

THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE TEACHER  
PREPARATION OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATOR

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Responding to recent demographic shifts in the United States, teacher educators have become increasingly concerned with preparing preservice teachers to teach diverse student populations in urban schools. Currently, for example, Latino/a and black students comprise the majority population in 100 of the largest cities in the United States (Moll, 2002). These demographic changes lead to new curricular and pedagogical practices, as teachers are being better prepared to build on the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of the economically poor and/or ethnic minority students who attend under-resourced urban schools. The goal of teacher preparation is to enable preservice teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills to provide a high quality education to all student populations, instead of one which prepares poor and/or ethnic minority populations for predetermined low-paid service sector jobs. Inevitably, preparing preservice teachers to work with diverse student populations in under-resourced urban schools becomes inseparably linked to struggles for social justice in education and society.

There has been considerable attention to the impact on schooling that derives from these demographic changes and social justice goals. However, much of the research on teacher preparation focuses overwhelmingly on helping white, middle class, female preservice teachers understand classroom issues of diversity, inequality, and equity and the issues faced by teacher educators seeking to prepare them (Sheets, 2001; Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner, 1992). While it is important to prepare white middle class females to work in culturally and linguistically diverse urban schools as social justice educators, it is equally important for preservice teacher educators to examine normalized curricular and pedagogical practices which focus solely on the needs of white middle class female preservice teachers. In so doing, teacher educators can consider how

well these practices also serve to prepare preservice teachers of color (Hale, 1991). Indeed, the numerous calls for a more diverse teaching force require such a shift in focus. Central to the purpose of diversifying preservice curricular and pedagogical practices in preparing preservice teachers as social justice educators is an understanding of individual and collective forms of transformation (Collins, 2000a). These transformations as social justice educators occur as preservice teachers acknowledge, learn to critique, and act upon social differences and oppression in their personal lives as well as in educational and societal institutions.

There is, of course, an extensive body of literature on African American teachers (mainly female) who, over many generations, have provided excellent education for African American students and students of African descent (Delpit, 1986; Foster, 1996, 1997; Henry, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lynn, 1999). Within the past ten years, this literature has been brought to bear on the preparation of African American preservice teachers. Studies of their socialization experiences within teacher education programs have investigated the role of personal biographies (Cantor, this volume; Dillard, 1994; Holt-Reynolds, 1994); the influence of race, class and gender in becoming change agents (Cochran-Smith, 1995a; Knight, 2000; Lynn, in press; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002); the use of African American English varieties (Knight, in press; Meacham, 2000); and the facilitation of intercultural dialogue among one's peers (Bennett, Cole, & Thompson, 2000; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

This article builds on the growing body of research on preparing African American preservice teachers. I specifically focus on the preparation of Lynn, a working class African American female preservice teacher, as a social justice educator. In order to do so, I draw upon the concept of intersectionality rooted in feminisms by women of color. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which race, class and gender are inextricably intertwined and not experienced as

separate categories. I highlight the ways that the intersections of Lynn's raced, classed, and gendered identities matter in shaping and being shaped as a social justice educator by the curricular and pedagogical socialization experiences of learning to teach in urban schools within a teacher education program.

First, I briefly critique the literature on teacher education to illustrate the intersections of preservice teachers' of color identities and their curricular and pedagogical socialization experiences. Then, I describe how I conducted the feminist qualitative case study of Lynn and offer a glimpse into her cultural background. Next, I introduce the concept of intersectionality from the multicultural feminist literature. I highlight Lynn's individual transformation and collective transformations (or lack thereof) with her peers in being prepared as a socially just educator in urban schools. The findings suggest the need for teacher educators to understand their curricular and pedagogical practices and the interaction between the multiple intersecting identities of preservice teachers of color in order to: 1) build on preservice teachers' strengths situated within African American historical and cultural worldviews and 2) facilitate intercultural dialogue between and among all preservice teachers. I conclude with the implications for diversifying teacher educators' curricular and pedagogical practices and future research for preparing teachers of color as socially just educators.

## PREPARING AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESERVICE TEACHERS FOR DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

There is a growing body of research on the perspectives, experiences, and practices of preservice teachers of color on issues of diversity and social justice as they enter and are socialized within teacher education programs (Burant, 1999; Dilworth, 1990; Grant & Secada, 1990; Meecham, 2000; Montecinos, 1994; Sheets, 2001). This increased attention raises some

important concerns and tensions that are key in understanding the preparation of Lynn in this article as a social justice educator in the multicultural social reconstructionist teacher education program. First, if we take the white, middle-class female's experience as the norm and generalize it to the preparation of all other prospective teachers learning to teach diverse students, we ignore important differences raised by the experiences of women and men of color in teacher education programs. Montecinos (1994) notes that the research literature "makes diverse students in public schools an object of study but suppresses diverse teacher candidates' presence as subjects who pose critical questions to teacher education practices" (p. 13). She argues further that ignoring issues posed by candidates of color in a teacher education program sustains the norm of whiteness as an ethnic category that defines teacher education curricula.

