Janet Helms (1992), Peggy McIntosh (1988), Christine Sleeter (1993), and Lois Stalvey (1997; 1989), helped me develop a deeper understanding about what the students in my classes were likely experiencing and provided me with a better perspective for interpreting their reactions. I realized that if I was going to be effective in engaging most white students in reflexive thinking and critical conversations related to multicultural education, I needed to search for ways to extend and deepen our dialogues.

### Origin of the Assignment

The idea of a shared journal on the hot topics of multicultural education (i.e., white racism, racial profiling, English Only, etc.) seemed compelling. It offered a realistic and non-threatening way to seriously engage white preservice teacher education students in discussions of multicultural education without the constraints of processing these issues during class time.

Prior to using the shared journaling assignment, *I felt* that most students (especially white students) were not interested and did not want to engage in understanding *oppression in our society*. Students were guarded in their discourse and reluctant to raise their hands to participate in class discussions about racial issues. As I provided students with critical readings (See Appendix A “Schedule”) and attempted to facilitate critical dialogue in the classroom, I noticed that few students were willing to participate in discussions of race and representation. Most white students deflected participation in critical conversations about race and representation by avoiding eye contact with me and providing simple answers such as “I don’t know” or “I haven’t thought about this before” when I asked direct questions. While these responses were likely sincere, I did not find them to be productive debates leading to critical thinking.

I determined that the strategies I had been able to rely on in other academic settings were inadequate in the cultural environment in which I was teaching now. I was, therefore, searching for classroom innovations when I came across an article by Garcia and Swenson (1992) that described their experience with journal writing in pairs as a way to address the hard, but necessary work, of addressing white racism in a predominantly white academic setting. They described how they had used journal writing in pairs to facilitate critical conversations among Social Work faculty from varied backgrounds and standpoints. I could see how the strategy they had employed could be adapted for use in my classroom. A description of the assignment and a discussion of my experiences using this method are provided below.

### Description of the Assignment

I start my undergraduate classes by discussing the process of shared journaling. The method is straightforward. The first time I used this assignment, I let the students choose their shared journaling partners. It seemed that students gravitated toward classmates they already knew or classmates with shared identity characteristics such as age, gender, and phenotype. A semester later, I adjusted the assignment by matching partners (one-to-one), pairing students with cultural and linguistic differences. Assigning journaling partners to maximize their differences generates new and fresh opportunities for exploring contrasting perspectives so students can learn from someone with different life experiences in the class (See Appendix B “Self-Introduction and Multicultural Education”).

Writing partners promise confidentiality, decide on their scheduled times to

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write, and begin to exchange entries. Because writers will be responding to their partner's responses to the instructor's questions, they must decide on a convenient time to switch journals, before or after class starts. The rationale for a written conversation is its suitability for busy students and that it offers a record of their writing processes. It also slows the conversation down, which can be important when emotionally charged material is exchanged.

In reading students' journal entries over a number of semesters, I have found evidence that supports the value of this assignment in helping students develop increased consciousness regarding the sociopolitical nature of primary and secondary education. *By engaging in a dialogue with another student, student responses to my journaling questions were often addressed without my intervention.* Students could talk with each other about things they seemed to find threatening rather than if I raised these questions in open class discussions. Therefore, this process seems to circumvent some of the resistance that used to be apparent in classroom discussions, and we seem to be accomplishing more in our time together. I have learned that in order to comment on each partner's journal entries, it is necessary for me to insert a mid-semester journal review as well as reflect on the entire journaling assignment at the end of the semester. Most of the journals have shown subtle shifts occurring in students' critical thinking, and the feedback from their journaling partners helped to mediate these shifts of understanding.

### **Interpretations about Student's Experiences with the Shared Journaling Assignment**

It is particularly challenging for white students that live in a society where the predominant conditioning promotes ignorance about the interactions between privilege and oppression to confront their biases and prejudices. Helms (1992) suggests, for example, that white people are raised to be confused about their own color.

While they are taught to be aware of other people's color, polite White persons do not mention color in public — especially their own. Dare to mention that a person is White if you are not and you become a racist or a nationalist or (heaven forbid) a separatist. Dare to mention White if you are, and you become a supremacist at worst and an uncouth braggart at best. (p. 5)

These are the types of constricting norms and values that I try to prepare my students to recognize and critically analyze. Freire (1997b) maintained that liberatory education requires more than the transfer of knowledge. Liberatory education promotes awareness of our sociological conditioning and recognition that human beings are capable of transforming our beliefs and behaviors.

