

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective in Teacher Education: Invisible Burden for Faculty of Color

By Jean Moule

Context

Introduction

It is as if we are all on a river that flows quietly and gently along. Most of my friends, students, and colleagues float on this river in a strong, sturdy boat of their majority status—a boat I cannot get into because I am not White. The river, our societal mainstream, is accepted and hardly noticed. I manage to swim or float alongside the boat as I am learning how to navigate this mainstream. Every once in a while someone in the boat notices my struggle and tosses out an inner tube or briefly holds my hand. And then sometimes, someone reaches out and pushes my head under with, “Just get over this race thing, Jean.” I sputter, resurface and continue on. In the long run, I figure it makes sense to construct a raft for myself. So while I talk to those in the boat and we run difficult rapids together, at the same time I must lash together whatever supportive materials I can find. The response? “Hey, how come Jean gets a raft?” When I say, “Because I can’t get in the boat with you and I’m getting tired of staying afloat without more support,” some say, “What boat?” (Moule, 2003, p. 3 [adapted from Journal entry 11/19/01])

Jean Moule is an assistant professor with the College of Education at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon.

African Americans in predominantly White institutions often carry a greater load than their positions describe. While researchers have explored the unique role of African Americans in higher education (Cook, 1996; Diller & Moule, 2005; Jones, 2001; King & Castenell, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Maboleka

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

& Green, 2001; Moule, 2004; Powell, 1999; Richardson & Villenas, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000), this study deepens the understanding of this role by analyzing the work of one African American woman in a teacher education program at a large Northwestern research institution.

As a female African American assistant professor, I examine my position description and assignments over a five-year period. I focus particularly on changes that occurred as our teacher education faculty struggled to implement a social justice perspective into our preservice teacher program. How have we run these rapids together, and what impact has the institution of our social justice perspective had on my role and person as an isolated individual of color?

Setting and Participants

As the proportion and number of children of color in the nation's and our state's school districts have increased, so has the need for teachers with multicultural awareness and perspectives. For the success of students of color, it is imperative that these teachers develop a social justice foundation and perspective while enrolled in our teacher education programs and carry this perspective into their teaching practices.

Sleeter's (2001) meta-analysis of efforts to prepare students to work in diverse settings highlights the overwhelming presence of Whiteness in education. For example, my college has made efforts to recruit a more racially diverse student population into its graduate teacher education programs, yet the reality is that the majority of the preservice teachers are White. In the school year 2003-2004, 95% of our preservice teacher cohort was White. The faculty is also overwhelmingly White. I serve on the elementary education team of 5 core faculty and 6 part-time faculty in a School of Education with 30 faculty members. I am one of the few people of color in my building, and I am one of only 10 African Americans among the university's 1,200 tenured or tenure-track faculty (Oregon State University, 2002).

Our one-year Master of Arts in Teaching program began in Fall 1991. From its inception there had been a strong constructivist, reflective and interpersonal focus in the program. At one point, due to the need to formalize a perspective for a National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) review, one member of our faculty wrote a social justice perspective statement.

Social Justice Perspectives

We placed a social justice vision statement on the first page of our handbook (Professional Teacher Education Program, 2002):

The purpose of education is to promote a democratic society based on principles of social justice and economic equity. Schools and education should be laboratories for democracy, where adults and children learn together to raise questions about issues and problems, both of a cognitive and social-critical nature, and they work together to find the answers to those problems. . . . A basic task of education is to support students'

ability and disposition to analyze experience, as it relates to justice and equity issues, and then to take action to address injustices or problems in that experience.

When we agreed on this statement, there was little discussion on what this meant in practice or who would take specific responsibilities for implementing elements of the perspective. We did begin each year with a group session to share and discuss the perspective. We individually began to weave a social justice focus into our courses with relevant course readings and discussions. Together we required a social justice component in the work samples our preservice teachers prepared for licensure. As part of this requirement the preservice teachers indicated how they would promote and encourage social justice actions in their students.

Although we reached some consensus about the statement and this requirement for licensure, the faculty did not talk long nor agree on how to implement a social justice perspective with our students, in our advising, or in our admissions process. Even before the statement in the handbook, the visible and invisible differences between us—especially some based on race— influenced faculty members’ perceptions and definitions of social justice. These differences began to become more apparent than ever as we strove to institute our social justice conceptual framework (Moule & Waldschmidt, 2003).

Disparate views of social justice are not uncommon. Zollers, Albert, and Cochran-Smith (2000) state that, “Although faculty members unanimously embraced the goal of ‘teaching and teacher education for social justice,’ they held widely varying ideas about the meaning of social justice”: everything from “changing individual beliefs” at one end of the spectrum to “taking action collectively” at the other (p. 5).

When the word “racial” is added to “social justice,” the stakes are raised and the need for action by groups or individuals of color may be heightened. “Therefore, the strategy of those who fight for racial social justice is to unmask and expose racism in all of its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). Because race is an immutable part of who I am as an African American, the *racial* nature of social justice is an intrinsic experience and automatic expectation for me; I need to do this unmasking.

While my White colleagues could work toward social justice by acknowledging and challenging socially acceptable notions of racism, such as taking a strong stand against overt racism, I could not. Thomas (2001) found this true in the women she studied, “African American women and Latina scholars see a personal mission of *social change* as a fundamental part of their professional responsibilities” (p. 82). My colleagues have not experienced being a person of color in our society and may neither recognize, nor have the same need to fight, more subtle racism. Our differing perceptions and definitions led to dissimilar levels of commitment and divergent ways to work towards the goals of our social justice perspective.