Su (1996) examined black, Asian, Latino/a and white preservice teachers' entering perspectives and educational perspectives in a teacher education program and found that there are differences between entering preservice teachers of color and white preservice teachers. Su concluded that the ethnic minority candidates came from a lower socioeconomic status than their white counterparts and demonstrated a "strong awareness of the unequal educational opportunities for the poor and minority children, the irrelevance of the existing curriculum and instruction for minority students and the need to restructure schools and society" (p. 130). Moreover, she argued that black students entered the programs conscious of social justice issues and committed to teaching as change agents. Unfortunately, "their voices were seldom heard as they felt discouraged and excluded from the main discourse in their education and schooling" (p. 130). Without the historically excluded voices of African American preservice teachers and the educational epistemologies generated by them, the knowledge constructed about the teaching profession and teachers' learning to be change agents will be inevitably partial and lacking.

The second issue that researchers raise in relation to the preparation of preservice teachers of color is the idea that however knowledgeable particular members of a minority group are about their own culture, there are other ethnic groups in a diverse society that are unfamiliar to them (Bennett et al., 2000; Nelson-Barber & Mitchell, 1992; Nieto, 1999). Sheets (2001) argues that teachers of color “may not necessarily be better prepared than White teachers to succeed with children from their own or with children from other groups of color” (p. 28). More specifically, in their pedagogical practices with a cohort of black and Latino preservice teachers, Bennett et al. (2000) contend that the intercultural dialogue among these preservice teachers of color supports their ethnic identity development and awareness of similarities and differences within and between ethnic minority groups while preparing them to teach for diversity and social justice in non-minority, minority, and mixed group settings.

The third issue raised by researchers in the preparation of preservice teachers of color is the standard, normalized emphasis within the curriculum. This emphasis predominantly reflects white-middle class norms even though the preservice teacher education curriculum literature focuses on preparing teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Montecinos (1995) is one of the few teacher educators who has criticized the existing literature on preparing teachers for diverse student populations by documenting the demarcation of diversity in the teaching force as being identified solely as “ethnic differences.” She argues that the “intersection of race, gender, and class has become invisible and this identification impoverishes our understanding of the multiple social categories that intersect to shape teacher’s practices” (p. 4). For example, in examining two working-class African American female preservice teachers and their multiple African American English languages in their teacher preparation, Meacham (2000) calls for teacher educators to address not only Standard English

forms as the valued language within the curriculum but to include multiple English linguistic varieties into the course content. He also addresses the need for teacher educators to build affirming on-going relationships that create a culturally and linguistically diverse community of learners among preservice teachers of color and white preservice teachers. These affirming on-going relationships would reflect the diversity of K-12 students that their preservice teachers will eventually teach.

As noted, the literature on preparing teachers for diversity and social justice tends to focus on the curricular and pedagogical needs of white middle-class female teachers. This focus creates normalized curricular and pedagogical practices based on white, middle class norms. These norms ignore important differences between white female preservice teachers and preservice teachers of color, the curricular and pedagogical preparation needs of preservice teachers of color to teach diverse student learners, and the intersections of preservice teachers of color identities as race, classed and gendered individuals learning to become social justice educators. For example, Sleeter (2001) argues that “most white preservice students bring little awareness or understanding of discrimination, especially racism” (p. 94). Thus, curricular practices may first focus on facilitating white preservice teachers’ understandings of racism while preservice teachers of color need further curriculum development of the strengths that they bring with them to the program, including personal, educational and social critiques of racism (Grant & Secada, 1990).

#### QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

One central purpose of this research study was to explore and examine the “little-known and [not well-] understood phenomenon” of the intersections of race, class, gender, and the socialization experiences of Lynn within a multicultural social reconstructionist teacher

education program (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 43). This investigation was best suited to an in-depth case study where the researcher had little control over events. Lynn's multicultural social reconstructionist teacher education program facilitated preservice teachers' understandings of the skills and dispositions necessary for social justice and educational equality in urban contexts. Multicultural social reconstructionism is defined as the ways teacher educators and preservice teachers envision and work towards a more socially just world through the examination of oppressions and inequitable social structures based on, but not limited to, race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and/or disability (Sleeter & Grant, 1993).

The data that I present on Lynn were collected as part of a larger two-year qualitative case study informed by feminist theories in the preparation of four African American teacher candidates at a state university in New York. Lynn was selected for this article because her profile demonstrates the ways in which the intersections of her working-class, African American, female identities and the preservice curriculum can build upon the knowledge base needed to diversify curricular and pedagogical practices. In so doing, this diversification, which includes multiple perspectives of preservice teachers based on the concept of intersectionality, will add to the curricular and pedagogical knowledge base in teacher education to prepare African American working-class female teachers of color effectively for diversity and social justice.

Data were drawn from five semi-structured interviews lasting from one hour and a half to three hours over a two-year period as Lynn proceeded through the multicultural social reconstructionist teacher education program. During the first interview, I gathered information about Lynn's family background, her perspectives on diversity and social justice, and her teaching philosophies. Subsequent interviews were held at the end of each of the four semesters

in the teacher education program. These interviews clarified curricular and pedagogical practices in the participant observations of Lynn's weekly two-hour core seminar and student teaching classrooms during the first year of the program and her classes as a first-year English teacher in an urban secondary school. Written documentation included all of Lynn's assignments in the core seminar, lesson plans, journal writings and the Master's portfolio. My roles as researcher and team supervisor immersed me in the daily activities of the teacher candidates. I analyzed data in a recursive process of data collection and employed a constant comparative approach utilizing the concept of intersectionality. Utilizing an intersectional framework, I examine how Lynn understands what it means to become a social justice educator who can critique and act upon inequitable practices at the personal, educational and institutional levels. I highlight some of the teacher educators' curricular and pedagogical practices as they relate to Lynn's processes of individual transformation and collective transformation (or lack thereof) with peers in becoming a social justice educator through a qualitative case study.