I ask my students to talk about their early experiences with people from other ethnic groups, socio-economic classes, religions, and communities and to explain how this will impact them as classroom teachers. Students are also asked to reflect



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on their experiences growing up with regard to what the people who influenced their lives said about people from other cultures. Even now, few students disclose information in classroom discussions about their personal beliefs or the experiences that shaped their perspectives (Pewewardy, 2002). However, students do share this type of information through their journal entries. The following excerpts, shared with student permission, are reflective of types of information journaling partners share as they begin a process of discovery about themselves and one another:

*My experiences in life have been predominately working around white people. I grew up on a farm in the middle of the Midwest, so there wasn't much diversity in my city or in my school. In fact there was only one African American through grades K-12 that I can remember who attended my school. Now that I'm in college I have met many different people, with many different beliefs and this has helped me immensely to understand other cultures. (WF)<sup>5</sup>*

*I, too, am from a small farming community, but in the western part of the state. We had a few Mexican families come in and out over the years, but they never really stayed long enough to know the local community. (WM)*

*My growing up experience was a white, suburban, middle class, two-parents Christian upbringing. I'm thankful for all the opportunities that provided me — safety, comfort, support, education, love, health, etc. However, I feel cheated of different perspectives. I chose to educate myself outside this bubble and discovered that I didn't agree with my narrow lessons. As I broadened my views and became an advocate for underdogs, minorities, social outcasts, and all the people mainstream society rejects, my family was not supportive. They still smirk at what they consider to be "PC" euphemistic language and ideas, and often ridicule me for it. However, this makes me an even stronger advocate. (WM)*

I believe my students are taking risks when they provide the type of information reflected in the preceding excerpts and that I need to nurture their willingness to discuss their experiences. According to Tatum (1997), instructors need to help young white people engage in the kind of dialogue that precipitates racial identity development. Therefore, I am more interested in helping students achieve consciousness about their racial identity development than I am in critiquing their entries early in the semester.

I ask students to consider more challenging issues toward the middle of the semester. For example, around the eighth week of a 15-week semester students are required to read Patricia Williams's (1997) essay, *The Emperor's New Clothes* and to respond to her critique of a color-blind perspective. Some journaling pairs agree about the meanings and implications of the essay as reflected in the following exchange:

*In schools all over America, teachers stress the idea that the color of one's skin does not matter. However, Patricia Williams argues that stressing "colorblindness" is not solving the problem. The fact remains **that** color continues to matter. The*

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*colorblind approach to teaching makes it easier for teachers to ignore the problems that do exist. For instance they continue to ignore the fact that there is a disproportionate number of African American children in special education. While it is nice to pretend that all students in the classroom get along wonderfully, the truth is minority students are continually singled out as different by their peers. (WF)*

The journaling partner's response:

*You and I are on the same page. "Colorblindness" is a cop out. I see it as no more than an excuse to treat students differently. Like I said, teachers of mine used it to give special treatment to students they liked, and mistreat other students that they did not particularly care for. Once again, you and I have the same feelings over this article subject. (WF)*

The inclusion of race-related content in multicultural education courses often generates emotional responses in students that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair. The discomfort associated with these emotions can lead preservice teacher education students to resist the learning process (Tatum, 1992). Sometimes students' emotionally charged responses emerge as soon as a race-based issue is introduced in this shared journaling assignment, as indicated by the following student entry:

*Another issue involves the individual accountability. I agree with what they say about developing empathy for the experiences for individuals and groups [who differ] from ourselves. This is something that we all need to do. It is hard to do coming from the privilege side. Sometimes I feel that the blacks are still feeling sorry for themselves because of what happened in the past. They blame the whites still for what happened. It makes me mad because they [blacks] are no longer enslaved. What happened in the past is not our generation's fault. I don't like it when blacks keep bringing it up and say that we owe them something. I live in the same world and society that they live in. (WF)*

Considering themselves under "attack" by politically correct minorities, many white students feel besieged and persecuted. Moreover, many white students hold beliefs like those expressed in the preceding example and actively accept the dominant ideology that oppresses. If they passively accept it, they are unconsciously conscious of the systemic acts of oppression (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998). What follows is this journaling partner's critically conscious response to the issues of this country's history of slavery and repatriation.