The tension between “changing a perspective” versus “taking action” informs the underlying workload issues and helps explain the results of the study. As my

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

own workload became overwhelming for me, I needed to understand why our new commitment to social justice had a greater effect on me than on my colleagues. Was there shared responsibility for implementing the faculty's social justice perspective?

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) "begins with the notion that racism...is so enmeshed in the fabric of the U.S. social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this society" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). The experience of oppression and a critique of liberalism are other foundational components of a CRT perspective (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This theoretical framework helps us to understand the underlying system that produced the struggles and inequities described in this study. Multiple/multiethnic perspective taking as developed by Hyun and Marshall (1997) and Selman and Schulz's (1990) work on social perspective taking also help us discern how race develops different perspectives. While these frameworks are useful, I am drawn to racial identity development theory because it directly uses race in its application, and because its stages may lead more quickly to understanding and solutions.

Based on the theories of racial identity development of Cross (1971, 1995) and Helms (1990), I have developed what I call "racial interaction development." It is a schema that is easy to keep in mind and share with others, especially busy inservice teachers and young undergraduates. It is simple to understand and remember, and, most importantly, it highlights the interaction process that is useful in naturalistic inquiry.

Helms (1990) defines racial identity development as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group...racial identity development theory concerns the psychological implication of racial-group membership" (pp. 3-4). In my model of racial interaction development, I call the first stage "I'm OK; You're OK." This corresponds to the pre-encounter/contact stages found in racial identity development theories. It is analogous to the "color-blind" or "let's just ignore race" stance. In this stage individuals of color and White individuals "must maintain the fiction that race and racial indoctrination have nothing to do with how he or she lives life" (Helms, 1990, p. 23).

The second stage I call "Something is not OK." This corresponds to the encounter/disintegration stages found in Cross (1995) and Helms (1990). It is a confusing stage in which individuals begin to question their previously unexamined racial identities and the ways in which race matters because some startling "encounter" shakes their previously held worldview.

The next stage I call "I'm OK; I'm not so sure about you." In this category I combine stages from different theorists including anger, denial, pseudo-independence, immersion, emersion. As necessary I expand and define this stage using details from various identity-development models. For example, those in a pseudo-

independent stage (Helms, 1990) have begun to let go of their assumptions and abandoned their beliefs in White superiority, yet may still speak and act in ways that unintentionally perpetuate the system. One of the expanded statements in my racial interaction development stage that might exemplify this is, “I’m OK, therefore do as I say” where the underlying hierarchy of race is unconscious, yet is the only reasonable explanation of different treatment. Statements that protect the status quo, such as, “I’m OK; change is too much trouble,” are usually in this category as well. Those in the immersion/emersion stage surround themselves with visible symbols of their own racial identity and during this stage may project an “I’m OK, you’re invisible” attitude towards those not like themselves.

I’ve named the last stage “I’m OK, You’re OK, We’re OK.” This stage is equivalent to the autonomy or independent stage (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1990), where people are continually open to new information and new ways of thinking and are ready to work for change in a more fully integrated manner. (These details on racial interaction theory are adapted from Moule, 2004, p. 148).

This racial interaction development framework focuses on the way people may interact at different stages of racial identity development. This framework informs the stages my colleagues and I are going through in our efforts to implement a social justice perspective. As a theoretical framework it supports the “commitment of the qualitative researcher to study the world always from the perspective of the interacting individuals” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 575).

Methodology

Researcher Perspective and Validity

This is a self-study that began after I needed to understand my experiences. I am limited by my own lived experiences and assumptions, as well as my need to maintain a respectful attitude toward my hard-working colleagues. I am aware that differing viewpoints influence what can be “seen,” even before the analysis begins. For instance, as I gathered information, did I miss documents? Similarly, were there important turning points in our work that I did not write about in my journal and that faded from my memory? Because of the validity problems inherent in a self-study (Feldman, 2003), I have shared the material with colleagues with whom I have worked during the five years I review. And while “there is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15), I do believe that “private experience can provide insight and solution for public issues and troubles” (p. 15).

In the end “a story’s ‘validity’ can be judged by whether it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is authentic and lifelike, believable and possible” (Ellis, 1998, p. 129). If the reader finds a hint of recognition in the themes and patterns and is empowered to make a difference in similar situations, then the

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

study has a certain validity. Researching lived experience has the power of depth and understanding because “my own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else’s are” (van Manen, 1990, p. 54). And these experiences are valuable because of the possibility that “one’s own experiences are also the possible experiences of others” (p. 54). Similarly, just as an emotional response to my situation led me to seek understanding and solutions, so an emotional or “moving response” to a study may lead others to action (Winograd, 2003).

