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Positioning Ideas and Identities
in a Multicultural Education Class:
Understanding Students' Use of Web-Based Interactions

By Heather Pleasants

Abstract

In this article the author examines the discursive, Web-based interactions of students within a multicultural teacher preparation class for which she was the instructor. By exploring teacher candidates' use of online written texts to position themselves and others through Discourses with a capital "D," or "ways of being in the world" as well as discourses with a lowercase "d" that comprise everyday spoken and written communication, the author calls attention to the informal yet influential discourses that are contained within and enacted through the Web-based discussions that explore issues of social justice.

Positioning Ideas and Identities
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The preparation of teachers for the diversity present in public schools continues to be an issue of urgent concern for teachers and teacher educators (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Bennet, 1995; Turner, 2007). In light of this need, in this article I direct attention to the teacher preparation classroom and focus specifically on a set of Web-based journal entries and interactions between students within a multicultural teacher preparation class for which I was the instructor. By closely examining the Web-based interactions of students within the course, I explore teacher candidates' use of written texts to position themselves and others through what James Gee (2000) refers to as Discourses with a capital "D," or "ways of being in the world" as well as discourses with a lowercase "d" that comprise everyday spoken and written communication. The continued necessity of building bridges between pre-service and in-service teacher development in the area of multicultural education (Greenman & Kimmel, 1995; Finley, 2000; Moss, 2001) warrants attention to teacher candidates' positionalities, especially as these are played out through various communication technologies. By understanding--and acting on--how teacher candidates position themselves and their peers, multicultural teacher educators may be able to assist these teachers in supporting and challenging each other to enact education for social justice.

Contextually, this research took place within EDU 106, a multicultural teacher preparation course in which undergraduate students enrolled in the Eastern University teacher preparation program were involved. A core aspect of the course was a practicum at The United Community Center "La Comunidad Unidad," or LCU (all names and places have been assigned pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity). Students completed this practicum and discussed their interactions with children and adults at LCU through Web-based conversations, Web-based journal entries, and in-class discussions. These interactions, discussions, and reflective writing texts form the corpus of discursive data analyzed within this article. In focusing on the ways in which students' text-based interactions revealed their understanding of their positions within our college class, the LCU and their future professional lives, I draw on

conceptualizations of identity and meaning-making that use language as a tool for the joint construction of self and other (Gee, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986;Wertsch, 1991). In this article, I seek to address the following questions:

- How do students position themselves and others in a multicultural education classroom through their Web-based discursive interactions?

- How are these Web-based interactions woven into the social life of the classroom and teacher candidates' understandings of diverse others?

The facilitation of communication through Web-based technologies is a ubiquitous aspect of the learning and teaching that takes place in and around college classrooms. By critically analyzing the Web-based journal entries and conversations within multicultural education courses, teacher educators and teacher candidates may be able to develop greater self-consciousness about their own complicity in the social positioning that takes place within and outside of the classroom. From this awareness, it may also be possible to more productively support the inclusion of divergent viewpoints in teaching practices and in preservice teachers' interactions with one another, both before and after they begin working in their own classrooms.

The conceptualization of the research detailed in this article developed over the span of a decade, during which time I taught multicultural teacher preparation courses as a graduate assistant, and then as an assistant professor at two universities. Below, I provide an overview of the research and textbook literature within multicultural education as a lens through which the research questions of this article are viewed. As is perhaps the case with other teacher educators, my own biography as a multicultural teacher educator intertwines with this literature and the development of my interest in multicultural teacher preparation pedagogy parallels a larger, national interest in multicultural teacher preparation. Therefore in presenting this review, I provide examples illustrating how the literature in multicultural teacher preparation shaped my thinking and pedagogical practices over time as I worked with teacher candidates. Additionally, relevant scholarship in the area of online student interaction is used as a further contextual frame, with specific attention given to research that explores how social identities are shaped by Web-based communication.

Literature Review

Supported largely by the work of anthropologists and ethnic studies scholars, in the late eighties and early nineties, multicultural teacher preparation focused largely on appropriate

teaching strategies for educating different groups of children (Golnick, Klassen, & Yff, 1976; Banks & Banks, 1995). Chapters in multicultural education textbooks often spoke of what worked pedagogically for African American Students, Native American students, Asian American students, etc. (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1992), or were arranged thematically to cover issues of race, class, language, and other kinds of group-oriented diversity (Nieto, 1996). This organization of topics is also present in chapters within the first edition of the *Handbook of Multicultural Education* (Gutierrez, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001; Snipp, 2001; Liu & Yu, 2001; King, 2001). In the initial courses I taught as a graduate student at a large Midwestern state university in the early nineties, the texts and audiovisual resources I drew from mirrored this focus on specific groups or "kinds" of diversities that were present in the scholarly literature. Class readings and assignments were organized thematically around issues of gender, race, social class, disability, and language and students were encouraged in class to discuss how their potential teaching strategies would address these different kinds of diversities. The texts that my students produced encouraged them to reflect, as individuals, on the content of the course. And while these issues were the focus of classroom discussions, students also completed "private" journal entries that were read by their instructor, and they completed papers that were based on their ability to "close the distance" between themselves and a member of a social group to which they did not belong.