*You mentioned how you sometimes feel that African Americans blame modern white people for what has happened in the past, and say we owe them something. You are correct in saying that they are no longer enslaved, but it is not as simple as that. We (meaning the American government, white people who are descended from slave owners, or white people in general) still owe them many things. First of all, our government promised every freed slave 40 acres of land and a mule to make up for slavery at the end of the Civil War. We have never given them this. Obviously, there aren't enough mules or acres of land for every descendent of a*

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*slave, but the government still owes it (or the cash value of it plus 150 years of interest). Second, we owe them an apology as a nation. The president could very easily do this, but no president ever has. The fact that it would be so little trouble, but it remains unsaid makes its absence even more insulting. Third, and finally, we owe them fairness and equality—something they still don't get in America. This is what programs like affirmative action aim to balance out. By tipping the scales towards African Americans in the job hunt, they hope to truly balance the scales for blacks and whites in society at large. The system is not perfect, but we owe it to them. Like you said, what happened to them is not our generation's fault, but it is like a loan. If you dad takes out a huge loan and dies before paying it (god forbid!), you have to pay the rest of the loan, even if you had nothing to do with it. Our ancestors took out a "loan," if you will, for billions of dollars worth of labor from the slaves, and now we have to repay it. (WM)*

This student's feedback to his journaling partner reflects a rare attempt by students in my classes to develop a pedagogy of "whiteness" that enables white students to move beyond positions of guilt or resentment of ethnic minorities.

I believe that students can mutually benefit from consensus or disagreement with *their* journaling partners. A critical aspect of the assignment is that it requires students to discuss their beliefs, observations, and perceptions with at least one other student and the course instructor. This seems to have value with regard to helping students become more conscious about their beliefs and identities. The assignment is also helpful in providing students with other students' perspectives, as seen in the following excerpts:

*I liked being asked to think and having someone else respond to my ideas. Reading Emily's [pseudonym] entries showed me a new perspective that I had not thought of. This assignment gives students the chance to say what they think and feel to one person, instead of a whole class full of people. For those who are insecure in a large class, this is perfect. (WF)*

*This assignment allows for freedom of expression that would typically be restricted through teacher-dominated lecture. The sharing of personal beliefs in a journaling format brings people closer. Individual communication breaks down stereotypes and stumbling blocks and opens the doors to peace, acceptance, and unity. (WM)*

*I think this journal is a great way to interact with another future teacher. Writing is less threatening and gets the points across. I would describe this activity as a process of learning about multiculturalism and how to positively pass opinions along. Reading and writing helps to point out things I would have never thought of. I also like the assignment because it is open and non-restrictive. Each group can work at their own pace. This is nice because of everyone's crazy semester. (WF)*

*This assignment was very interesting. It provided a chance to really think about things and have time to reflect on them. Some of these questions had me stumped and it took a while for me to come up with an answer that reflected my thoughts. I enjoyed the opportunity to have ideas and philosophies to think about from a*

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*multicultural perspective. If the assignment hadn't been here, I otherwise would not have considered thinking from a multicultural perspective. (WM)*

In addition, when asked about the utility of this assignment, most students recommend continuation of the shared journaling assignment for future multicultural education classes as reflected in the following excerpts:

*Overall, I have found this assignment to be an effective means of communication and dialog between two individuals. From a multicultural perspective, we are creating a safe environment, which can help us unfold our own cultural histories for one another. (WF)*

*This assignment was a good way to explore multiculturalism in a more personal format. It is sometimes easier to get all of your thoughts down on paper rather than trying to get your point across in class. I liked that Nicole [pseudonym] was very open about her thoughts and opinions. Allowing ourselves to participate in free discussion is an excellent way of improving our knowledge personally and professionally. (WM)*

*This assignment was very effective in addressing the goals of the students in the class. All semester long we've heard lectures about multicultural education, wrote papers based on readings, taken exams based on typical classroom information, listened to guest speakers, etc. These opportunities taught me a lot, but mainly involved me taking in and learning new information. During the six weeks of journaling, I was able to think back upon information learned in class and reflect on that information. In essence, I applied course information to my own perspectives in my journal. The journaling made course information more meaningful. I'll probably never forget a lot of the things I learned in this class because of this. (WF)*

Teacher educators have the responsibility for developing curriculum that encourages students to address institutional and personal racism. The shared journaling assignment, while not without its risks, offers one means *toward this end*. Care should be taken to think through the pairing process and to discuss at length the mutual responsibility of each partner in the process. Because of the sensitivity of the content, I have witnessed that many students want to pair up with people whom they already know. Much of the final feedback from previous classes recommended that instead of allowing students to choose their partners, the instructor should pair up students who are not familiar with each other. Therefore, the new learning occurs when students start engaging with a fresh acquaintance in their class.

### **Discussion**

In contrast to approaches that aim at creating objective descriptions of particular ethnic groups, the study of ethnic identity *should involve* an emphasis on how group members themselves understand and interpret their own identity.

*Teacher* educators are a particularly important group who can make use of the shared journaling assignment to fulfill this intention.