### *Lynn's Background*

Lynn is an African American working-class woman, who exemplifies candidates that teacher education programs desire to recruit as part of a more diverse teaching force in working with diverse learners in urban areas. At the time of the first year of data collection, Lynn was a 23-year-old African American female working-class student enrolled in a master's credentialing program. She was born and raised with her half-brother in a single-parent home in New York. Lynn's mother graduated from high school and worked as a secretary in a school district. Her father finished the eighth grade and dropped out of school. In the "clash and mixing" of the Latino and black community, her father believed that Latinos were "taking our jobs away." Lynn



understands her father's view, yet she differs drastically from him in her reactions to the multilingual and multicultural environment in which she grew up. She states:

I can see how a man like my father who works as a mechanic—works with his hands—could feel a bit intimidated. But at the same time it tells us there's a need for, especially my people, to realize we are entering into a multilingual community. We need to catch up!

While reflecting on her high school years, Lynn remembered “abandoned lockers, steel grated passageways, and painted-over windows which gave me a feeling of imprisonment and how concerned I was about the student who existed daily in such a closed and locked environment.” She described her first three years in high school as an “empty experience where I didn't learn. . . . The nurturing aspect wasn't there. . . . [and] that something was just wrong.” In the twelfth grade, she experienced literature “truly for the first time when I read Maya Angelou's *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting Merry Like Christmas*. Yet when she told Mr. Walker, her English teacher, that she was going to teach, “He didn't support me in it. [He said], ‘Oh, you don't want to do that.’”

Lynn received her undergraduate degree from the University of New Mexico with a major in American literature. From her autobiographical statement, we learn she “was given the University of New Mexico's highest honor, the Undergraduate Achievement Award that was given to three students who showed growth, persistence, and integrity throughout their academic careers.” Moreover, as an American literature major she had always written short stories and states that “creative and analytical expression has always been my strength. . . . Like a novel, I also enjoy reading into social structures and cultural systems in order to comprehend the basis of their existence.” Although she has learned most of her Spanish *por el libro*, she enrolled in the

teacher education program to obtain the Bilingual Credential and plans to work and study with the Spanish speaking communities with the hope that the “social and cultural exposure will enable [her] to work towards an understanding of the people and their unique struggle and existence.” Furthermore, after earning the necessary teaching credentials, she hoped to return to her old high school (which had a 25% dropout rate) to teach American literature. In sharing her thoughts about her self-reliance of “to learn and return” to the community in which she was raised, Lynn acknowledges that she will be returning to the “polluted sunsets, riot ruins, and the graffiti-wearing walls of my home. I will be returning to the familiar solid concrete and the nurturing dirt on which my life settled and grew.”

As a working-class, African American, Spanish-speaking, bilingual female who grew up in a multilingual and multicultural environment, Lynn’s cultural background, experiences and undergraduate degree in American literature qualify her as an especially promising secondary English teacher. Unfortunately, even the best-intentioned preservice programs that are based on progressive educational principles do not reflect the norms and values of social justice that Lynn embodies based on the intersections of her social identities and experiences.

#### ANALYSIS: THE INTERSECTIONAL INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK OF RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

Although the preservice teacher education research has not yet integrated the concept of intersectionality from feminist literature into analyses of teachers’ socialization experiences, the educational literature is increasingly incorporating tenets of feminist theoretical frameworks by women of color in analyses of teachers’ curricular and pedagogical practices (Henry, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 1998). The concept of intersectionality has enabled unique and powerful analyses of issues such as health care, occupational trajectories, immigration, and

welfare reform, grounded in the experiences of woman of color over the past twenty years in the disciplines of law (Wing, 1997), sociology (Collins, 1990), anthropology (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991), African American studies (James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000) and interdisciplinary fields (Hurtado, 1996). Many of these scholars of color have argued that race, class or gender are limiting as separated categories of analysis. These categories suggest that the racism experienced by women of color is simply additive to sexism, when in fact, race, class, gender, and sexuality are systems of interlocking oppression, experienced simultaneously which have a cumulative effect. Researchers utilizing the concept of intersectionality have transformed epistemological understandings of what it means to investigate the multiple identities and oppressive experiences of women of color.

Collins (1990) asserts that the intersections of race, class, and gender in black women's daily lives create new angles of vision and ways of theorizing about black women's identities and social justice. She specifically articulates the need to reclaim the black women's intellectual tradition of theorizing about social justice concerns by examining the everyday ideas and experiences of "invisible" black working-class women. Educators are thus challenged to redefine how black female intellectuals provide new understandings of what it means to be a social justice educator through the contributions of women like Sojourner Truth and Billie Holiday, who share ideas within black communities (Davis, 1998). More specifically, I connect the concept of intersectionality undergirding the "invisibility" of working class, African American preservice teachers like Lynn to provide new angles of vision of what it means to become a social justice educator.