Several years later, I began teaching multicultural teacher preparation courses at a mid-size state university in the Midwest. The students taking my classes were increasingly diverse in terms of race, class and gender, and often included first generation college attendees, young mothers and fathers, and individuals who were returning to school to obtain a degree in education after having worked in other fields. During this period (1995-1999), research and textbooks had begun to more fully address the complexities of developing multicultural teaching competencies, and the literature moved from an emphasis on the characteristics of students to a multicultural teacher preparation pedagogy that foregrounded the co-constructed relationships between teachers and students and paid close attention to institutional *and* individualized manifestations of culture (Liston & Zeichner, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1998). The range of students' backgrounds and perspectives reshaped my practice, pushing it beyond simplistic dichotomous notions of difference characterized by scholarly discussions of (for example) the black/white achievement gap (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Jenks & Phillips, 1998) and

the differences between middle class students and students living in poverty ([Payne, Devol, & Smith](#), 2000). Again, this change in my pedagogical stance reflected larger trends in multicultural teacher preparation, trends in which contentious debates about the structure, goals and future directions of multicultural teacher preparation were informed by a burgeoning body of scholarship grounded in postmodern and poststructural epistemologies ([Hargreaves](#), 1997; [Aronowitz & Giroux](#), 1991; [McCarthy & Crichlow](#), 1998). In support of this work, students in my courses were encouraged in class and through cooperative learning assignments to discuss the complexities of their identities with each other. During this time, a growing number of colleges and universities began to combine service learning initiatives with multicultural education coursework ([Langseth](#), 2000; [Martin & Wheeler](#), 2000), and these initiatives found a natural home in colleges of education ([Boyle-Baise](#), 1998; [Wade, R. C., Anderson, J. B., Yarbrough, D. B., Erickson, J. A., and Kromer, T.](#) , 1999), where students, including my own, were encouraged to complete multicultural education projects aimed at educating their peers and supporting the surrounding community's engagement with issues of social justice.

When I began teaching EDU 106 at Eastern University in the fall of 2000, scholarship in multicultural education had highlighted the importance of representing sociocultural diversity in sophisticated and nuanced ways, though research literature on multicultural teacher preparation practices did not often capture this complexity in as much depth. However, new models for multicultural teacher preparation increasingly used technology in innovative ways, and moved away from traditional conceptualizations of service learning toward models that recognized the reciprocally beneficial learning that occurred when university students became involved in communities in a sustained and reflective way ([Damarin](#), 1998; [Gorski](#), 1999).

Consistent with the past use of journaling within multicultural teacher preparation ([Garmon](#), 1998), in teaching EDU 106, Web-based interactions served as an important intermediary discursive form within the social life of the classroom. Specifically, the act of posting online journal responses and engaging in a synchronous dialogue with peers provided a degree of distance from the immediacy of the social positioning of in-class discussions, while retaining enough of the affordances of classroom social life to guide the conversation down pathways that were resonant with course themes ([Ellis](#), 2001, [Vonderwell](#), 2002; [Waskul & Douglass](#), 1997). These characteristics of online discourse are important factors in courses that deal with multicultural issues. However, though research in the area of multicultural education

has focused on the role of technology in facilitating conversations, (Merryfield, 2003; Schoorman, 2002; Sleeter & Tettegah, 2002; Wassell & Crouch, 2008), and has explored the ability of Web-based technology to assist students in developing deeper conceptual knowledge (Oikonomidoy, 2009), up to this point very few research articles have focused on the way that Web-based discourse is used in the expression of positioned identities and perspectives. Subsequently, this research pursues answers to:

1. How students position themselves and others in a multicultural education classroom through Web-based interactions and

2. How these Web-based interactions are woven into the social life of the classroom and teacher candidates' understandings of diverse others.

Below, I present the methodology used to address the research questions given above, and I provide an overview of the context of the research.

Methodology

As has been noted in previous scholars' work (Garmon, 1998; Pewawardy, 2005) students' written reflections often support the expression and development of philosophical perspectives related to the demographic diversity present in primary and secondary schools. Consequently, the research questions above were explored through an ethnographically-oriented study that focused specifically on the ways that written language (in this case, primarily online, asynchronous postings) helped to create and support discursive contexts within which students' understandings of self and other were placed.

It should be noted that what is reported here are the results of one small self-study, a self-study grounded in the philosophical perspective that knowledge of the social world is always situated, partial, and contingent on the contexts and discourses within which it resides (Fine, 1998; Lincoln, 1997; Richardson, 1992). The approach to the research was inductive, rather than deductive, and the subject matter was informed both by my prior experiences in working with teacher candidates in the context of multicultural education courses and by my situated participation within a particular scholarly community focused on community-based teacher education. As such, rather than aiming to produce results that are broadly generalizable to other contexts, the goal of the current article is to encourage the production of more research accounts (both qualitative and quantitative) focused on the discursive strategies used by teacher candidates in multicultural education courses, and to stimulate reflection on theory and practice in this area.