Feldman contends that evidence of change based on the results of research may “help to convince readers of the study’s validity” (2003, p. 28). To that end I have included in the *Emerging Solutions* section changes in the way I educate preservice teachers and ways I work to survive in the academy based on the results of my self-study. Additionally, as I have shared the results of this study with my colleagues, our collective sense of direction in our social justice work as well as their own individual efforts have been refocused and supported. Evidence of this rededication to our social justice perspective is beginning to emerge through increased discussion, action and collaborative efforts.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study I considered the following artifacts from a five-year period, January 1999 to January 2004: (1) documentation of my faculty assignments for the past five years; (2) my journals, calendars and perspective pieces; (3) my own reflections on my use of time; (4) emails and conversations with colleagues; (5) minutes of faculty meetings; (6) departmental notices and flyers; and (7) final grant reports.

I compiled the material in a chronological sequence, combining several artifacts such as journal writings and emails into one notebook. Faculty minutes and workload assignments were organized in a separate set of folders. Flyers, grant reports and my past yearly calendars were organized by year, some in my annual review documents. As I reviewed the artifacts chronologically, I particularly noted instances that referred to my assignment in the areas of teaching, advising, research and service.

Methods of naturalistic inquiry were used to make sense of my data sources and my experiences. The analysis involved a comparison of the material through a selected sampling over time which generated emergent patterns and themes. For example, I compared my schedule and assigned workload during the same term each year and referred to faculty meeting minutes, emails and conversations that related to this workload. My journal writings contain my reactions to matters of fact and often include details that were not included in the documents themselves.

While analyzing such a large body of material over five years, I have often relied on what has struck me “as significant, important, or of interest” from an overview rather than in a line-by-line analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 82). This may mean that I sometimes overlooked material that might be seen through more detailed coding. While my choices edited the text, I have been careful to “not present an interpretation that contradicts or that would be contradicted and repudiated by a

complete reading of the data. This is an issue of conscience as well as of reliability and honesty” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 19). “Making something...of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). The material is seen through my eyes, and the analysis represents my desire to make meaning of a unique and difficult lived experience.

As I saw themes emerging from my analysis, particularly after noting areas where I was choosing to take on much more than my assignment, I wanted to find out what others were doing beyond what I had already noted. I asked the faculty members in our unit to give me specific feedback on their individual efforts to implement our social justice perspective. My email questions included, “Did you recruit students of color for our program outside of the regular channels and process?” and “Did you develop any new courses based on our efforts to implement a social justice perspective?” I also asked a general question about any specific and unique contributions outside of our joint work that they made to implement our social justice perspective. While my colleagues certainly accomplished much in their chosen fields and fulfilled their job descriptions, their answers have helped me to discern that the work I indicated as unique to my role as a faculty member of color in this area of social justice was not shared substantially by others.

The themes that emerged around the different aspects of my role as a professor shaped the framework for the results section of the study as well as the solutions I propose. While I made an effort to focus on my own work, details of my relationships with others, their impact on my work and their own workloads have entered naturally into my results. I have included our joint work in *Emerging Overviews*.

Findings

Emerging Overviews

As our unit began to operationalize the mission statement in its handbook and publications, we actively recruited part-time faculty and students of color and we attempted to prepare a more welcoming climate on campus in courses, activities, displays, and so on. Photos of students and faculty of color began appearing on hall displays and on the website. We began to include our social justice mission statement as part of the admissions interview, and we became more conscious of the ethnic and gender makeup of the interview teams. During this time we also initiated a part-time program that would begin to address the needs of economically challenged individuals who must continue to work while pursuing a teaching license.

The faculty commitment to social justice raised the consciousness of the unit to include social justice advocacy and plans that were not apparent in our prior level of teacher preparation. For example, when we required a social justice component in our work samples, we had to discuss what this meant and add definitions for this

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

in our course syllabi and advising sessions. Also during this time our licensure coordinators defined cultural competency goals and worked to find ways to advocate for students of color with the graduate school.

Because I sensed that there would now be stronger support for such work, I began to take independent and individual actions toward implementation of the stated faculty commitment. We all worked hard and some of my colleagues supported my more radical efforts, such as encouraging the entire cohort to live in an inner city for three weeks so that they could student teach in a diverse setting. Nonetheless I ventured into much of this work alone. One obvious reason for my colleagues' reluctance is the everyday pressure of their academic roles. I would suggest an additional factor: the unintentional oversight caused by the ever-present White privilege of not having to factor race into any given equation.

Other faculty members seemed more likely to take action that dovetailed with their expected roles, for instance, replacing certain reading selections, adding a powerful film within the course contact time, or considering admissions or scholarship applications from students of color more carefully. As an exceptional example, one colleague began requiring bilingual-endorsement students to write their lesson plans and reflections in Spanish, an action that increased her workload as she now had to more carefully review the work samples of advisees of those advisors who did not read Spanish. While we all worked diligently to prepare our students for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, for the most part other faculty members' workloads would shift while mine would increase.

My actions were more likely to result in extra, not changed work, as I developed new courses and recruited in new ways in new areas of the state. I sensed the need to "reach out of the box" to change things, rather than simply acknowledge the need for change and add on a "color coat" at a superficial level (Moule, 2004). Reaching out of the box also meant reaching out of my assigned FTE (full-time equivalent).

My analysis of the data indicates that my self-initiated activity as an isolated individual of color working toward social justice was the most prevalent reason for my overload. The resultant themes and examples are organized by my educator/scholar's role: teaching, advising, research, and university service. I have concluded with a discussion of our struggles at different levels of racial identity and interaction.

Area: Teaching

Underlying theme: An individual of color's unique perspective may uncover unmet needs in the population being served. The individual may work to meet those needs even when the needs are not seen or addressed by others.

