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## Realizing students' every day realities: Community analysis as a model for social justice

### Cover Page Footnote

We would like to thank the students in Jeanette's Spring 2008, EDUC 315 course for providing us permission to use their papers for this article, especially, Carlos, Darren, and Teresa. The development of this article enabled us to think more deeply about our teaching.

## Realizing Students' Every Day Realities: Community Analysis as a Model for Social Justice

Jeanette Haynes Writer and H. Prentice Baptiste

You can't guide your students to overcome challenges of social injustice if you cannot relate material to the lives of your students outside of the classroom. And in my opinion, the most important reason for a teacher to understand the challenges facing their students outside the classroom is so that the teacher can become motivated to promote social justice in their own daily life as well as within their classroom and to not be naïve to the problems that truly exist in our society. —Darren, pre-service teacher

This article examines the implications and effect of the Community Analysis (CA) Project assignment that we utilize in the Multicultural Education (MCE) course<sup>1</sup> at New Mexico State University, located in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The CA enables pre-service teachers to critically examine, through a social justice lens, the manifestations and intersectionalities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and religion in PreK-12 students' communities, which may be rejected and ignored, or embraced, serving to connect students' lives to learning contexts and opportunities in their schools. The CA compels pre-service teachers to analyze systemic inequities and inequalities in communities which impact the everyday lives of students. They discover organic knowledge possessed by students and families to bridge students' knowledge and the knowledge promoted within the school curriculum. Pre-service teachers also contemplate how their privileged or disadvantaged identity statuses intersect with their future students' privileged or disadvantaged statuses, or impact how they read communities.

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The ultimate goal of the CA, through this reflective practice, is to prepare pre-service teachers to provide equitable and just learning environments for all students).

With the examination and discussion of the CA, we offer educational professionals knowledge and information that can assist them in the implementation of multicultural education from a critical analysis perspective. We maintain that MCE must be formulated within a social justice framework, which purposefully transcends the "heroes and holidays," or what we refer to as the "food, fun, festivals, and foolishness" approach. It is only from multicultural education practice anchored to a social justice theoretical framework that we establish and maintain equitable and just learning environments.

### The Conceptualization and Facilitation of the Course—Situating our Teaching Context

Our teaching context is in Las Cruces, New Mexico. We are located at the south end of the state, approximately forty-two miles from the Texas border and approximately an hour's drive from Juarez, Mexico and the Mexico/US border. We are in the "borderlands" in terms of political boundaries, as well as in metaphorical, social, and cultural borderlands in regard to how various identities (race, citizenship, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) often times intersect in a confrontive manner. Our pre-service teacher population is typically one-half white and one-half Mexican American/Hispanic, the latter being divided into those who have immigrated to the area recently, either in their own or their parents' lifetimes, and those whose families have lived in the US for generations. We have a richness to draw from in linguistic ability and experience. Undergraduate courses host a higher percentage of women; the presence of men tends to increase in graduate courses. In terms of socio-economic class, white pre-service teachers typically occupy the middle class status; those who are Mexican American/Hispanic come from a mix of middle-class and working-class backgrounds.

Jeanette has been a faculty member in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction since fall of 1996; her primary teaching responsibility is the undergraduate and graduate MCE courses. Prentice has been with the

department since 1997; previous to his teaching responsibility of the MCE course, he served as College of Education Dean for two years. Prentice began using the CA with his undergraduate and graduate courses in the 1980's during his tenure at the University of Houston. The community analysis module emerged from an activity called the Princeton Game. It was first modified by James Anderson for a course and further modified by Prentice at the University of Houston and Kansas State University before Prentice introduced it at New Mexico State University. He shared the assignment with Jeanette and she has been using the assignment for approximately five years. Previously, Jeanette had employed the community service option for her pre-service teachers, using the CA first in the graduate MCE course.<sup>2</sup> However, she extended the CA to all of her MCE courses because of the deep understandings obtained from the assignment.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings**

Although a significant amount of literature has been developed in the field of MCE (Banks & Banks, 2001; Baptiste, 1986; Bennett, 2001; Boyer & Baptiste, 1996; May, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), scholars have not settled on a specific definition. For our purposes, we utilize the following definition:

Multicultural Education is a comprehensive philosophical reform of the school environment essentially focused on the principles of equity, success, and social justice for all students.... Social justice in schools is accomplished by the process of judicious pedagogy as its cornerstone and focuses on unabridged knowledge, reflection, and social action as the foundation for social change. (Baptiste, 1995, as cited in Boyer & Baptiste, 1996, p. 5)

May (1999) contends the MCE movement "promised much and delivered little" (p. 1). Recently, Jeanette visited a kindergarten teacher at a local elementary school. Within the conversation the teacher remarked that a fellow teacher planned to have the children "dress up like Indians and pilgrims for Thanksgiving." We know that the "heroes and holidays" form of MCE is happening in public schools, so we strategically work to move pre-service teachers from the "celebrating diversity" frame of reference to one of social justice.

Bell (1997) describes social justice as "both a process and a goal" (p. 3). Social justice interrogates the manifestations of power and the dynamics of oppression, such as in individuals' and groups' access to resources and the experiences those individuals and groups have due to their status that either advantage or disadvantage them. From this interrogation, a plan of action is developed to transform systems of oppression. Along with social justice, critical pedagogy is a vital aspect of our work in the MCE courses because it involves the teaching of critical analysis. As expressed by Oakes and Lipton (2007), critical pedagogy "links knowledge of diversity and inequality with actions that can make the culture more socially just" (p. 100).

The CA is a critical pedagogical tool to transform the awareness and consciousness of our pre-service teachers to recognize oppressions and to strategize circumventions for those oppressions. The CA encompasses these ideas by moving social justice from "words on a page" into a tangible, hands-on learning opportunity.

## **Constructing the Course Syllabus and Assignments**

The background, goals and vision of the MCE course establishes that:

Students from a variety of language, cultural, class, gender, and exceptionality backgrounds attend school everyday and interact with each other in academic, social and personal ways. Besides academic learning, the school environment fosters socio-cultural learning - be it positive or negative, implicit, or explicit. The teacher's role can maximize or minimize the positive or negative multicultural learning that unfolds. This role develops through the teacher's personal knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, and critique of diversity and pluralism in a democratic context. The teacher is encouraged to create a sense of self that will promote a nurturing respect for self and others in order to genuinely promote equal and accessible education (EDUC 315 Syllabus).

In the first class meeting, Jeanette clarifies that this is not a "how to do MCE" course, it is a conceptual, research-based course where pre-service students develop awareness, skills, and abilities to intellectualize what MCE is and what social justice looks like. She explains that after reading the course texts and other readings, struggling with the concepts, and conducting their CA, pre-service teachers will be able to read communities and the educational terrain to be effective in various teaching locations and situations.

Banks (1994) and Vavrus (2002) maintain that teacher education programs should facilitate pre-service teachers' understanding of their cultural heritages before expecting them to understand those of their students. Other scholars (Artiles & McClafferty, 1998; Haynes Writer, 2002a; Mahlios & Maxson, 1995; Stachowski & Frey, 2003) articulate the value of surveys, inventories, and other methods of assessment of pre-service teachers' conceptualizations, beliefs, and attitudes in teacher education programs and teacher development. Jeanette does this by having the pre-service teachers conduct an analysis of their socialization employing Harro's (2000) "Cycle of Socialization." Pre-service teachers work through their seven core identities (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and religion/spiritual orientation) to identify their dominant or subordinate identities and identify how their identities intersect with each other. Haynes Writer (2002a) asserts, "After 'inventorying' one's own conceptualizations, attitudes, and beliefs, a student must then find her or his own courage for critical transformation as a critical multicultural teacher, to change what is incorrect and inequitable" (p. 13).

Utilizing Harro's Cycle of Socialization, each pre-service teacher presents her or his identities and socialization process to the class; Jeanette presents her Social Identity Project to the pre-service teachers first to serve as both a model for the presentation and as reciprocal disclosure of her socialization. As the pre-service teachers present, they bring in knowledge that all can access; they provide counterstories to the oppressions found in the dominating society; and they confront assumptions they had of colleagues. The assignment assists pre-service teachers to become aware of and name their subordinate statuses, as well as their privileged statuses that may "blind them" to the realities of students, families, and communities that are situated in subordinated identities or contexts. At the end of the semester, pre-service teachers write an "Epilogue" to discuss how their colleagues' presentations added to their knowledge base or how the CA transformed their understandings of community as they position themselves as critical educators; most students write about the impact of the CA.