In *Fighting Words: Black Women in Search of Justice*, Collins (1998) examines the ways in which black working-class women understand the intersections of their identities and utilize

their agency in transgressing different spaces embodying oppressive practices to envision and enact more socially just practices. In the following excerpt, Collins articulates the influence of intersectional analyses and black working-class women's agency to confront and challenge structural issues of racism, classism and sexism by attending to how currents of power and oppression shift and change different conceptualizations of truth and social justice in varied communities. For example,

Because [Sojourner] Truth lived in a Black woman's body, her position in the world certainly shaped her position on her world. A traveler, a migrant who transgressed borders of race, class, gender, literacy, geography, and religion largely impenetrable for African-American women of her time, Truth remained an outsider within multiple communities. Just as Sojourner Truth was situated in the context of hierarchical power relations, searching for truth requires similar contextualization. For her, resolving the tensions raised by her migratory status did not lie in staying in any one center of power thereby accepting its rules and power. (p. 231)

The above excerpt provides insights into how the struggles of everyday living experienced by the intersections of women's race, class, and gender identities contribute to the production of knowledge and truth that challenge personal, educational, economic, and societal injustices. Collins (1998) also asserts that black working-class women should not be viewed in relatively fixed categories of race, class or gender, but rather as "sojourners" who cross categories and cross boundaries by migrating in and out of multiple communities. In this sense, Collins argues, black working-class women intellectual workers broke down historically segregated spaces of all kinds as they searched for meaning, justice, and "truth" to bring about a more equitable society. Equally important, Collins contends that the intersections of race, class,

and gender of black women create new angles of vision or ways of seeing and theorizing about black women's identities and socially just practices.

In what follows, I utilize the concept of intersectionality to illuminate the ways that the intersections of race, class, and gender in Lynn's socialization experiences influence the ways she theorizes about becoming a social justice educator. I also draw on Collins' (1998) "sojourner" metaphor to suggest that Lynn's intersecting identities are invisible to her predominantly white middle-class preservice peers and teacher educators. The concept of intersectionality provides an interpretative framework and generates two thematic concerns for preparing working-class, African American, female teachers as social justice educators in culturally and linguistically diverse urban schools. These themes include: 1) rethinking curricular and pedagogical practices to include multiple theoretical perspectives of social justice grounded in African American cultural worldviews, and 2) facilitating intercultural dialogue to address differences of power, privilege, and access among preservice teachers.

*Individual Transformation: Reconciling Social Justice Perspectives and Claiming Self-Identities*

Multicultural social reconstructionist teacher educators seek to prepare preservice teachers to connect and ground their K-12 curricular and pedagogical practices in the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Yet, even within such a teacher education program, intersectional analyses of Lynn's socialization experiences in the teacher education program reveal the ways in which she struggles with dominant theoretical perspectives on social justice and to become "visible" in order to articulate a more public voice. Within black feminist frameworks, individual transformation begins with the movement from silence to language to action (Lorde, 1984) and/or from struggle to reconciliation. Lynn's reflections about the intersections of her social identities and the multicultural social reconstructionist curriculum

provide an opportunity for preservice teacher educators to understand the processes of her individual transformation as a social justice educator. Lynn's written responses to two books, *Life in Schools* and *Teaching to Transgress*, reveal the ways in which the intersections of her race/ethnicity, class and/or gender provide insight into the curriculum as a site of struggle over the inclusion of multiple social justice perspectives and the intersections of preservice teachers' identities. In viewing this curriculum as a site of struggle, two themes of self transformation evolved in Lynn's first semester: 1) the reconciliation of her perspectives on social justice rooted in social, political, and historical values of African-American culture with a curricular text such as *Life in Schools* which is grounded in North American critical theory<sup>i</sup> and 2) the negotiations needed to claim her identities in intellectual public spaces in the teacher education classroom.

*Reconciliation.* Lynn's experiences with the race-class intersections of her own identities and those embedded within the social reconstructionist multicultural curriculum reveal the ways in which she struggles with the contradictions and challenges posed by one dominant worldview of social justice and questions who is responsible for bringing about societal change. For example, she struggles to reconcile differences between her cultural worldview of social justice and one of the dominant views of social justice in the program. In reflecting upon the first semester in the program, Lynn mentioned, "There are certain things that the teacher education program can't teach [her], like the notion of social justice." She then elaborated that it took some time to reflect upon the fact that

maybe I should listen to this [curriculum] because to know social justice as far as they [North American critical theorists] are concerned comes from Germany and all these European schools of philosophy. It is just really interesting for them to think that because

Marcus Garvey and other African-Americans talked about social justice long before McLaren and them.

Lynn later stated, “Afrocentrism always taught that education should focus on the child and that they [children and youth] understand and realize why they’re in the position that they’re in.”