Conceptually, the methodological framework for the current research is informed by a sociocultural view of discourse. Central in this view is [Gee's](#) (2000) articulation of writing and speaking as fundamental aspects of the subjective enterprise of making meaning, and the idea that "little d" discourses, defined as socially situated "language-in-use" help to comprise "big D" Discourses, or social ways of being in the world. Within the current research, the Web-based discussions are the centralized type of language-in-use, though ethnographic observation and recorded classroom conversation are also used within the analysis.

Course Context

EDU 106 is a multicultural teacher preparation class at Eastern University that is centered on a practicum experience in which students interact with children twice a week at LCU in the city of Clarkville. LCU is located in an urban; primarily Latino section of Clarkville and most of the children who attend the community center are of Hispanic descent. The majority of the class discussions revolve around the students' course readings and experiences at the LCU. These experiences are relatively informal, in that students and children circulate freely between different activity areas that include a gym, a dance instruction room, an art room and a computer room. EDU 106 is a critical component in the multicultural education of Eastern university teacher candidates, since the majority of these teachers self-identify as white and middle class and often describe themselves as having had limited opportunities to develop relationships with others from different socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

Students

Students in one section of EDU 106 formed the participant group for this research. All of the students in the class were between the ages of 18-21, and identified themselves as being from the Eastern states. Although it is not uncommon to have only two or three ethnic minority students among classes of 20-24, the section of EDU 106 upon which this research is based was comprised of a group of 18 students, all of whom were white women, and all of whom identified themselves as "middle class." The relative homogeneity of this particular class provided a relatively unique opportunity to explore the complex ways in which student positionalities and conceptualizations of the "other" are enacted within courses that centralize interactions with diverse children.

The data for this research was compiled from student Web discussions and journal entries submitted through the EDU 106 Website on a biweekly and weekly basis, respectively. At the beginning of the semester, students were encouraged to use the discussion board as a means to reflect further on the topics and themes discussed within the class and their interactions at LCU, and were expected to post to the discussion board at least twice a week, through postings that were either original or responses to other students' posts. Additionally, each student completed ten graded journal entries on a series of topics during the semester. At the conclusion of the semester, data collected from student Web interaction included 228 student postings and 180 journal entries.

Weekly meetings between me and a research assistant were held in order to discuss postings, journal entries, and field notes from class and practicum meetings. Using constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), preliminary coding of this data revealed patterns in discursive strategies and in the number and type of responses to students' postings. At the conclusion of the semester, all postings and journal entries were compiled and data were coded based on these initially noted patterns, which included themes related to the positioning of self, defining/positioning others, definitions of professional identity, level of comfort expressed in working with diverse children and expressed values.

In the second phase of analysis, I focused on the subject matter of postings; the conventions used within postings; the length and tone of individual posts; and the number of responses to individual student's posts. Additionally, I was able to identify students within the class whose contributions seemed to be pivotal to the direction of discourse within the class as a whole, as indicated by the content of their postings and number of responses to their postings (see Appendix 1

Findings

Across the semester, students' Web postings tended to fall into the following topic areas: (a) experience in interacting with or observing diverse others (34%); (b) problems/situations within the practicum experience (26%); and (c) benefits of the class (17%). These main categories of postings were further grouped into discursive categories that corresponded to positional stances taken within the posts. De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006) note that "analyses of positioning build on the insight that identity is socially constructed" at multiple

levels (p. 7). In the present research, positional stances within Web postings were labeled as evaluative, emotive, or aligning in order to construct a more fine-grained understanding of students' identity constructions within that medium. *Evaluative postings* were most common (47%), and related to students' perceptions of the appropriate actions of themselves as future teachers, the aspects of in-class discussions that were perceived as valuable, and their reflections on their work and the children and adults at La Comunidad Unidad. Postings in which *alignment* was present (39%) were those in which agreement was expressed with either the content of another student's posting or something that was said in class. *Emotive postings* (14 %) were marked linguistically by the phrases "I feel" or "I felt like." However, often these prefacing phrases were used as a way to posit assertions about things that happened within their interactions with children at LCU. As discussed below, each of these types of postings positioned students in particular ways relative to each other and the subject matter of the class.

Evaluative Postings

Evaluative postings were used by students to assert ideologically laden assessments regarding teaching, diversity and diverse others. These evaluative comments were often linguistically prefaced with the phrase "I think."

For example, given that students' placement at LCU was specifically designed to disrupt notions of themselves as "more knowledgeable others" relative to the children with whom they worked, students were directed to help the children but were advised that they were not there to be teachers or tutors for the children. With this as a guideline, EU students were charged with finding ways to interact with children such that the relationship was mutually beneficial. Erin's comment, which begins with the words "I think" is illustrative of the linguistic markers that many students used in evaluative postings:

> I think that together we need to define a clear objective of why we are there and
> what we want to accomplish. I think that we are mainly there to form friendships
> with them and learn about each others' culture.