At this historical moment, there are many evidences of increased white racism in our society (Akintunde, 1999; Hanssen, 1998; Razack, 1998; Garcia & Swenson, 1992; Fox, 1992). Although racism no doubt is debilitating for whites in a number of ways, unless we analyze who benefits from and promotes racism, we cannot see clearly what needs to be done to counter it (Alcoff, 1998). Teacher educators need to be especially vigilant and explicit about teacher education and to model social justice education for their students. Nonetheless, faculty should not ask students to do what they themselves have not done, and many teacher educators have not learned systematically about personal and institutional racism. *The shared journaling assignment offers a means for this work by examining whiteness in teacher education. The goal of this article is not to place blame, but to better understand the role of white teachers in the circumstances that surround privilege and oppression. Nieto (1999) asserts that: "Involving Whites in multicultural education needs to resolve two seemingly contradictory aims: to confront in a brutally honest way White oppression, and to promote the development of a healthy White identity that is at the same time anti-racist and multicultural" (p. xiv).*

In the semesters I have used this assignment, my own pedagogical and curriculum practices have changed as the result of student feedback. My teacher practice in this course continues to evolve as an attempt to challenge, confront, and engage students' understandings and to push them forward as multicultural educators. I have become critical and analytical about *my* own pedagogical practices each semester since I began administering this assignment. Accordingly, I want to share briefly some of the lessons I learned from initiating this class assignment.

First, I have learned about the folly of believing that understanding one kind of prejudice/bias will automatically prepare students to understand another's perspective. Second, I have realized that teaching multicultural education courses carries with it a moral responsibility to help students work through conflicting and powerful emotions. Third, teaching multicultural education courses has taught me to be patient with the process of change, which is congruent with learning theory. Fourth, utilizing this assignment has reinforced the boundaries between my roles as the teacher/researcher with the students. Fifth, I have realized how much reform is necessary in teacher education, particularly if social justice is *to be a core goal*. Finally, I have learned how critical it is to reflect and adjust my pedagogy — *a pedagogy* that challenges the hegemonic policies and practices in my own teaching in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

Since the worldviews of most white middle-class preservice *education* students expressed through this assignment are based on their life experiences as

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members of the dominant group, they often lack an understanding of the ethnocentric nature of school ideology, practice, and curriculum development. Sleeter (1998) contends, “even as many white teachers reject engagement with multicultural education intellectually, their own day-to-day classroom realities demand it” (p.xiv).

Along with Aaronsohn, Carter, and Howell (1995), I recognize that one semester will not undo the damage of centuries of racism and classism. Moreover, changing white preservice education students’ attitudes may be temporary considering that when they leave the classroom, they return to the environments — dorms, homes, neighborhoods, schools — in which the stereotypes were originally generated and sustained. *Established* support systems *do not* allow prospective teachers to continue to use information about this newly recognized bias. *In fact* the probability is that for most teacher education students one brief semester of such awareness might be washed away by the familiar and cumulative effect of the larger society. Nevertheless, I recognize the value of providing a rich and varied set of experiences like shared-journaling through which white preservice teacher education students are forced to confront their fears and biases, to become not just tolerant of, but attracted to, differences, and *to want and be* able to learn about new ideas, connections, beliefs, and ways of seeing the world (Roose, 2001).

Finally, the shared journaling assignment facilitates the development of essential qualities in acting against racism. The responses from these teacher education students suggest that a shared journaling assignment contains powerful methods to help white students engage in multicultural education discourse. These are self-reflections, commitment to *a pluralistic society*, and a willingness to take risks. Class time must be given to applying these developing critical perspectives in *small- and large-group* discussions. While shared journaling provides a unique and powerful opportunity for learning about diversity and social justice, this approach cannot be regarded as a stand-alone effort, one-size-fits-all solution, or how-to guide, since there are no right ways to engage in these conversations. Coordinated with other campus efforts toward affirming diversity, and infused in the processes and practices of higher education institutions, shared journaling can have an even greater impact. White teacher education students cannot be reasonably expected to meet the challenges of teaching in multicultural classrooms if they have not been adequately prepared to do so (Gay, 2000). Therefore, teacher educators must include experiences like shared-journaling in their professional development programs for teachers. In this way, many doors have been opened for building constructive engagements in multicultural education discourse that would not have occurred otherwise.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> According to Danielewicz (2001), “reflexivity entails thinking that turns back on itself, a reexamination or revisiting of a project or an activity, and a questioning of motives, frameworks, assumptions, working strategies, conclusions, beliefs, and actions” (p. 156).