Therefore, while reconciling two historical perspectives on social justice, it is not surprising that Lynn writes the following response to Peter McLaren’s *Life in Schools*:

I wonder whose voice is the most powerful amongst the haves and the have-nots: the one who tries to understand, or the marginalized one who tries to be understood. I felt liberated by the text, because *Life in Schools* concerned me personally, as a past inner-city student and a future inner-city teacher. That sense of legitimization disturbed me. After reading I grew skeptical, simply because the socioeconomic relationship to failure in schools was explored by a white man who is of that “ruling ideology (p. xv).” My response to *Life in Schools*, then, was a need to reconcile myself with the text and the author.

Researchers are documenting the “conundrum,” “conformity,” and “cultural limbo” that working-class African American preservice students struggle with in predominantly white institutions whose dominant cultural and linguistic norms do not attend to and/or affirm their multiple and varied heritages (Meacham, 2000, p. 572). Yet, Lynn’s desire for reconciliation while encountering the contradictions between multiple theoretical perspectives of social justice enables educators to ask, how do preservice teachers learn from the contradictions emerging from classed raced-based perspectives within the curriculum and their own experiences as they effect their development as social justice educators? Lynn tries to resolve the wary and ambivalent feelings that she has toward North American critical theory and the middle-class

white author's positioning in perpetuating injustices in inner cities even as it resonated with some of her cultural experiences based in working-class African American communities.

In addition to reconciling with North American critical theoretical perspectives of social justice in analyzing inequities in inner cities predominantly comprised of people of color, Lynn also grapples with the bi-directionality of change needed to bring about societal justice between "the haves and have nots." By using the term bi-directionality, Lynn underscores how change cannot solely be enacted by one group or the other—the colonized or the colonizer—but by both simultaneously. She is asking for change on both sides of the power dynamic. Lynn notes:

The US is accustomed to and dependent on the minority poor. Comfortable with their extreme lack of resources, physical and self-respecting, the colonizer has refused to see the disparities, and has refused to renew his mind. I wonder, then, if the renewing of the advantaged mind is crucial to change just as [it is for] the disadvantaged.

Thus, in articulating the necessity of reconciling the intersections of her identities and experiences as a working-class African American female with the text *Life in Schools* and the middle-class, white, male author, she also examines relationships of power, privilege, and oppression to question the bi-directionality of change that is needed from those who "have" as well as those who "don't have" to enact societal change (Wildman & Davis, 2000).

#### *Claiming Identities and Intellectual Public Spaces in a Preservice Education Program*

Feminists of color have focused on the necessity of self-definition and self-determination as part of individual and collective transformations in the face of institutional and self-oppression in higher educational institutions that may often go unexamined (hooks, 1989; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). For example, the Latina Feminist Group has recently written *testimonios* to discuss the intersections of their identities and to write the stories of their communities that



would otherwise remain invisible. Thus, it is not surprising that a book on transgressing dominant cultural worldviews from a former working-class African American woman would influence Lynn's individual transformation.

As a preservice teacher engaged in understanding how social justice educators bring about personal, educational, and societal transformations, Lynn critiques relationships of power and self-oppression through an understanding of the connections between her speaking-writing voice, intellect and pain. Lynn articulates perspectives of self-definition and self-determination through a sharing of her silence to voice to action. In so doing, Lynn brings visibility to the struggles to claim her "intellectual" identities and personal transformation in her written response to bell hooks' (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*, entitled "I AM HERE":

Two days a week I leave class frustrated and angry with myself. Four hours a week I struggle to BE. I struggle to speak. I've read the works of bell hooks before, and I hope to qualify as being hookian someday. Her words, I possess. They speak to me and nurture me.

My mind and soul circulate inside of my chest creating a tension throughout my body. This happens when I repress my voice. I am my own oppressor. In class I want to say that I cannot and will not (at this time) think in "we" terms. I do not share the same view [as the other preservice teachers]. I want to ask how is our self-transformation progressing? What can I learn from your pain? I sit anxious, observant, challenging myself, being filled with images and colors, waiting and wanting to free my ideas into the air. I hold the sparks in, starting a restless fire. I think thoughts, thinking they are valid, but I think, not really. My thoughts must be given voice before I can really be free.

.....

I anticipate the growth of my own voice so much that self pressures converge within, spiraling and circling, backing up my mind. Somehow, I think, my voice is my intellect. Through my voice I hear original thoughts. I know I am like no other, but knowing is not enough. So I embellish myself with the opportunities to use my written voice to compensate for the silence. My voice spills onto the paper, desperate, abundant, streaming, and it is real. I AM HERE.

In Lynn's writing excerpts above, the intersections of her racialized, gendered, and classed identities as an African American working-class female shape her written response as a site of empowerment in her own learning and self-transformation. This response is one of the first steps of her own empowerment in learning to publicly voice her identities and perspectives. As Collins (1990) argues, "although important, private naming is not enough, truth must be publicly proclaimed" (p. 237) to combat alienation and marginalization of one's identities and values. Thus Lynn's self-empowerment and transformation occurs through a critique of the predominant perspective of social justice utilized in educating diverse student populations in the assignments of her cultural foundations course. More specifically, Lynn's written acts of self-transformation through her reconciliation of diverse perspectives of social justice occur in the "typically uncomfortable disjuncture between conflicting knowledges" (Collins, 1998, p. 235). In this disjuncture, Lynn challenges the theorizing of social justice from North American critical theory with European roots from the theorizing of social justice situated within from African-American intellectual traditions with different sociopolitical roots.