Erin's framing of potential objectives for herself and other classmates fit well with my expectations and the expectations of other instructors. However, the pull to enact pre-teacher identities was strong. As the semester progressed, several students "discovered" the tutoring

room and expressed positive feelings about their ability to do work that was more consistent with ideas of their emerging professional identities, as indicated by Deanna's posting below:

> Tuesday night was the first time that I went to the tutoring or homework room at LCU. This was one of the first times that I was there and felt like I made a difference. I helped one child with their homework and worked together on a worksheet. I was happy that I went to this room and will probably try to go there at least once a week.

In this case, it seems that there was no need for a prefacing "I think," given the unambiguous positive evaluation that Deanna ascribes to making a difference through providing homework assistance.

Evaluative postings were also made in relation to course guest speakers. However, as compared to their assessments of what they should or should not be doing in their interactions with children at LCU, it was clear that students in EDU 106 created a bifurcated conceptualization of their roles, and saw themselves as either university students *or* future teachers. For example, in reflecting on a guest speaker who discussed his experiences in coming out as a gay man, Jennifer wrote:

> Everything he said was really interesting and I felt bad for him to think that people cannot accept homosexuality. I think that as time goes by more and more people will become used to the idea. That is definitely why he was pushing for it to be discussed with younger children, because they are the new generation who can change how people view homosexuality.

Concurring with Jennifer, Carol's observations of the guest speaker were focused on an evaluation of the speaker's personal competence, experiences, and ability to communicate a meaningful message through his presentation:

> I agree, I think the speaker did a wonderful job. It must have been so nerve racking to come up by himself and speak on such a sensitive topic. I have many friends and even a family member who is gay however, I haven't really talked to

them about issues like the ones we discussed in class. I think it was very informative and thought provoking.

Neither Jennifer nor Carol made connections between the speaker's message and their thinking about the LCU practicum or their identities as future teachers. In contrast, when discussing their work at LCU, students were much more likely to frame their experiences and reflections through the lens of themselves as future teachers. For example, Erin wrote:

I think the pizza party was really fun, but I also felt that it was a little unorganized. I felt that the children were all over the place and could not sit down. Although, I understand that it is an afterschool thing to do so the children may not want to listen.

In discussing the pizza party, Erin connects "afterschool" with children's predisposition to disregard the directives of adults, and by extension she draws a parallel connection between school and the stationary, orderly and obedient behavior of children. Similarly, Shanna wrote:

I think that structure is exactly what some of these kids need…the few times I have been to the gym, if mr. brown isn't "in control" then the kids will go crazy (not in a fun play gym type of way). The gym should be fun but I also think it should be safe and not a chaotic mess.

In general, the use of "I think" was a tool for individual students to reflect on their classroom experiences and experiences at LCU, but this phrase was also used in the context of specific situations at LCU that were organized around a problem or dilemma that the class, as a whole, took up as a central issue. One such issue was initially raised by Susan. In her interaction with a child at the LCU, the child made several comments that indicated low levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem. This was deeply troubling to Susan, and although she discussed the situation with me, she was initially hesitant to bring the issue before the class for discussion. We agreed that we would give the child the pseudonym "Roberto" in order to provide him with some anonymity.

The issue of what to do was a central focus in a large group of postings, and most students weighed in on the issue. In this instance, "I think" was a strategy within Web postings not unlike a verbal "I think" might be used in a meeting of a group that has been organized to address a problem within an organization. For example, in speaking about Roberto, Tracey wrote:

> I think that the best thing for us to do is be there to listen. I don't think that its necessary for us to go and tell someone about him yet because like Suze [Susan] said, he was more cheerful the next day. So I think that if he continues to be happier, and he has people like Suze to talk to, then there's not that much to worry about. We can casually keep an eye on him but not in any way make him stand out from the rest of the kids.

Several students disagreed with Tracey, however. Chelsea was one such student, writing:

> As much as you can say he is only seven years old he is from a different culture and socio-economic status which means that you really don't know what he is exposed to. I think it can't hurt to make the knowledge known to the people that work at the LCU and let them make their own decision.

Chelsea's response is a particularly powerful example of an evaluative positional stance, given the way that it overlaps with her contributions to the classroom discussion regarding Roberto and her orientation to work at LCU overall. In general, Chelsea often struggled to connect with students at LCU, and missed several of her practicum days during the semester. Within the discussion of Roberto, she reiterated her position that they should tell someone "in charge," adding that "if something happened" in regard to Roberto's behavior, "we could be held responsible." Her posting reveals the way in which a position on an issue (the significance of cultural and socio-cultural status) overlaps with a social position (distance *from* vs. the cultivation of connections *with* diverse others) which is in turn layered over a particular professional stance (an emphasis on liability over other potential interpersonal concerns).