## **Community Analysis Project Assignment**

Too often a school and its staff constitute an island, which is physically within, but culturally and epistemologically removed from the surrounding community. The need is for direct experiences to give pre-service teachers knowledge and understanding of the problems and the strengths of the people in the kind of community in which she or he may teach. The CA develops in the pre-service teachers a critical lens as they examine communities in ways they have not before.

Each individual selects a school site, but is instructed not to go into the school; the pre-service teacher is to learn about the community around the school, not the school itself. The CA purposefully de-centers the authority of the school, while centering the authority of the community. The everyday realities of the students who go to the school are examined, as is the organic knowledge they bring to the school context. The pre-service teachers have to imagine themselves as future teachers at their particular school, asking these questions: How are the core identities manifested in the community? What are their intersections? How is power played out? What are the issues in the community that serves as obstacles for the students? What are the strengths and resources of the community? How will I bridge school curriculum with the organic knowledge that students bring to school? The CA is an overarching, culminating project that encompasses several assignments.

### ***Activities Within the CA Project Assignment***

Pre-service teachers construct a Descriptive Map of their selected school community, including the names of the specific areas, villages, streets, or roads in the community; they may use the school district's boundaries or construct a purposeful boundary of their own. Using a color and number code to fill in the map, the following are designated: schools; federal/public community service agencies; religious/spiritual or political organizations; substandard housing; places where children and teenagers play or gather; places where the unemployed gather; major industries/businesses; and condemned buildings or areas.

Pre-service teachers also complete two Observation Logs regarding the presence or absence of two core identities that Jeanette selects; the logs coincide with the readings at that point in the semester. The logs are developed as ethnographic observations with accompanying personal reactions/questions, grounded with course readings and readings outside of class. Pre-service teachers are instructed to use this formula to examine the remaining core identities as a means to generate analyses and references for the Critical Analysis Paper. In addition, pre-service teachers collect various kinds of data concerning their community to complete the 20 question Questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses pre-service teachers' attention to such issues as quality and availability of

food and housing, social issues, physical infrastructure viability, and perspectives of residents regarding the community.

The Critical Analysis Paper is developed based on the critical intellectual synthesis of information from community observations, interviews with residents and community service personnel, course readings, research articles, statistical data, and the information gathered for the questionnaire. The following questions are addressed: (1) What have you learned about the manifestations of race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and religion in the community?; (2) How are power and oppression connected to these identities displayed or played out in the community?; and (3) How will you circumvent the seven oppressions (racism or ethnocentrism, linguisticism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and religism) to address critical issues in the community through your work with students in the classroom and their caregivers?

The pre-service teachers share their new understandings with colleagues during the Community Analysis Reports. Each prepares a Power Point presentation and, taking turns in small groups of 3 to 4, discusses their communities with their "critical colleagues." As critical colleagues, the pre-service teachers listen, ask questions, provide feedback in comparison to what they have seen in their communities, and ground the conversation to the Oakes and Lipton (2007) text and other course readings.

Several times during the semester progress checks are conducted in class, as scaffolding mechanisms, to see where pre-service teachers are in their CA. They have the opportunity to dialog with one another on what they are discovering, what difficulties they are having, and what resources they are tapping. In their research, pre-service teachers consult print and on-line research journals; governmental, community, and organization websites; US Census data; and talk to individuals in the community. The project is designed to expand pre-service teachers' resourcefulness in locating community information and resources.

## **The Pre-Service Teachers**

Whereas, Jeanette has utilized the CA for a number of years, in Spring 2008 she collected papers from her undergraduate MCE course for the purpose of this article. Of the twenty-two pre-service teachers, sixteen described themselves as Hispanic, Mexican or Mexican American and six as White or Caucasian; fourteen were female and eight were male. Self-describing one's socioeconomic status, the class was comprised of a mix of socioeconomic classes, the majority claiming middle-class status with a few claiming working-class status. Of the twenty-two pre-service teachers, eighteen signed consent forms for the gathering of CA documents. Of these, seven Critical Analysis Papers and Epilogues were first selected for their completeness and depth; three were then analyzed further for discussion in this article.