Lynn's movements of reconciliation between the interactions of multiple perspectives of social justice and the intersections of her identities can be viewed as a pedagogical "space of difference" between the learner and an official curricular text such as *Life in Schools* that must

not be erased (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 38). This “space of difference” in her written responses holds multiple possibilities for resistance to injustice and transformation of her identities in becoming a social justice educator. This space of difference and possibilities for transformation is realized as Lynn utilizes her agency to situate one of her responses, “I AM HERE,” to the readings about social justice within the African American intellectual tradition of poetic writing instead of the more conventional written summary response to a given text (Christian, 1990). Lorde (1984), a noted African American feminist poet and political activist, contended that through poetry many of the disenfranchised began to “speak” and to find freedom and healing through writing. As preservice teacher educators journey with Lynn on her struggle to “BE” in the poem, it becomes clear that the growth and development of Lynn’s voice is inseparable from the growth of her intellect and the need to speak. Lynn later spoke of the “I AM HERE” response as necessary “to proclaim[ing] my presence for myself and for others” within the classroom. Burant (1999) argues that the growth and development of “voice” of preservice teachers of color is part of a “silenced” dialogue that in many cases does not enter the public space of preservice programs.

In claiming her visible presence and voice as part of her individual transformation, Lynn also engages in critical self-reflection around the painful differences in self-transformation that are taking place between herself and her peers in the preservice program. Lynn readily acknowledges that she doesn’t think in “we” terms or “share the same view” of her peers in the teacher education program. Thus, she combats the homogenized or monolithic view of self-transformation that educators may believe occurs among all preservice teachers in becoming a social justice educator in favor of interrogating the differences to be found in her process and that of her peers. Similarly, Burant (1999) describes the self-transformation of Monica, a working-class Mexican American preservice teacher in a foundations course, as different from

those of her white peers in a teacher education program. Monica's self-transformation is one in which she becomes empowered to use her voice to discuss multicultural issues within the classroom, but unfortunately she then subsequently learns to hide her "public" voice in the midst of many of her white peers who were not ready to engage in "experiences [which] fall outside of the mainstream" (p. 215).

Lynn participates in a rite of passage (as she moves) from being object to subject by challenging the curricular content and written forms of dominant "official" theories around social justice and negotiating her identities as a social justice educator (hooks, 1989, p. 237). The processes of individual transformation situated in African American worldviews and cultural values of social justice and a variety of writing genres raise several important questions for teacher educators to consider. For example, how might teacher educators embrace the "space of difference" in their curricular and pedagogical practices to critique multiple perspectives embedded in varied theories of social justice representing a range of cultures?

Lynn's case study demonstrates the need for teacher educators to build on and strengthen the knowledge that African American students bring to multicultural social reconstructionist teacher education programs. Teacher educators can provide curricular and pedagogical practices that would support the conditions for African American preservice teachers' abilities to locate and critique the sociopolitical and historical contexts of their own cultural perspective of social justice as well as the multiple perspectives of social justice. Moreover, teacher educators are also led to question the ways they critique their curricular practices, based on the intersections of their own social identities such as, but not limited to race, class, sexuality, language or religion (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). Finally, teacher educators can examine their curricular and pedagogical practices for the ways in which they facilitate preservice teachers of color and white

preservice teachers to engage in similar and different types of struggles and transformations in learning to be social justice educators based on the intersections of their social identities.

In trying to understand how pedagogical practices facilitate preservice teachers' experiences of what it means to be social justice educators, I now turn to examining the intersections of Lynn's identities in her socialization experiences with her peers in a cross-cultural course on development. I highlight pedagogical practices that facilitate dialogue across relationships of differences and power for collective transformation to build alliances in challenging educational and societal inequities.

*Missed Opportunities in Facilitating Dialogue Across Differences and Power*

Teacher educators' pedagogical and curricular practices can render visible the multiplicity of African American preservice teachers' identities and experiences when facilitating dialogues of difference and power as a collective struggle for all students. I agree with Collins (2000b) who would argue that the first step for teacher educators is to recognize "that our differing experiences with oppression [and privilege] create problems in the relationships among us. These differences in power, whether structured along axes of race, class, gender, age [and/] or sexual orientation, frame our relationships" (p. 597).

Lynn's experiences and the intersections of her identities as a working-class African American female with her peers in the cross-cultural course illustrate the ways that differences within relationships of power shaped the dialogue. I specifically examine the intersections of race, gender, class and her experiences in two course assignments. In the first assignment, Lynn and her peers had to view and discuss such films about teaching in the inner city as *Boys 'N the Hood* and *Stand and Deliver* outside of the regularly scheduled team seminar. In the second, they had to discuss their "traveling" experiences in the seminar. These two experiences illustrate

how teacher educators can interrogate the ways that underlying middle-class norms create barriers to mutual engagement and possibilities for the individual and collective transformation of preservice teachers of color and white preservice teachers in becoming social justice educators.