Postings in which alignment was present were those in which agreement was expressed with either the content of another student's postings or something that was said in class. Alignment was most often signified by a student writing that they agreed with a particular student's comment. For example, Casey, in writing about the Roberto situation, noted:

> I agree with Erin, that a lot of kids do go through stages like that in their lives. It's not necessarily healthy, but I don't think it is our job to notify anyone of his activities. The most important thing is that the child feels he can trust Suze, and if he notices that the trust was betrayed, then that can be more harmful to him in the end.

While students freely expressed agreement with other students, disagreements were handled more delicately. Disagreements that a particular student had regarding another students' post were taken up through indirect means, or by using pronouns ("I," "our," "us") to frame alternative perspectives as being held by multiple others. For example, Eileen wrote that she couldn't "believe *we* went there for ten weeks!" but that going to LCU twice a week "sure made the weeks go faster," adding, "I am glad *we* did though because the experience is only going to benefit *us*" (italics added for emphasis).

Emotive Postings

Often used in conjunction with evaluative postings, emotive postings were marked linguistically by the phrases "I feel" or "I felt like." However, these prefacing phrases were used mainly as a way to posit more tentative assertions about things that happened within their interactions with children at LCU. For example, in reflecting on an adult worker's interactions with girls at LCU, Emma wrote "I feel it is just his way of interacting and joking around with the children on their level." Late in the semester, Jennifer wrote that:

> I was shocked when I found out that 2 nights each week I would have to go into Clarkville from 4:30-7:30. Now that it is over, I am glad that I went to LCU. It was such a wonderful experience. I was able to meet so many amazing kids. I do feel in a way that they effected me more than I effected them. But regardless, I

feel that my time at LCU was definitely worth it and it flew by! I am going to miss so many of those little kids.

These tentative, emotively framed postings seemed to fall into two main categories, using "I feel" to express either endorsement of a particular perspective or experience, or using the phrase in order to express discomfort with specific situations. The positively valenced emotive posting is typified by the response above, and by other students who expressed similar sentiments about the practicum experience. Conversely, students also used emotively framed postings in order to leverage both critique and unease. For example, Shanna, in discussing the behavior of one of the boys at the center, wrote:

Isaiah is 15 I am 18…he is in my peer group and I feel that I have no authority over him and he should have just a few manners. I would honestly rather a kid not talk to me than give me constant grief like he does. I feel like he wanted to know me so he could belittle me, and that makes me angry. He needs to grow up.

Another student, Ana, critiqued a presentation given by one of the LCU staff members:

Today Eric gave a talk to a number of kids about drug use, but I feel that the way it was presented to them was very ineffective. He did not ask the students to become involved, instead he just began speaking to the group in front of him….I feel that it would have been more effective to allow the students to express what they already know about drugs, and what their thoughts and views are on them, and then to discuss it further.

Overall, emotive postings were used at least once or twice by almost all of the students in the class. When used, it was most often as a strategy for qualifying or personalizing the remarks that followed, rather than as the expression of an authentic emotion.

Web Postings within the Discursive Context of the Course

The significance of evaluative, aligning and emotive postings is further emphasized when seen as part of the emergent discursive context of the course. In the case of the present research, this context is made up of the pedagogy and practicum of EDU 106, and is also a product of interactions between teacher candidates, children and adults at LCU, and myself (the instructor). In exploring these interactions, it became clear that several students seemed to function as anchors for the discussions in class and on the Web, as indicated by the likelihood that other students would use evaluative, aligning and/or emotive postings to develop discussion threads based on their initial posts. The ability of these students to anchor discussions was defined by a confluence of physical and personality characteristics, and through the values they supported and their way of speaking about these values and their experiences. Susan was one such student.

Susan was an art major, Jewish, wore glasses, had long frizzy-curly hair which she wore braided down her back, and she sometimes drew doodles and wrote on her arms and hands. Often dressed in a t-shirt and carpenter pants, she talked openly and honestly about her experiences, though the way she spoke about these experiences diverged from the discursive practice of her peers, a large segment of whom (7 of 18) were members or pledges of campus sororities. Susan positioned herself early on as existing outside the normative classroom discourse, describing herself as a "theater geek." Although Susan created evaluative, emotive and aligning statements within her posts, she adopted a conversational style that was markedly different from the rest of the class in its level of detail and self-disclosure. This is evident in a comparison of Susan and Renee's response to the question of why they decided to become teachers:

> Susan: Actually, I have always wanted to be a teacher of some kind. I have a distinct memory of declaring to my mother in second grade that I was going to be "an elementary school art teacher, just like Mrs. Bennett!" who of course was my art teacher in second grade. I idolized her, heh. I dunno…I've just always loved working with young kids, like kindergarteners up through maybe 4th graders. They're still interested in school, they're SO creative,, they like learning (usually), they respect people (usually)…I've always wanted to teach something or other; of course, what I wanted to teach and to which age group changed from year to year

from 5th grade through 11th, but then I realized I'd be happiest pursuing a variant of my second-grade dream. So here I am!

Renee: Growing up and playing school with my little brother and stuffed animals, I knew I always wanted to be a teacher. As a kid I like the idea of being in charge and bossing everyone around. Now I look forward to being an inspiration to young children. I want to make learning fun and enjoyable for all. And I'm certainly not complaining about the weekends and summers off!