After spending twelve weeks in their selected communities talking to students, parents/guardians, community members and personnel from community businesses, agencies and public services, frequenting various websites, and researching the scholarly literature to complete their Questionnaire, as well as constructing their Descriptive Maps, and completing Observation Logs, the pre-service teachers wrote their Critical Analysis Paper. This paper brings all the information together in a cumulative, intellectually-grounded, meaning-making paper. This is the opportunity, as Jeanette tells them, to "show what you know."

In the subsequent pages readers follow three students, Darren, Teresa, and Carlos, as they progress through their Critical Analysis Paper and Epilogue. Here, readers are introduced to the pre-service teachers and witness the transformation of their critical knowledge base, awareness of their dominant or subordinate identity statuses, and movement towards a social justice perspective.

Darren is a mono-lingual English-speaking, heterosexual, able-bodied white male in his early 20s, who was raised in a community that is a border town to the Navajo reservation. He described himself as middle-class, and came from a family that was economically sound and educated. His father is a veterinarian and he and his siblings were all expected and able to attend college. During his time in K-12 schools, he had Navajo classmates and related a story of being beat up because he was "a white boy." He also described himself as a person of strong Christian faith and at the beginning of the course inquired why evolution, which he did not support, was privileged over intelligent design. This was an issue of struggle within his trajectory of becoming a high school science teacher.

Teresa is a bilingual, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual Mexican American female in her early 20's. She is of the Catholic faith and was raised and went to school in the El Paso area. Teresa focused her examination on the community of Sierra Vista, located approximately twenty-five miles south of Las Cruces. Teresa stressed that the CA made her realize that teaching was not "a simple profession." As she studied her community, she found that interviews were important because of the sense of the community she gained from talking with residents, "The way the community members looked at the world is how their children, my students, were going to look at it as well." Teresa revealed that her point of challenge—and opportunity for transformation—revolved around the issues of

homosexuality and heterosexism. She admitted that, "In order for me to try and confront homophobia in my classroom,...I had to really push my beliefs aside and take into consideration the discrimination against innocent individuals."

Carlos is a heterosexual, able-bodied Mexican male in his early 20s who is fluent in Spanish and English. He lives in Fairfield, which is a short drive north of Las Cruces. Instead of examining the immediate community surrounding one of the four schools in Fairfield, Carlos choose to study the entire community. Fairfield is a small, rural farming community. The backbreaking labor within the lucrative agricultural business in Fairfield comes from fieldworkers, many who are migrant laborers from Mexico, thus US citizenship and anti-immigrant sentiments play out in complex ways. Carlos was born in Mexico and has his US residency documents. He is a participant in the College Assistance Migrant Program at NMSU, which provides financial and educational support to students from migrant and seasonal farm working families. He described himself as being from a lower socioeconomic class; Carlos's mother works in the fields, as does he during the summer. Carlos was very quiet in class and rarely spoke in large group discussions. Jeanette sometimes wondered how and if he was making sense of the course content—was he engaged? His Critical Analysis Paper answered that question with a resounding "yes!" Carlos researched the community and deconstructed it along the seven core identities deeply and critically. As he analyzed the community, Carlos confronted some of his own oppressions—both what has been waged upon him and what he has participated in. He desires to become a bilingual teacher; he found that his linguistic skills benefited him in the CA Project, "Throughout my analysis I was able to make observations that a person that only spoke one language would either miss or not notice."

### ***Question 1: Manifestations of the Seven Core Identities in the Community***

Within the Critical Analysis Paper, the first question the pre-service teachers addressed was: What have you learned about the manifestations of race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and religion in the community? To discuss this question, we concentrate on specific identities, those with which the pre-service teachers personally struggled or those which stood out to them.

Becoming conscious of his strong Christian identity through the Social Identity Project, an identity he named as dominant for himself, Darren explored how religion manifested within the Las Cruces community around Sun View Elementary, specifically in the form of Christian religious organizations. Connecting course readings<sup>3</sup> and our class discussions to what he was observing in the community, Darren recognized how discrimination could be formulated due to historical biases and recent events.