A group of Lynn's peers decided to meet on a Sunday night to discuss the films on inner-city youth. Lynn was unable to meet on any night of the week as she did not have access to a car, as did many of her peers. Lynn's peers were unaware that not having an automobile prevented her from presenting and their hearing her opinions on teaching black and Latino/a youth in the inner-city from a black working-class female standpoint. They also did not realize that in asking Lynn to take a bus at night, they were exposing a single black female to the hazards of the night. Lynn articulated that "sometimes those nights leaving [the university at ten o'clock] when it was very cold and having to walk all the way to Brumfry Street and take the bus, they were very difficult bus rides."

Her absence from the dialogue on films left unquestioned her peer's perspectives on inner-city youth and facilitated the traditional practice of seeing students of color from working-class urban schools as objects of inquiry and not speaking subjects within the "official" curriculum. From the perspectives of the privileged, the lives of people of color in under-resourced schools and neighborhoods thus continued to be studied but never engaged by a speaking subject like Lynn who might talk back to the objectified views of people of color (Burant, 1999; hooks, 1989). Her absence also leads educators to question how teacher educators' curricular practices can facilitate the multiple perspectives of all preservice teachers in the program.

The discussions of the second assignment did not focus on preservice teachers' experiences on buses, but rather on Lynn's peers' mutual "traveling" experiences that demonstrated another way of living, based on their privileged intersections of race and social class. Lynn noted, "the students who tended to speak are given the floor and acknowledged as having something of value to contribute to the classroom in terms of their mutual traveling experiences around the world." Unfortunately, Lynn begins to construct preservice teachers' intellectual abilities on the basis of mutual voicing of "world" traveling experiences in contrast to her "bus" traveling experiences. Within the course, Lynn notes:

I began asking myself, "Am I intelligent? Am I an intellectual? Do I belong with all of these other students?" Perhaps, I felt that way based on their experiences, especially in class and [when I] heard about where everyone traveled. I don't know their total backgrounds, but I felt intimidated.

These patterns of unequal relationships across differences and power in the two curricular assignments gives further support to the claims of Burant, (1999), Parker and Hood (1995), Murrell (1991), and Su (1997), that the perspectives of preservice teachers of color are missing in the preservice curriculum. Yet at the same time, one working-class black preservice teacher in teacher education classrooms should not be used "to perform on cue" (Collins, 2000b, p. 458; see also Ellsworth, 1992). Consequently, facilitating dialogue across differences of power in terms of privilege, oppression, and access in shaping pedagogical practices and building coalitions among preservice teachers entails acknowledging and rethinking these differences. For example, how do pedagogical practices of dialogue confront relationships of power and differences wherein preservice teachers can make decisions to treat their peers as invisible or visible?

Lynn's responses to her curricular and pedagogical experiences in the program can help educators understand the necessity for teaching about unequal patterns of relationships of power in the classroom and connecting them with issues of oppression at the societal level (Orner, 1992). Lynn's experiences highlight the intersections of her social identities as a working-class African American female whose travels consist of her urban migrations on the bus with the narratives of some of the white middle-class students whose norm is "traveling" around the world. Lynn's experiences echo hooks' (1994):

[I]ntensified awareness of class difference [at Stanford ] in the constant evocation of materially privileged class experience (usually that of the middle class) as a universal norm that not only excluded those of us from working-class background, but effectively excluded those who were not privileged from discussions, from social activities. (p. 181)

Canon (1990) further illuminates this phenomenon of the invisibility of the connection between the middle-class norms of privilege and intellectual abilities within the classroom. She states, "members of privileged groups are more likely to talk, have their ideas validated, and be perceived as making significant contributions to group tasks" (p. 129). She asserts that if nothing is "done to upset the 'normative balance of power' in the classroom, students' statuses in society at large will be replicated in class, and members of less privileged groups will continue to remain silent while the privileged speak" (p. 129). Similar to Lynn's response, Hall and Sandler (1982) also argue that instead of developing their intellectual abilities, "women may begin to believe and act as though their presence in a given class or institution is at best peripheral . . . their participation in discussion is not expected, and their contributions not important" (p. 9).

Unfortunately, the intersections of Lynn's identities as a working-class African American female and the curricular and pedagogical practices of a multicultural social reconstructionist



curriculum did lead to missed opportunities for intercultural dialogue and the building of a coalitional group of change agents among the preservice teachers. As Lynn is positioned on the periphery of the program and the curriculum as a black working-class female from an urban neighborhood, her ideas, experiences, and/or knowledge about being raised, educated bilingually, and prepared as a social justice educator in the inner-city do not shape the curricular or pedagogical practices for culturally and linguistically diverse urban communities.

Lynn's narrative illuminates how teacher educators can begin to question the ways curricular and pedagogical practices of dialogue across differences of power contribute to the silence and marginalized voices of working-class black females in predominantly white middle-class institutions (Bennett et al., 2000). Additionally, in what ways do pedagogical practices and curricular content contribute to the building of allies or coalitions for collective transformations in preparing teachers as agents of change? Questions such as these can be explored through a curriculum that emphasizes dialogue across differences within classrooms, especially those based on preservice teacher's intersecting identities and socialization experiences (Cochran-Smith, 1995b; Martin & Van Gunten; 2002; Orner, 1992).