Susan seemed to violate the discursive expectations of her peers in several ways. In class, she accomplished this through her unselfconscious and nonconformist presentation of self, in LCU, it was exhibited in the degree of comfort she displayed in interacting with children, and on the Web, she departed from discursive norms through an open and self-disclosing approach to Web posting. In this way, Susan became "the other" for many of her peers, while students like Shanna anchored classroom discourse through expressing a more normative, meritocratic orientation toward student diversity.

Shanna was a gregarious student, with a bright smile and a sense of humor that often helped to diffuse difficult classroom conversations. Having spent her elementary years in a school that she described as "inner city," Shanna's notions of culture were influenced by this experience, and by her parents' decision to move to a suburban district so that she could "get a better education." Shanna was also acutely aware of the enactment of positionalities in the context of LCU, and voiced her concern that she and other students not be perceived as "carpetbaggers" by LCU staff and parents. Early on, Shanna expressed her interest in making a difference in the lives of children through her decision to become a teacher, but at same time, she struggled to establish non-evaluative ways of interacting with children at LCU:

Hey everybody! Sorry I didn't post this earlier. In class last Thursday we were discussing our roles at LCU. Personally I feel a little uncomfortable because I don't want to act like I'm better than they are by directing their speech and behavior, and I've also been having trouble making connections with any of the

kids. I got to the computer room and they won't speak to me and then I go to another room and there are more EU students than LCU kids. I don't want to overwhelm them, but what can I do to be helpful? Does anyone have any other opinions or ideas about what to do to make things more comfortable for students both at LCU and EU?

Just as Susan and Shanna acted to anchor certain positionalities in the classroom, there were also students in the course who occupied a middle ground; students who attempted to establish ways of thinking about how to interact with kids at LCU. For example, note Erin's comments below, who aligns herself with Shanna, while also responding to her requests for assistance:

I completely agree with Shanna on this topic. I sort of feel uncomfortable there when all the kids are doing work on the computer or crossword puzzles (individual activities) and I don't want to impose….They are mentoring us as much as we are mentoring them. I agree with Shanna though on that we need more activities that we can do with them. There are so many fun icebreaker/get-to-know-you games that don't require props that I know! We can definitely have so much fun! Hope everyone had a good spring break! See you soon!

Another student, Deanna, also made postings that exhibited these qualities:

It seemed in class today during our discussion of how the home lives of LCU children affects them that the assumption was that these students are not doing well academically. I know for a fact that many of these students have very different lives from the way ours are, but at the same time, I also know that many of these children are very good students. I feel as if we should give them more credit for what they are able to accomplish despite some of their situations, and not just assume that they are not doing well. These kids are AMAZING.

Students such as Erin and Deanna were pivotal in shaping the direction of classroom discourse. They were more accepted socially than students like Susan, but they also found ways to gently critique the ideological perspectives of students like Shanna. In class, these students often reflected on disjunctures between the different ideological stances that were expressed through referencing their own experiences within and outside of LCU, and in doing so, assisted other students in their own reflective process. This is evidenced below in Chelsea's aligning comments, posted in response to Deanna's observations:

> I agree also. I went to LCU and went in the computer room and was amazed. They showed me this game that they connected all the computers and were playing against each other. I would never be able to do half the stuff the kids do on the computers besides build my own computer. I think I am going to stay in the computer lab for a little longer and see if maybe I can learn something from the kids.

In exploring the data, the discursive picture of this multicultural classroom emerges as one developed through an assemblage of language strategies, perceived social positions, and ideological stances framed by participation in classroom conversation, Web discussions and a culturally-rich practicum experience. It is a picture made vivid through Susan and Shanna's positionalities (as well as those of student occupying ideological and social middle grounds), and through all of our attempts to make sense of the significance of interactions within the classroom, the Web and the practicum. In discussing the implications of this research, I focus on the significance of this analysis for myself and other instructors of similar courses, and for teacher candidates on their way to becoming practicing teachers.

Discussion

Similarly to others who have used Web-based interactions in the teaching of multicultural education (Merryfield, 2003; Sernak & Wolfe, 1998) in EDU 106, Web postings were used as a tool for reflection and as a way to maintain an ongoing dialogue about what students were learning through their involvement in the LCU context. However, in looking closely at Web postings as a reflection tool, what becomes apparent through the current research is the importance of Web-based discourse in the positioning work of students in the course. Through

the use of evaluative, aligning and emotively-framed comments, students were able to construct themselves as future teachers, as students taking a university class, and as individuals who exhibited various degrees of comfort in interacting with people who were culturally different from themselves. Consequently, in thinking about and reflecting on the use of Web-based interactions in multicultural education courses, it is important for teacher educators to begin directing attention to both the content of students' postings, and the way in which these postings are discursively framed through specific linguistic strategies, such as prefacing comments like "I think," or "I feel" or the selective use of pronouns. Attention to the way that Web interactions are constructed can enable teacher educators to identify why certain students have more prominent voices in the classroom community, and this knowledge can be used to create opportunities for students to take on different discursive roles within classroom/Web conversations. In calling attention to how students talk with one another, teacher educators can encourage students with a "stronger" voice to assist others in asserting their perspectives, thereby lending depth and complexity to the discussions that take place. Teacher educators can also model and/or provide additional ways for all students to couch ideas and opinions. For example, in EDU 106, students were often encouraged to ask for clarification and examples from other students when broad statements about children at LCU were made in class and on the Web.