Within the city of Las Cruces there are over 180 religious organizations or churches. Of at least thirty-six religious institutions within one mile of the community, the majority of them are Catholic, Protestant, or other Christian-based churches....The fact that the majority of churches in the Sun View community are either Catholic or Protestant may indicate that the discrimination against other religious views could be common. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, a steep increase in discrimination against Muslim people has occurred on a national level. Those events have most likely created similar feelings for some people living in the Sun View community.

He connected this to how religious groups outside of the Christian mainstream may be targeted, including students from those religions.

Because young children are so easily influenced by parents, friends, the media, etc., many students have already developed negative stereotypes of people of certain religious groups or of non-religious people. This may lead to discrimination among these young people in schools based on religion by other students or even by faculty....

Like Darren, Teresa also identified her religious identity, Catholic, as a dominant identity. Viewing discrimination as a moral and ethical issue, she challenged her beliefs to assess the homosexual presence, or rather, absence, in her community.

There were no gay/lesbian groups or clubs that were easily detected. Fliers in stores and in restaurants had pictures of heterosexual couples. In asking around the community about homosexuality I did not get very many responses because some people did not wish to talk about it. The ones who did answer said that it was not common in Sierra Vista to see a gay or lesbian couple. Usually you see them at the gas station fueling up because they are just passers-by.

For Carlos, particular identities became very clear in Fairfield. Homes in the community illustrated a stark stratification based on the intersections between race, class, and citizenship or “arrival” in the US. Looking at various sections of the community, Carlos found a few “mansions” and “miniature mansions”; these were homes of Anglos who “owned or were related to people who owned the biggest money-making businesses in Fairfield.” The areas where the poor lived reminded Carlos of what he had studied regarding the Hoovervilles from the Great Depression, homes that featured “doors made out of street signs,” that were “literally falling apart,” and apartments made of adobe that “seemed to have been built by the Spaniards themselves on their first conquistas.” Whereas, the wealth and upper-class status in Fairfield was possessed by Caucasians, Carlos remarked that, “[M]ost of the middle-class...was Mexican American, while most of the lower-class was mostly of full Mexican descent. The middle-class seemed to be mostly second and third Mexican American generations.”

### ***Question 2: Examining How Power and Oppression are Displayed in the Community***

The second question in the Critical Analysis Paper was: How are power and oppression connected to these diversities displayed or played out in the community? Carlos specifically examined race; he studied US Census data to establish the racial demographics of his community, which showed that Hispanics were numerically dominant. Carlos discovered that power did not, however, follow the numbers once socio-economics intersected with race in the power dynamic.

Many may assume that the town is run by the Hispanic population because if you enter any business the managerial positions are all occupied by Hispanics. But after further investigation it slowly starts to become apparent that all of the businesses are managed by Hispanics but in reality they are owned by Anglos.

Driving around the community, Carlos found that most of the store signs and business advertisements were in English, however, the majority of the employees in the stores and businesses conducted business in Spanish. There was one exception:

In the hardware store everyone only spoke English. The employees understood Spanish but they never spoke it.... I started to make the connection at the hardware store where the majority of customers were Caucasian; a few Hispanics would trickle in but it seemed that they were just in and out.... [I]t seemed that the whites almost used it as a clubhouse.

To critically analyze the intersections of race, class, and language, Carlos drew upon the course readings. He specifically cited Tatum's (2000) words that others are the mirror in which we often see ourselves, and Harro's (2000) Cycle of Socialization as to how Hispanic community members were collectively socialized to acquiesce to the Anglos' English. Carlos stated,

[Tatum] kept making sense in my head because the reason I believe everything was in English was for adaptation purposes. The subordinate group in Fairfield is the Hispanic community and the dominant group is the Caucasian community. In this town the dominant group's population is more than doubled by the subordinate population, yet the language is adapted for the group whose population is smaller....The Hispanics have gotten [so] used to always accommodating the whites that everything they do is to make life easier for the dominant group.

Teresa interrogated the power dynamic of heterosexism<sup>4</sup> in Sierra Vista; she affirmed that,

Heterosexuality is dominant in Sierra Vista. The fact that some residents refused to talk about homosexuality is evidence that it is subordinate. ...There are no support groups for adults or for children who are homosexual in Sierra Vista. Who are young gay and lesbian children going to run to if they have a problem? A child that is living in fear to come out is not healthy.