Example 1: The faculty jointly agreed on a social justice provision for students to observe and teach at schools in diverse settings at a distance, and the need to offer courses for inservice teachers in these distant locations. The burden of placement, travel, and paperwork fell primarily to me. If I had not pursued and supported the work, it would have slowed or stopped (Moule & Waldschmidt, 2003). Long emails

and difficult conversations addressing the needs I saw, and the underlying racial tensions with colleagues peaked during this time as well. Referring to when and where we place students I wrote, “*I am sorry that what I wrote as an ‘aha’ on how we institutionalize racism caused us both pain. I do treasure your friendship*” (email, 10/29/01).

Example 2: I developed eleven new courses in the past five years in order to meet the needs of inservice and preservice teachers preparing to teach a diverse student population. Two of the 11 courses received some direct grant support for their development. Many were web-based or site-delivered outreach courses customized for the audience. Only two of the courses appear on my FTE list.

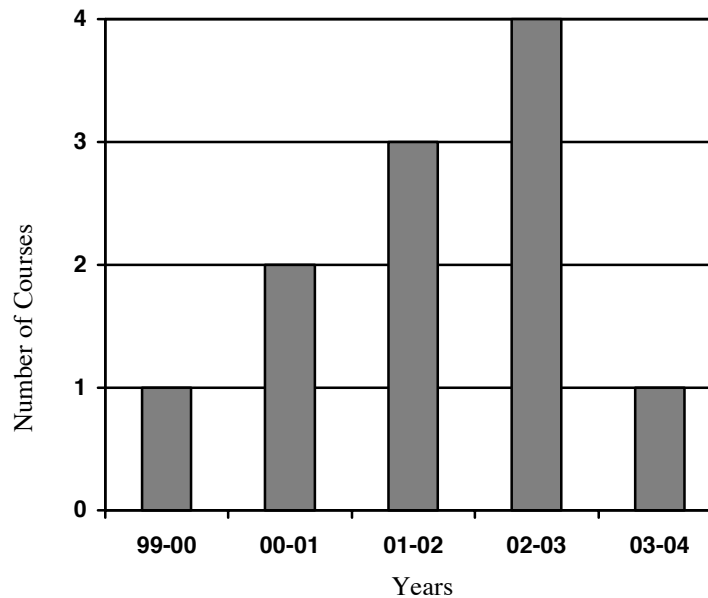


Figure 1. New Courses developed by Moule in five years.

Underlying theme: Teaching social justice material presents different challenges for those of color.

Example 1: The psychological cost to the person of color is high because retelling the stories that help students understand a different lived experience causes one to partially relive these experiences.

There were six students of color...Unlike other years when I have been a lone voice and the one or two isolated students of color dared not speak, this quarter was full of lively conversation and I was not tagged “the nagger” for my insistence on considering issues the students would just as soon ignore. (Memo, 1/25/99)

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

As another example, I have several personal stories that I may or may not share in a given term, depending on the perceived “safety” I feel from a particular class of students. If I launch into a lived experience that awakens my emotions, I need to feel safe.

Example 2: There is a tendency for White students to diminish or disrespect a messenger of color and thereby discount the message. This happens when the teaching and stories interrupt or oppose the students’ worldviews and acceptance is difficult (Diller & Moule, 2005). For example, a Latino graduate student who had been a member of a multicultural issues in education class was struck by the difficulty of teaching the same class. After his first day of teaching, he said, while shaking his head, “Don’t you find the students *resistant*?” (A. Castro, personal communication, May 2001).

Example 3: Sometimes a perspective is obvious to me as a person of color and yet seemingly impossible to convey to others. This produces a certain barrier based on race.

Am I bitter about accepting the fact that I have to learn to live with the differences my race makes and the fact that others will not/cannot fully understand those differences? ... Yet, whenever I begin to talk to other African Americans about my perspectives, feelings, and so on, it is as if a veil is lifted. I find myself not even needing to explain. I find ... instant understanding ... I find myself disclosing more and feeling “safe.” (Journal, 2/13/01)

Area: Advising

Underlying theme: Individuals of color may choose to address the advising task differently than other faculty members due to differences in race and culture. The unknowns about others’ unconscious racism and biases may more often lead me to be a safe “guide on the side” rather than a challenged “sage on the stage.”

Example: My desire to see students in their contexts as a way to understand them as a whole rather than in the detachment of an on-campus site compelled me to visit the students at their preservice school placements. I also asked the students to work collaboratively with others at their placement sites to figure out many of their questions among themselves. Finally, I tended to prefer advising by email and phone, especially when students were placed in a distant diverse setting. When these ways of connecting were in place of the “standard” advising meetings and processes, they were sometimes seen as inadequate rather than different and valuable. We had several faculty meetings where it became a contentious issue about when, where and how advising would take place (Faculty minutes, Fall 2001).

Underlying theme: Isolated individuals of color are often called upon by other isolated individuals of color. A stated social justice perspective increases the number of such applicants drawn to the program that may need advising and advocacy.

Example 1: Recruiting doctoral and master’s degree students of color or those with intense experiences in diverse cultures was often my unstated responsibility as a faculty member of color (Calendar, flyers, emails 2000-2003).