Greater attention to the qualities of Web discourse also helps to reveal what students feel most comfortable asserting opinions about—and why. For example, in the current research, students often felt comfortable commenting on the need for, or lack of structure in the LCU context. Given that the establishment and maintenance of different types of structures is integral to the practice of teaching, this may be expected. Students felt much less comfortable, however, in commenting on ways to establish meaningful connections with children at LCU outside of recognizable school-like social structures, as evidenced by a greater degree of tentative, emotively-framed postings regarding this topic. Through pinpointing and discussing how students write and talk about experiences that are challenging, teacher educators can emphasize or reemphasize important themes relating to multicultural education—including how one becomes more at ease in connecting with students who are culturally different, and how a need for structure can be balanced with a focus on children's interests and ways of communicating and interacting. Oikonomidoy's (2009) case study research on the use of Weblogs as a tool for conceptual reflection is relevant to the support of teacher candidates' ability to discuss these

issues, and further research should continue to explore how recurring themes in multicultural education are helpfully explored through blogs.

While the importance of the practicum in EDU 106 was built around teacher candidates' ability to establish mutually beneficial relationships with the children at LCU, this research also explored the ways in which teacher candidates could develop supportive relationships with each other. In examining Web postings, it was is clear that through the course of the semester, certain students felt more able to assert their opinions and perspectives, while others were more comfortable positioning themselves through their agreement or disagreement with other students' posts. Left unexamined, this dynamic may present a barrier to teacher candidates' ability to encourage peers' voicing of divergent perspectives. Given the significance of social positioning as a part of the learning experience in EDU 106 and other similar courses, the current analysis suggests that greater attention should be given to the ways that social positioning is accomplished across face-to-face and Web-based interactions. For example, an examination of Susan and Shanna's contributions in class and on the Web revealed that Shanna was supported by peers across these discursive contexts, while student engagement with Susan's ideas was greater on the Web than in the classroom environment. The data presented here suggests that Shanna's place as a socially accepted member of the classroom translated into support across contexts, while the Web discussion space may have served to mitigate Susan's in-class status as socially "other."

As [Hughes](#) suggests in her discussion of the intersections of diversity, identity and belonging in e-learning communities, "when an individual's social identities, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender and occupational status, are consistent with the topics and patterns of communication and associated discourses of identity that are made available by an online group or community, identity congruence" occurs (2007, p. 714). In the case of the present research, Shanna's identity was much more congruent than Susan's, and despite the fact that Susan and Shanna's contributions to discussions were both instrumental in the learning of their peers, as the instructor, I was concerned about the lack of acceptance that students demonstrated toward Susan in class, as evidenced by negative body language (rolling of eyes, turning away from or talking while Susan was speaking). In reflection, and in examining the data, I suggest that attention to the discursive strategies that students employed on the Web *and* in class gave me a pedagogical tool that could be used to understand issues of "identity congruence" and increase students'

consciousness of how their interactions with each other could enable or shut down generative lines of conversation. Specifically, in the same way that a focus can be directed toward teacher candidates' ways of writing about their experiences on the Web, it may be productive for teacher educators to consider the unearthing of teacher candidates' in-class discursive strategies as an integral part of multicultural teacher education pedagogy. This can be accomplished, for example, by explicitly acknowledging at the beginning of multicultural education courses that students will be asked to explore their understandings of diversity on multiple levels—which may include not only what they have to say, but how they say it, and to whom. This could be further emphasized by assignments that encourage teacher candidates to try ways of talking differently about issues of diversity, as well as exercises that emphasize discursive strategies that can be used to learn more from individuals who are perceived as socially or philosophically different. The use of these strategies could prove useful for bringing students like Susan more fully into the center of classroom discourse, and may assist other students in making room for dissenting or dissimilar voices in conversations about the diverse students.

Conclusion

Teacher candidates who enter multicultural teacher preparation courses bring with them emerging ideas regarding what it means to be a teacher, what it means to be a teacher of diverse students, and what it means for themselves and others to be students. In the current research, these ideas were partially manifested through the evaluative and emotive Web postings that students shared with each other throughout the class. Further, through aligning themselves with the posts of others, the teacher candidates described in this research indicated the degree of their agreement with particular perspectives regarding diverse others. Although not the focus of the present research, this alignment with and/or distance from the ideas of classmates was also reflected in the in-class discursive interactions of students.