As she investigated her community to examine the power of heterosexuals, Teresa connected the absence of homosexuals as an issue of power and a position of invisibility, which may have the potential to place gay and lesbian individuals or students at risk in that community.

### ***Question 3: Developing Strategies as Teachers to Circumvent Oppressions***

The third question in the Critical Analysis Paper was: How will you circumvent the seven oppressions to address critical issues in the community through your work with students in the classroom and their caregivers? The three pre-service teachers had transformed themselves from being individuals unaware of their identities to “teachers-in-process”; they were intellectually strategizing disruptions of discriminatory actions and discourses in their classrooms.

Darren transformed from being a young man who defended his privileged Christian identity, maintaining at the beginning of the course the need to present intelligent design on the same footing as or in place of evolution,<sup>5</sup> to a future educator who situated himself as being attentive to all of his students' religious orientations.

One of the things that I will undoubtedly encounter in my science classroom will be the origin of life. I hope to explore various religious and non-religious views with my students that pertain to the origin of life, and to engage students in expressing their opinions about this. Religion is something that I do not believe should be “taught” in any way in the classroom; however, I want to encourage my students to express their beliefs while being respectful and open-minded in learning about the beliefs of other people. I feel that my experiences with various religions and the information that I have learned from this project and in this class have prepared me to create an environment that is conducive to helping students develop respect for and diminish negative stereotypes of various religions.

Carlos situated himself as a social justice teacher by connecting to the everyday realities of his students. He would have them become active and see themselves as change agents.

As an educator I will address these problems [that he found in his community]...I will strive to open the eyes of my students and help them see that the answer to their problems is right in front of them. I will not only promote equality but equity as well....Oppression will always exist and I don't intend of abolishing it but I do intend on creating a socially just atmosphere in my classroom, home, and school.

Carlos began envisioning himself as a transformative educator, one whose work does not stay in the classroom but moves out into the community in an effort to create alliances and motivation for change.

Always with great hope that my work will spill over to the community and create a bridge not only with myself and the school but with everyone in the community creating an interlaced network that fights for the same objectives with the same motives in mind.

“As a social justice educator I need to fight homophobia in my classroom because children are [placed] at risk.” Teresa wrote extensively about what steps she would take to address homosexuality and homophobia in her classroom, from obtaining permission to show the film “It's Elementary: Talking about gay issues in school” (Cohen & Chasnoff, 1996), to putting up pictures in her classroom which portray families in various forms, to drawing upon suggestions from the book, *Queering Elementary Education* (Letts & Sears, 1999). She would also dialogue with her students regarding what homosexuality is because,

I know that someday they will come across this word. I want to teach them before they are given a negative definition....I also want my students to be aware of homophobia and the negative effects it has on individuals. I will certainly be open for any child who has a problem about coming out or just needs someone to talk to. I will make sure that bullying does not go unpunished, especially when it has to do with homophobia.

## **New Realizations and Understandings of Social Justice**

James B. Boyer asserts that “The absence of instructional vision results in the absence of social and academic justice” (Boyer & Baptiste, 1996, p. 177). Darren, Teresa, and Carlos, through the CA, developed a new vision of their responsibility and possibility as teachers, moving them toward social and academic justice as they garnered new realizations and understandings about social justice.

Darren spoke of his transformation as a journey, “As a white, future educator, I have been on a journey to understand racism and white-privilege so that I am better prepared, as a strong believer and promoter of multicultural education, to challenge these problems in our schools.” In his Epilogue, Darren wrote this regarding social justice:

I learned from this project, and this class as a whole, the various factors that shape our identity, the fact that so much of who we are is not decided by us, and the importance of being an agent of change for social justice and equity. As teachers we are in the position to change the world by affecting the students that we come in contact with everyday. This is a power that should not be wasted or abused. Teachers who are not in touch with the students in the classroom and are not aware of the struggles, disadvantages, and problems that students face in the community and home life will not be as able to integrate their curriculum into the real-life, situational type of education that students need to be able to confront and overcome the issues of social justice in their lives.