Example 2: One of the earliest projects I undertook to actualize our social justice statement was revamping our admission process so that it more effectively caught human error, especially in the cases of diverse applicants. With the changed admission process I also established additional recruitment tools, including a listserve, quarterly meetings, and informational meetings set in distant inner-city locations. These increased my responsibilities.

Example 3: African American individuals often seek later entrance into our professional teacher education program because many of these students may be missed by our traditional advertising methods and often learn of the opportunity late through personal contacts. Some are determined and willing to produce the necessary materials under short notice. As an African American who both wants to and is expected to recruit students of color, I make every effort to accommodate these applicants. Advising these students involves many conversations/emails with colleagues, head advisor, admissions and graduate school personnel, and the individuals themselves. During these pre-admission periods these students are not considered part of my advising load. While my colleagues also participate in many pre-admission advising sessions, the outcome for me if we do not find and recruit students of color is severe:

As you may know, we had zero applications from students of color. My gut reaction...was, "I don't want to be here." For the thought of shouldering most of the preparation of our interns to meet the needs of their future students of color was more than I wanted to undertake without a smattering of multicolored faces in the cohort itself...only the prospect of taking all the interns to Portland next year...allowed me to smooth my own ruffled feathers and settle down to continue the other aspects of my position this quarter. (Memo, 2/22/00)

Area: Research

Underlying theme: A scholar of color may be specifically recruited for certain grant and scholarly opportunities. Research around cultural competency or racial issues come naturally to this person's attention and interest as well.

Example 1: The need for more extensive and transformative experiences for my students and advisees drove me to establish an Eisenhower Professional Development immersion experience for student teachers in a predominantly African American school. These development grants in science and math were targeted for high-poverty schools. Five years of this grant work has produced an ongoing cycle of accounting and reporting. For example, in Spring 2002, 27 of the students in our program were placed in Portland schools, a 1.5-hour drive from campus. I spent 14 days and nights in Portland during this placement in order to insure its success and to serve as a facilitator for the students. My colleagues spent a total of 2 days among them at the site. There is no evidence of this workload on my FTE, as this work does not fall clearly under teaching, advising or research. It was something I wanted to do for the good of the order. It is an example of the difference my commitment made in my workload.

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

Example 2: I spent much time and energy in the early years of my work on campus writing about and to my learning community. These reflective pieces, including a four-part series, *View Through Lenses of Color*, were addressed “to the academy” for consideration and understanding.

In bridging the gap for my students, I also need to continue to try to bridge the gap for my colleagues...Is it different for you than for me to walk to the student union, to the administration building? Does race make a difference in my need to park close to the building? Do you care? Or more, do you understand? (Unsent email, 2/3/01)

My time is somewhat salvaged because I needed to somehow reveal [through literature review and research] the current nature of my African American female existence in the predominantly European American university community. (Journal, 2/12/01)

Part of being a person of color in higher education means spending time writing things like this. (Email, 10/30/01)

Area: Service

Underlying theme: The need to alleviate the isolation of race and to increase the understanding of the issues by involving outside resources often results in additional service to the university. This increased visibility leads to escalating responsibilities and expectations.

Example 1: I feel compelled to invite speakers to campus who may help in the understanding of multicultural/social justice issues. Working on funding, location, details and advertising is time-consuming. An example was my invitation to James W. Loewen, an historian who helps people understand a multicultural perspective through his writing (1995). In November 1999 he spoke to four student groups and the university at large during a visit I initiated (Guest-speaker flyers and calendar).

Example 2: I arranged for the showing of three films on racial issues to our staff and faculty during the first week of one academic year. I invited key people in the university whom I believed would influence our unit toward social justice to facilitate the showing and discussion of “The Color of Fear,” “Shattering the Silences: Minority Faculty Break into the Ivory Tower” and “Skin Deep.” Subsequent to the showing of the films, a cultural competency committee spontaneously formed and began to work cultural competency into the fabric of the School of Education.

Example 3: I have served on more significant search committees and task forces than others at my same rank. For example, as an assistant professor I served on the screening committee for the dean of our education unit with a full professor, a department head and a college dean.

Example 4: My visibility as I pursued program changes, invited speakers, brought in films and served on high-profile committees led to my invitation to give the university commencement address for graduate students. This is a remarkable opportunity for an assistant professor. While I was honored and humbled by the invitation, it was an unusually intense and time-consuming endeavor (Moule, 2003).

Interacting with My Colleagues

Stage One: “I’m OK, You’re OK”

I have analyzed our work towards social justice through the stages of Racial Interaction Development. Our “I’m OK, you’re OK” phase (similar to Helms’ *contact* stage) occurred during my first few years at the institution when I attended primarily to my assignments and viewed my race as a part of the meaningful contribution I made to the diversity of the unit, without changes in my workload. I believe that others perceived me primarily as a colleague, not a Black colleague, although race was a factor in the courses I was asked to teach. At first the changes from this unexamined stage were apparent only to myself. I found myself drifting away from an easy acceptance of this “everything is OK stage,” especially as the difficulty of teaching social justice material authentically became evident.

Stage Two: “Something Is Not OK”

At first we accepted that the low number of students of color in our program was due to our small-town location and the population we drew from. Yet maintaining a White worldview, rather than working with students and applicants in a more culturally congruent manner, also caused us to reject or lose some applicants of color. Subtle unconscious biases may have also been a factor, one that is difficult to explore. According to Begley (2004) seven out of ten White people show unconscious racial prejudice, including those who claim to be bias-free. Unless we assume that individuals in the academy are automatically in the 30% without unconscious bias, we can conclude that there was some unconscious and perhaps unrecognized prejudice.