Through the informal interactions that teacher candidates have with each other, they position themselves relative to diverse others and to ideologies that may complement or diverge from their own. As multicultural teacher educators, we must move beyond attending to the reflections of students about course content. In order to maximize the learning opportunities of our students, we must make note of the dynamics that emerge between students and call attention to these dynamics that emerge between students as a part of our pedagogy. Finally, we must ask ourselves and our students to critically reflect on why and how certain students in multicultural

teacher preparation classrooms are positioned in particular ways as we discuss issues of social justice. By beginning to address these issues, we will also begin to make progress toward connecting what happens in the experiences of teacher candidates to what happens in the professional lives of these individuals when they begin work as teachers in public schools. In encouraging reflection on their own positionalities and the positionalities of others, it may be possible to enact a critical discourse for change that extends beyond the confines of the multicultural teacher preparation classroom.

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Appendix 1

# of Resp.	Originating Student	Topic	Student Responders
8	Tracey	**Talking to Roberto**	Jennifer, Renee, Cynthia (2), Eileen, Liv, Chelsea, Karen, Erin
	Carol	**Renee and Caley**	Carly, Renee, Cynthia, Haley, Cynthia, Emma, Liv, Jennifer
	Haley	**Why Teachers**	Carly, Tracey, Erin, Carol, Shanna, Chelsea, Susan, Liv
	Jennifer	**The End**	Tracey, Deanna, Emma, Carol, Haley, Eileen, Ana, Liv
7	Shanna	**Guest Speaker**	Renee, Haley, Cynthia, Erin, Cynthia, Jennifer, Carol
	Tracey	**Pizza Party**	Emma, Shanna, Eileen, Renee, Susan, Erin (2)
	Erin	**Isaac**	Renee, Haley, Shanna, Cynthia, Emma, Ana, Liv
	Erin	**Living in a bubble**	Cynthia, Emma, Renee, Ana, Eileen, Karen, Liv
	Karen	**Feelings about the class**	Ana, Deanna, Haley, Eileen, Chelsea, Emma, Liv
	Ana	**Next Year**	Haley, Karen, Eileen, Chelsea, Deanna, Emma, Liv
6	Ana	**Final Project Video**	Erin, Emma, Jennifer, Haley, Ana (2)
	Renee	**I will remember you but will you remember me?**	Haley, Karen, Eileen, Chelsea, Haley, Susan
5	Susan	**Where have all the LCUers gone**	Emma, Rachael, Haley, Susan, Shanna
4	Carol	**I Don't Know Spanish**	Eileen, Carly, Renee, Erin
	Erin	**Field placements**	Jennifer, Eileen, Jennifer, Renee
	Shanna	**Define Racism**	Carol, Carly, Chelsea, Liv
	Carol	**Friends**	Shanna, Haley, Carly, Susan
	Susan	**Roberto Update**	Carly, Emma, Liv, Rachael
	Eileen	**Lack of supplies**	Carol, Chelsea, Susan, Chelsea
	Susan	**Maria?**	Haley, Emma, Erin, Shanna
	Shanna	**True Colors**	Haley, Susan, Liv, Chelsea
3	Shanna	**Labeling kids**	Carly, Haley, Cynthia
	Haley	**Final Projects**	Carol, Emma (2), Susan
	Tracey	**The "older" boys**	Karen, Liv, Susan
	Tracey	**Most Effective Teaching**	Susan, Eileen, Deanna
	Shanna	**What are we supposed to be doing?**	Renee, Haley, Chelsea
	Karen	**Censorship**	Tracey, Haley , Jennifer
	Karen	**What to do**	Renee, Eileen, Shanna
	Ana	**Negative Assumptions**	Deanna, Liv, Jena

	Renee	Actually helping	Deanna, Liv, Jennifer
	Haley	Not much time left	Carly, Susan, Shanna
	Tracey	Computer Smart	Carol, Chelsea, Cynthia
	Deanna	Girltalk	Karen, Liv, Renee
	Karen	Surveytime	Emma, Cynthia, Jennifer
2	Susan	Boosting self confidence	Deanna, Me
	Haley	Negative attitudes	Carly, Shanna
	Haley	Go to the LCU	Chelsea, Erin
	Haley	Definitions	Carol, Haley
	Deanna	One of the kids	Tracey, Susan
	Renee	Babysitters club	
	Liz	English and Spanish	Erin, Haley
	Chelsea	Postings	Carly, Emma
	Tracey	Coming back to talk to the next class	Chelsea (2)
1	Eileen	No smoking campaign	Ana
	Deanna	A rare experience	Haley, Erin
	Carol	Helping out on my final project	Haley
	Renee	Attendance	Haley
	Chelsea	Postings about the class	
	Tracey	Coming back to talk to the next class	
	Carol	Tuesday	Cynthia
	Tracey	Dancing	Susan
	Tracey	Drug talk	Carly
	Deanna	Opening my eyes	Liv
	Cynthia	Discrimination	Erin
	Liv	End of semester	
	Haley	Fitting in	Carly
	Deanna	Being helpful	Carly
	Haley	The Gym	Shanna