Carlos reflected on the impact of the CA as a catalyst to examine his home community through a social justice lens, revealing things he had not been aware of before, and facilitating realizations about himself:

[T]here was so much I never took the time to notice in my own home town....This community analysis paper was an eye-opening experience to say the least. I have learned so much about myself and I have grown as an educator. I feel now that I am equipped with new tools to become a great educator. Learning about one's self may be hard sometimes because accepting the bad sides can be difficult, but this course has taught us social justice is not to be shown to other people, but to ourselves as well.

Teresa felt empowered to tackle oppressions as a teacher:

Observing the seven core identities in Sierra Vista has raised my awareness of what it really means to be a teacher. The observations really helped me open my eyes to things I never took the time to care about. I hope to take with me the knowledge I gained from this project and from my multicultural class when I enter the teaching field. One day I will confront these issues and I will have the tools to battle them.

## **Conclusion**

In regard to our own praxis as critical multicultural educators, our work constantly reminds us of what we must do in MCE to advance the movement toward “‘MCE as social justice,’ to rid ourselves, our educational institutions, and ultimately the larger society from the ‘food, fun, festivals, and foolishness’ form of MCE” (Haynes Writer, 2008), to shift us into Baptiste’s (1994) Typology of Multiculturalism, Level III, for social justice and social action. We must provide opportunities for our pre-service teachers to operationalize MCE concepts, not merely recall terminology from course texts, as a means to assist them in synthesizing theory and practice. As Teresa realized, “A book could not teach the students about their community and the injustices in it, but a teacher who has done her [or his] research could.”

Assignments such as the CA facilitates the recognition of the core identities in lived contexts, enabling pre-service teachers to recognize the manifestations of power and oppression in the everyday, so those oppressions become part of the curricular content and social justice becomes a pedagogical imperative. The pre-service teachers addressed the metaphorical, social, and cultural borderlands that our location sustains, prompting the pre-service teachers’ identification and understanding of the educational marginalization that often happens to diverse, less powerful students and communities.

In summary, this article examined the implications and effect of the CA Project assignment on pre-service teachers, providing them opportunity to critically examine the manifestations and intersectionalities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and religion/spiritual orientation in PreK-12 students’ communities. They identified organic knowledge from the communities, enabling them to envision and strategize curricular and pedagogical connections to students’ lives. The CA required pre-service teachers to analyze systemic inequities in communities which impact the everyday lives of students, compelling them to intellectually analyze how their privileged or disadvantaged identity statuses impact how they read communities or will intersect with their students’ privileged or disadvantaged identities. Because the CA is situated within a social justice framework, and functions as a critical pedagogical tool, it works to end or greatly challenge the educational marginalization that so many students experience. This engages the pre-service teachers with MCE teaching conceptualizations and strategies that purposefully transcend “food, fun, and festivals” approach as a means to establish and maintain equitable and socially just learning environments for all students.

## **Notes**

1. All pre-service and in-service teachers must pass the MCE course to seek admission to NMSU's teacher education program. The MCE course is offered at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Whereas, the courses are similar in MCE content and emphasis on social justice, the courses differ in the texts utilized. Assignments may differ as well due to the professors or graduate assistants teaching the various course sections; up to seven sections are offered per semester at the undergraduate level and two at the graduate level.
2. Prentice uses the CA with graduate students, but they work in teams. For the purpose of this article, we examine the use of the CA at the undergraduate-level as an individual assignment.
3. Readings addressed the influence of media bias on the social constructions of the Muslim community (Haynes Writer, 2002b), and a teacher's pedagogical choices in working with a Muslim student (Karp, 2001).
4. Pre-service teachers completed the "Writing for Change" exercise which provided a definition of "compulsory heterosexism," and had them provide various examples of compulsory heterosexism and place themselves in scenarios. We also saw a portion of the film "It's Elementary: Talking about gay issues in school" (Cohen & Chasnoff, 1996).
5. With Darren's comment in class, Jeanette problematized the issue of presenting only "two sides of the story," the Biblical genesis story and the theory of evolution, by discussing that the over 575 federally recognized tribal nations in the US have their own "genesis" or origin stories. Thus, it was no longer a matter of two privileged sides, but hundreds of "sides."

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