<sup>2</sup> According to Chavez and O’Donnell (1998), “the process of engagement refers to

those who do not accept the status quo and begin to unconsciously conscious and/or consciously unconscious transform themselves to understand the status quo and place themselves into a location for liberatory action based on a praxis of social justice” (p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> Teaching for Social Justice is at the core of democratic education. It serves as a reminder not only of the inequities and biases that continue to wear away at the foundation of democratic values, but of the powerful stories which inspire us to work toward change, to make the world a better place. A focus on Teaching for Social Justice reminds us that our children need not only a firm grounding in academics but also practice in how to use those academics to promote a democratic society in which all get to participate fully (Hunt, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> My cultural identity as the teacher in this course is centered in Indigenous thought and philosophy as well as my tribal worldview. It’s obvious when walking into this particular classroom every semester that my phenotype physically stands out as one of few ethnic minorities present. Moreover, my focus in teaching multicultural education courses is directed toward social justice (developing critical consciousness) as opposed to a “feel-good” or “food, music, and holiday” approach to teaching multicultural education.

<sup>5</sup> I use the code (WF) to represent “White Female” and (WM) to represent “White Male” to give readers information regarding the student’s racial and gender identity characteristics.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Shared Journaling Schedule**

Week 1:

- (1) As a future teacher, respond to the article "Why Do We Need This Class?"

Week 2:

- (1) Respond to the following questions: What experiences have you had with people from other ethnic groups, sociological classes, religions, and communities? Explain whether this impacts you as a classroom teacher. When you were growing up, what did the people who influenced your life say about people who were of a different culture than you?
- (2) Respond to your partner's Week 1 journal entry.

Week 3:

- (1) It is common practice to identify with students who have strengths that are visual, auditory, etc. Your journal entry this week employs that practice. Create a *collage* in your notebook that reflects your race, culture, and ethnic identity. Use magazines or other sources to create a visual of who you are.
- (2) Respond to your partner's Week 2 journal entry.

Week 4:

- (1) Respond to the following questions:
- (2) What are some of the challenges and opportunities of teaching in inner-city schools? What are some of the challenges and opportunities in affluent suburban schools? In which kind of school do you think teachers can make the most difference? Why? How would you benefit in each of these schools?
- (3) In which kind of school would you prefer to teach? Why?
- (4) Respond to your partner's Week 3 journal entry.

Week 5:

- (1) Respond to the following questions: What is your professional teaching philosophy? How are multicultural educational concepts integrated into your professional teaching philosophy?
  - (2) Respond to your partner's Week 4 journal entry.
- Turn in your journals for mid-semester review.

Week 6:

- (1) Respond to a selected chapter, "The Emperor's New Clothes."
- (2) How does the colorblind perspective make it easier for White teachers to discriminate?

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Give specific examples from this situation and from your own observations and experiences in schools and in other settings and contexts.

(3) Respond to your partner's Week 5 journal entry.

Week 7:

(1) This week you have an opportunity to do some free-writing. It is your choice to write about anything that we covered in class or sites in which we visited this semester. It's your choice to write whatever you want. Express yourself!

(2) Respond to your partner's Week 6 journal entry.

Week 8:

(1) Provide one final journal entry by describing your experience with this assignment. At least respond to the following questions: How would you describe this assignment to future students? What did you like about this assignment? What would you change about this assignment?

(2) Overall, how would you evaluate the effectiveness of this assignment in addressing the goals of students in this class?

(3) Respond to your partner's Week 7 journal entry.

Journals are now to be submitted for grading.

## **Appendix B**

### ***Self-Introduction and Multicultural Education***

The purpose of this exercise is to acknowledge, appreciate, and share with other members of your class the different aspects of multicultural education. The procedure follows below:

Side (A) of your index card:

Briefly introduce yourself by responding to these questions:

- A. What is your *name*?
- B. What *year* are you in the School of Education?
- C. What is your *major* (or content area in teaching)?
- D. What *level* of teaching are you pursuing (elementary/middle/secondary)?
- E. Where are you *from* and where do you call home?

Side (B) of your index card:

Write the following responses to the exercise "Who are your people?"

- A. In the *center* of your 3x5 card, write out your response to "Who are your people?" (the group that you primarily identify with). This group may be your racial group, or ethnic, gender, class, abilities, age, place, country — so on and so forth.
- B. In the *upper left-hand corner*, write the name of a second group that you identify with (a secondary group of people). Again, please choose any group that reflects another aspect of your multicultural self.
- C. In the *upper right-hand corner*, write one or two strengths about your primary group.
- D. In the *lower left-hand corner*, write one or two misconceptions/stereotypes about your primary group that you would like to have changed.
- E. In the *lower right-hand corner*, write two solutions for correcting those misconceptions/stereotypes of your primary group.