When it appeared that we were not approaching our admissions and other processes in a proactive manner, I shared my perceptions and concerns with others in order to offset taken-for-granted assumptions or possible hidden biases. We collectively came into a “Something is not OK” phase (Helms’ *disintegration* stage) as we responded to both overt and covert, often unconscious, racism between ourselves and within our program. At this point I recognized that I was in the uncomfortable position of supporting the dominant culture status quo unless we moved our program more concretely toward equity in multiple ways. When I took action, such as changing the admissions process or insisting on placements in diverse settings, my colleagues were often uncomfortable. For most White individuals, the need for change is perceived as less important. For one thing, they are not in a position to be charged with “lack of care for the race” for their inaction. I still felt compelled. My colleague, Eileen, reflected on our work together toward social justice and her painful recognition that collectively “something was not OK”:

As our faculty participated in discussions regarding definitions for social justice, different perspectives surfaced. Tension built when we made the decision to institutionalize the diversity experiences our student teachers would have in our teacher education program. Now we could no longer give lip service to diversity.

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

These experiences would no longer be optional and their implementation would impact the total program and all faculty: students and faculty driving 40 to 80 miles each way (depending on the destination school) a number of times each term for student teaching experiences in diverse settings; course schedules changed; new courses added and courses modified. As faculty members criticized parts of the plan, tensions grew. I was among the critics. My workload the previous year had been intense and very stressful. Implementing the new plan meant more meetings and less time to devote to my writing. I could only see these changes as too overwhelming and taking away from what I thought I really needed to focus on: getting tenure. I wince thinking back on this. (Moule & Waldschmidt, 2003, p. 128)

Stage Three, “I’m OK, I’m Not So Sure about You”

These reflections and writings uncover complex issues that are difficult to acknowledge or discuss. Because of this I find my colleagues are often silent when asked to comment on this self-study. One expressed to me that the very nature of commenting on race-related emotionally charged issues between a White person and a person of color, especially two colleagues who must maintain some kind of working relationship, seems like a “lose-lose” situation.

An African American colleague not at my university but with some knowledge of my situation suggested that this silence could be evidence of Helms’ (1992) *pseudo-independent stage* among my colleagues. If this is an accurate assessment of my colleagues’ stage of racial identity development, then the silence is partially explained by the primary characteristic of the stage, “the capacity to separate intellect from emotions.” People who I have shared emotional closeness in other ways appeared to have little emotional response to my writing and the pain underlying it.

Helms (1992) describes a pseudo-independent stage as signaling the first major movement toward the development of a positive nonracist identity. One of her nine characteristics is key for my understanding: “The person can articulate principles of racial fairness, particularly as long as implementation of such principles have no immediate implications for the person’s own life.” Helms explains the over-all impact of the stage:

The Pseudo-Independent stage represents the person’s attempt to recapture morality with respect to race. At least in part, he or she does this by “thinking” about racial issues rather than “feeling” about them. Thus, in a psychological sense the person remains aloof from racial issues even though he or she may appear to be actively advocating “liberal” perspectives with respect to such issues. . . . Pseudo-independent people use a variety of strategies that permit them to maintain their racial comfort. . . . These strategies also serve the incidental purposes of convincing other Whites that racism has virtually vanished, that people of color who express other convictions are necessarily crazy, irrational, or old fashioned, that if any remnants of racism do exist, they are not the responsibility of the White liberal person to resolve. . . . Underlying the strategies often is a message to the person of color concerning how he or she should behave in order to allow the White person to continue to feel good about being

White....The Pseudo-Independent stage offers...protective cognitive strategies for not having to worry about emotionally charged issues. (1992, p. 59-62)

Because the “I’m OK, I’m not so sure about you” stage is often the most antagonistic between races, I believe interactions between others at this stage would be hidden from me. During this stage my path and others’ would most strongly diverge. I believe some of the lack of support for activities I felt compelled to pursue is evidence that others were in this stage.

Stage Four, “I’m OK, You’re OK, We’re OK”

Our unit as a whole may be moving into the *autonomy*, “I’m OK, you’re OK, we’re OK,” stage. Some of my colleagues have now acknowledged our compelling need to bring in outside speakers and are much more open to problem-solving conversations about race. Others may be stuck in the pseudo-independent stage, “I’m OK, I’m not so sure about you,” marked by hesitation and a neutrality that neither supports nor constructively critiques—in other words, little action.

A system and unit functioning at this stage might more openly acknowledge the importance of such work and might incorporate the reality of an increased workload for a colleague of color due to implementing a social justice perspective. Eileen, for example, working at the autonomy stage, states the following in an excerpt called, *Working Toward Social Justice: Steps Accomplished in a Complex Struggle*.

Jean and I have both been willing to talk about and reflect upon some very difficult issues regarding race and we are continuing that dialogue. I have had the opportunity to continue to learn from Jean and her experience as the lone faculty of color in our group... Jean pointed out examples of “Whiteness” and “...its privilege, normativity (its ability to designate itself as the standard), and its erasure.” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001, p. 12)

This has been a painful process for me . . . examining my own Whiteness but I am still committed to hanging in there...