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS

By attending to the intersections of Lynn's identities and experiences within a multicultural social reconstructionist program emphasizing paradigms of domination, liberation, and transformative curricular and pedagogical practices, it is necessary to note that even with the best of emancipatory intentions "we all have the capacity to act in ways that oppress, dominate, wound" (hooks, 1989, p. 21). Thus, it is important for teacher educators to examine the norms in their own programs in which the intersections of race, class, and gender structure and are structured by specific curricular and pedagogical practices. In centering the intersections of

Lynn's identities and experiences within the teacher education program, I briefly provide two interrelated curricular and pedagogical implications for preparing African American preservice teachers as social justice educators. Building on the perspectives of scholars of color, and feminist and critical scholars, the implications and recommendations resonate with much of the research on successful teachers of diverse student populations in K-12 settings.

The first implication and area for future research is how teacher educators in multicultural social reconstructionist programs build upon the unique strengths and culturally diverse backgrounds of African American preservice students. For example, teacher educators can value a multiplicity of perspectives on social justice inclusive of African American culture. Rather than have only courses that are primarily based in one dominant monocultural social justice orientation, teacher educators can utilize preservice teachers' of color prior experiences of social justice grounded in their socio-political, cultural and historical communities to shape the curriculum. Teacher educators can then prepare preservice African American teachers to further understand, critique, and expand their knowledge and practices situated in relation to their own cultural background as well as multiple historical, cultural, and social perspectives of social justice in learning to teach culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in urban schools.

Teacher educators can also structure the course content to include multiple writing genres, such as poetry to emphasize social justice orientations "within the context of their [preservice teachers of color] cultural references (Cochran-Smith, 1995b, p. 552; see also Nieto, 1998). In so doing, teacher educators would provide opportunities for all preservice teachers such as Lynn to explore and interrogate individual and collective differences and develop greater understandings of interdisciplinary perspectives of social justice expressed in a variety of reading

and writing genres to examine what it means to become a social justice educator. As Barbara Christian (1990) powerfully reminds us:

[P]eople of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assaults on our bodies, social institutions, countries, and our very humanity? And women, at least the women I grew up around, continuously speculated about the nature of life through pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their world. (p. 336)

In addition to the incorporation of multiple writing genres to unearth the multiplicity of perspectives on socially just practices, Lynn's case study also suggests a need to explore the ways in which teacher educators employ critical questioning strategies to examine the role of unequal power relationships. These critical questioning strategies can facilitate dialogues of difference and the creation of allies and coalitions for educational change among preservice teachers. The findings support previous research which suggests that although many multicultural reconstructionist teacher educators examine patterns of unequal relationships of power and the ensuing inequities at the macro level in society, they neglect to examine this same pattern at the micro instructional level in teacher education programs (Luke & Gore, 1992).

Teacher educators can recognize how different experiences based on the intersections of race, class, and gender structure and are structured by the pedagogical practice of dialogue across differences of power. This recognition provides teacher educators with an understanding of how relationships of unequal power among preservice teachers can silence or facilitate alliances with

working-class African American preservice teachers to create educational change. Teacher educators can also identify how they reinforce power differentials among preservice students, reflecting societal inequalities and preservice teachers' privileged and/or oppressed status reflected by the intersections of race, class, and gender.

One pedagogical strategy for accomplishing this objective is through the use of critical questions. For example, the research of many feminist and critical scholars of color has already focused on power differentials within classrooms to continuously question who speaks, who listens, who is silent, in what contexts, and with which topics (Orner, 1992). In the curricular assignments of the film discussion and the "travel" experiences, employing critical questioning strategies of who speaks and who is silent during these assignments would reveal and open up opportunities for teacher educators to support all preservice teachers to articulate a more public voice in the dialogue around differences of power, privilege, and access.

## CONCLUSION

For over 20 years, multicultural feminists have employed the concept of intersectionality in research across multiple disciplines to examine the ways that black women's social identities such as, but not limited to, race, class, and gender interact to construct their realities and lived experiences with privilege, oppression, power, and access in such areas as employment and housing. Building upon the preservice teacher education literature, I have argued that the concept of intersectionality provides critical insights for teacher educators in preparing working-class African American female preservice teachers as social justice educators in urban schools. The concept of intersectionality as it relates to the intersections of race, class and gender among other social identities underscores the importance of teacher educators analyzing the norms and implications of whiteness, middle-class assumptions, and values in teacher education programs

in order to construct more culturally responsive curricular and pedagogical practices for working-class, African American preservice teachers. Intersectional analyses of race, class, and gender unearthed the invisibility of and missed opportunities for including multiple theoretical perspectives of what it means to become a social justice educator. Future research using an intersectional framework grounded in the daily experiences of working-class preservice teachers of color would extend the knowledge base in preparing teachers as social justice educators.

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<sup>1</sup> Cochran-Smith, M., Albert, L., Dimmattia, P., Freedman, S., Jackson, R., Mooney, J., Neisler, O., Peck, A., and Zollers, N. (1999) define North American critical educational theory as one in which the curriculum and pedagogy interrupt historical systems of oppression to create a more democratic society. American critical educational theorists include but are not limited to Jean Anyon, Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Cameron McCarthy, and Peter McLaren.