We now have a teacher education program that includes student teaching experiences in diverse settings. Our students have the opportunity to work with African-American children and bilingual English/Spanish children...

We have now included in any literature regarding our program the statement about our commitment to social justice. This includes the handbooks that we use in our program for our students to develop their units of study. We have begun to see students who have developed unit lessons centered on issues of social justice for kindergartners through middle schoolers. Although as a faculty we disagree on definitions of social justice, we have put on a face of unity for our student teachers and have stood behind our social justice statements in our program literature. (Moule & Waldschmidt, 2003, p. 135-6)

The autonomy stage may continue to elude us as a group characteristic until more of my colleagues develop an understanding of these levels of racial interaction and move to reflect on their own stages in Helms’ racial identity theory. Regardless

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

of my colleagues' attention or inattention to their own racial identity and growth, my work is easier when I use a racial interaction development schema to situate my colleagues and myself so that I have a better understanding of our differing perspectives. Understanding these interactions has helped me to "stay the course" in the university and make necessary changes in my workload.

Emerging Solutions

Collins defines the

interplay between Black women's oppression and Black women's activism . . . [that] views the world as a dynamic place where the goal is not merely to survive or to fit in or to cope; rather, it becomes a place where we feel ownership and accountability. . . . there is always choice, and the power to act, no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be. Viewing the world as one in the making raises the issue of individual responsibility for bringing about change. (1990, p. 237)

I see myself working for change and solutions. Collins (1990) positions a Black woman's standpoint as having a short distance between theory and practice. Because of this standpoint and my need for action, I end this paper with practical solutions.

After conducting this study and identifying the sources of overload, I have consciously and purposely prioritized and limited my work. I have listed my change efforts based on my findings and organized by my varying scholar/researcher roles. These concrete changes also provide evidence of this self-study's validity.

Teaching: Limit course development and offerings. From a high of four new courses in 2002-03, I am now developing one per year (see graph in findings section). I have also resisted the temptation to teach additional sections of my favorite course, Multicultural Issues in Education, because of its high psychological demands.

Advising: Directly after I began to see the themes emerging from this study, I systematically worked to limit my advising load to no more than 25 advisees per year. While this action was not popular among my colleagues, I believe it eventually helped push the unit for more reasonable advising load limits for all. I still advise more students of color in the admissions process; however, our unit's recent addition of a head advisor has brought needed support in this area.

Research: I have almost abandoned my small efforts, whether in person, in emails or memos, to interpret for my colleagues the experiences of people of color in our educational system. The psychological cost/benefit ratio is unreasonable (Lee Mun Wah, 2004). On the other hand, over the last two years, I have begun to make such reflections a larger part of my research agenda. I am seeking to understand the phenomena I am experiencing through reading, systematic study and conversations with others. I am troubled that my race has funneled me into this particular research field, as it was not my original focus. However, as race has become more salient in my work and my readings, it makes sense to study the interaction of my race and my position. In this case, the solution is not to leave the material, the

overload and the necessary reflections, but to embrace them. I am resigned to the fact that “Who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does” (Bullough & Pinneger, 2001, p. 13). I have also discovered that such research puts me in good company with others struggling to understand this “bittersweet” role. For those in similar work whose paths I cross and for my colleagues when in their antiracist mode, I share this from my journal, “*So what is the antidote to bitter? Sweetness, sweet, kind words, sweet friendships, hugs, and sometimes, just a listening ear*” (2/13/01).

Service: Service that “counts” at our university is narrowly defined as serving on “official” university or unit committees. Bringing guests to campus or speaking on various panels or at graduation do not count. I believe an expedient step for me is to more carefully weigh the cost/benefit factors, focusing on tenure. I may be obligated to say “no” more often unless the activity has currency in the system. I have had difficulty taking this step.

Conclusions

My original goal was to understand how a social justice perspective impacted our teacher education faculty over a five-year period. I find the results deeply disturbing. As supported in studies by Thomas (2001) and Turner and Myers (2001), I was carrying an inequitable proportion of the needed changes. Yet this troublesome overload was not consciously apparent until I analyzed the details. While many of the individual activities I initiated could be seen as the regular and expected work of a tenure-track faculty member, their combined weight is tremendous. Yet my differentiated efforts were nearly invisible.

As I search for ways to maintain my passion and my credibility in the academy, a contentious and continuing problem is to find ways to resist the unacknowledged hegemony that prevails. The alternative way of viewing the same set of data through the eyes of White privilege is ever before us as an obstacle. As attributed to Maya Angelou: “Society’s view of the Black woman is such a threat to her well-being that she will die daily unless she determines how she sees herself.” While I persevere, I feel that I am “living this way... with the daily indignities... with a broken heart” (Nile & Straton, 2003, p. 5).

We will continue our efforts to support and extend the social justice perspective of our program. As a faculty member of color who needs to make a difference, I am both internally motivated and externally pressured to take a stronger advocacy role that produces a work overload. My expected assistant professor role has turned into a “getting the [equity] job done” mandate. The off-campus and out-of-the-office activities and the difficulty of managing the workload, as well as the controversy around studies such as this, may jeopardize my future as a tenured professor (see Watson, 2001). My hope is that my experiences and my understanding of the underlying causes of the differentiated workload will add to our shared wisdom and may help others in similar situations.

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

I acknowledge that “in self-studies, conclusions are hard won, elusive, are generally more tentative than not. The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm or settle” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). Returning to the river metaphor,

Many grapple with the complex issues raised by this metaphor, whether it applies to race or other areas of difference. The challenge for those in the water and for those in the boat is to reach out for each other on our common journey while aiming to make a difference in the very river that carries us all along. (Moule, 2003, p. 3)

References

- Begley, S. (2004, May/June). The roots of hatred. *AARP The Magazine*, 47, 47-49.
- Bullough, R. V., Jr., & Pinnegar, S. (2001). Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 13-21.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Cook, D. (1996). The art of survival in White academia: Black women faculty finding where they belong. In M. Fine, L. C. Powell, L. Weis, & L. M. Wong (Eds.), *Off White: Readings on race, power, and society* (pp. 100-109). New York: Routledge.
- Cross, W. E. (1971). The Negro-to-Black conversion experience: Toward a psychology of Black liberation. *Black World*, 20 (9), 13-27.
- Cross, W. E. (1995). The psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross model. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 93-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Diller, J. V., & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Cincinnati, OH: Wadsworth.
- Ellis, C. (1998). Evocative autoethnography: Writing emotionally about our lives. In W. Tierney & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Representation and the text: Reframing the narrative voice* (pp. 116-139). New York: State University of New York.
- Feldman, A. (2003). Validity and quality in self-study. *Educational Researcher*, 32(3), 26-28.
- Helms, J. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice* (Vol. 129). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Helms, J. E. (1992). *A race is a nice thing to have: A guide to being a White person or understanding the White persons in your life*. Topeka, KS: Content Communications.
- Hyun, E., & Marshall, J. D. (1997). Theory of multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking ability for teachers' developmentally and culturally appropriate practice. *DCAP*, 11(2), 188-198.
- Jones, L. (Ed.). (2001). *Retaining African Americans in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- King, S. H., & Castenell, L. A. (2001). *Racism and racial inequality: Implications for teacher education*. Washington, DC: AACTE.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1997). For colored girls who have considered suicide when the academy's not enough: Reflections of an African American woman scholar. In A. Neumann & P. L. Peterson (Eds.), *Learning from our lives: Women, research, and autobiography in education* (pp. 52-70). New York: Teachers College.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 257-277). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (1994). The fifth moment. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 575-586). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- Mabokela, R. O., & Green, A. L. (2001). *Sisters of the academy: Emergent Black women scholars in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Moule, J. (June 14, 2003). *Aiming to make a difference*. [Commencement address for graduate students, Corvallis, OR]. Retrieved February 7, 2005, from Oregon State University, School of Education Web site, <http://oregonstate.edu/education/news/caddress.html>
- Moule, J. (2004). Safe and growing out of the box: Immersion for social change. In J. J. Romo, P. Bradfield, & R. Serrano (Eds.), *Reclaiming democracy: Multicultural educators' journeys toward transformative teaching* (pp. 147-171). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill.
- Moule, J., & Waldschmidt, E. D. (2003). Face-to-face over race: Personal challenges from instituting a social justice perspective in our teacher education program. *Teacher Education and Practice*, 16(2), 121-142.
- Nile, L. N., & Straton, J. C. (2003, Summer). Beyond guilt: How to deal with societal racism. *Multicultural Education*, 2-6.
- Oregon State University (2002). *Fact book*. Corvallis, OR: Author.
- Powell, W. N. (1999). *Structural oppression of African Americans in higher education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oregon State University, Corvallis.
- Professional Teacher Education Program. (2002). *Handbook*. Corvallis, OR: Author.
- Richardson, T., & Villenas, S. (2000). "Other" encounters: Dances with Whiteness in multicultural education. *Educational Theory*, 50, 255-274.
- Selman, R., & Schultz, L. H. (1990). *Making a friend in youth: Developmental theory and pair therapy*. San Diego, CA: Academic.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of Whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 94-106.
- Steinberg, J. H., & Kincheloe, J. L. (2001). Setting the context for critical multiculturalism: The power blocs of class elitism, White supremacy, and patriarchy. In S. R. Steinberg (Ed.), *Multi/cultural conversations* (pp. 3-30). New York: Lang.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, G. D. (2001). The dual role of scholar and social change agent: Reflections from tenured African American and Latina faculty. In R. O. Mabokela & A. L. Green (Eds.), *Sisters of the academy: Emergent Black women scholars in higher education* (pp. 80-91). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Turner, C. S. V., & Myers, S. L., Jr. (2000). *Faculty of color in academe: Bittersweet success*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario, Canada: State University of New York.
- Wah, L. M. (Director). (2004). *Last chance for Eden* [Motion picture]. (Available from Stir-Fry Productions, 470 Third Street, Oakland, CA 94607)
- Watson, L. W. (2001). The politics of tenure and promotion of African American faculty. In L. Jones (Ed.), *Retaining African Americans in higher education* (pp. 235-245). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Implementing a Social Justice Perspective

- Winograd, K. (2003). The functions of teacher emotions: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Teachers College Record*, 105(9), 1641-1673.
- Zollers, N. J., Albert, L. R., & Cochran-Smith, M. (2000). In pursuit of social justice: Collaborative research and practice in teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 22(2), 1-14.