**Teaching Narrative-Charise Pimentel**

*In my undergraduate multicultural education class, students are busy examining dolls from the Barbies of the World Collection. Mexican Barbie is in a bright pink, ruffled dress toting a Chihuahua dog, Australian Barbie is in a khaki safari outfit with a koala bear gripping her arm, and Japanese Barbie is wearing a kimono with a paper accordion fan in her hand…*

The courses I teach in the department of Curriculum & Instruction take on some of the most pressing educational issues that the state of Texas and the larger U.S. face, including the achievement gap that is characterized by the overwhelming underachievement amongst students who are ethnic/racial minorities, learning English as a second language, and/or low socioeconomic. As a quick reference point, Hispanics now make up more than 50 percent of the students in Texas public schools, yet are twice as likely to drop out of high school than white students. With these statistics in mind, the pre-service and practicing teachers in my multicultural classes attentively try to uncover the contributing factors to the achievement gap as they also develop teaching practices that will create equitable educational experiences for students who have long been underserved.

Amongst the many factors that contribute to the achievement gap, my pre-service teachers learn that students’ identities and cultural experiences are inadequately featured in school curriculum and the schooling context in general. In the vignette above, for example, my pre-service teachers are examining how students’ lived experiences—experiences shaped by social constructs such as ethnicity, language, socioeconomics, immigration, race, gender, and sexuality—are represented in children’s toys. While my students easily identify the limitations of the superficial depictions of each Barbie doll, they then struggle when I assign them the task of designing a cultural toy of their own. Students take on this task by working in groups where they carefully try to define the everyday lived experiences of diverse children and then attempt to map those experiences onto the physical elements of a toy. This is just one example of how I have my students (re)conceptualize a culturally relevant education. In these classes, students also design classroom decorations, create videos, and write children’s picture books (e.g, see Exhibit 1 which contains a children’s picture book on a Thanksgiving story from a Native American girl’s perspective).

As a professor in the College of Education, I am situated in a program that produces more teachers than any other university in the state of Texas. I realize that Texas State (already a Hispanic Serving Institution) and our teacher education program are poised to change the educational experiences for minority youth. Mindful of the significance of my teaching, I attempt to produce critical-minded teachers, knowing that in the near future they will be teachers themselves, and in the years to come will teach countless youth. In what follows, I discuss the guiding philosophy and methodologies of my teaching practices as well as discuss my various teaching activities.

**Critical Pedagogy**

As a result of taking my classes, it is my hope that pre-service teachers learn that being a multicultural teacher means much more than hosting the occasional “ethnic” potluck or dance performance, which has been referred to as “fairyland” multicultural education. Amongst many other things, multicultural education involves understanding students’ ever-changing identities in an inequitable social context. Ultimately, I see teaching as a political act, and as such, I believe it is imperative for pre-service teachers to gain critical perspectives and pedagogical tools to address social justice issues. My teaching practices draw from Paulo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy, as I advocate for a problem-posing and transformative education in which teachers and students work together on various social justice issues.

One particular problem we discuss in class, for example, is racism. At the onset of our discussions, most students either deny that racism exists in today’s society or they identify it as an individual performance, such as telling a racist joke or racist comment. Interestingly, none of my students ever identify themselves as racist, so the problem of racism disappears just as quickly as we can define it. Thus, they encounter a paradox: schools clearly suffer from racial inequities, as evidenced in the achievement gap, yet educators, including themselves, claim they are not racist. To challenge their thinking, I broach the subject by having them consider other forms of racism, including: 1) institutional forms of racism such as school curriculum, testing practices, and language programs, all of which can create inequitable racial outcomes without a “racist” person being responsible, and 2) discursive racism which refers to how racial constructs are often unwittingly produced in written texts and visual narratives such as the media.

Once my students gain a broader sense of how racism might be produced in our society, they begin to deconstruct how race is constructed in the historical narratives in textbooks and in the visual narratives of movies (e.g., see pre-service teachers’ racial analyses of the movie *The Blind Side* in Exhibit 1 or a graduate student’s article on the movie *Akeelah and the Bee* which appeared in the journal *Multicultural Perspectives* in Exhibit 4)*.*

**Mentoring**

My teaching endeavors involve cultivating remarkable teachers, but also great scholars, writers, and researchers. My perspective is that educators at all levels can contribute to the advancement of educational concepts, theories, practices, and research. The result of my mentoring has resulted in my students presenting at regional, national, and international conferences, going on to pursue advanced graduate degrees, and publishing peer-reviewed academic journal articles and book chapters. A great example of the personalized and long-term mentoring I provide students is represented by my work with Sarah Santillanes. While I originally served as Sarah’s faculty mentor for the Texas State University’s Summer Predoctoral Fellowship Program in 2010, I continued to provide close mentorship to Sarah long after the fellowship ended. This mentorship resulted in her completing three conference presentations, two journal publications, and her dissertation.

In all, I have co-authored six peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters in collaboration with students, including one undergraduate student (Marta Bitar) who traveled to Guatemala to collect ethnographic research as part of a Science Foundation project in the Department of Anthropology at Texas State University. Marta’s research was ultimately published in an international academic journal. In addition to assisting students with their many research presentations and publications, I regularly serve on graduate student committees, including 15 oral exam committees, 6 thesis committees, and 2 dissertation committees.

**Teacher Education Scholarship**

As part of the process of reflecting and refining my teaching practices, I regularly publish academic articles and book chapters that identify and theorize my own teaching practices. To date, I have written four academic manuscripts (two in print and two in press) that focus on my own teaching in the college classroom. One article, “Critical Race Talk in Teacher Education Through Movie Analysis: *From Stand and Deliver* to *Freedom Writers*,” identifies strategies for effectively discussing race in teacher education programs. In this article I discuss a writing assignment (Critical Discourse Analysis Paper) I use in CI 5330 (Multicultural Teaching and Learning) and share excerpts from my students’ critically minded and well-crafted papers—papers that serve as examples of how students can critically and effectively engage in race-centered analyses, discussions, and projects in a multicultural education classroom. Similarly, in my most recent book chapter, written with coauthor Dr. Kathy Fite, “Class Activities for Understanding Self and Others in Local, National, and Global Contexts,” we identify 20 activities we use in our teacher education classes to have students examine themselves and others as cultural, ethnic, and racial beings. These examples of success in teaching Multicultural Education are greatly needed in a research field that is largely characterized by a host of dysfunctional classroom dynamics when discussing the topic of race (e.g., student resistance, denial, guilt, and silence when faced with the task of analyzing race).

**The Developing Teacher**

Even though students consistently award me strong qualitative and quantitative evaluations for my courses (overall 4.65 on a 5.0 scale), I continually try to improve upon my teaching. Based on student feedback and the several professional development programs I have attended – including Allies Training, The Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute, and the Preparing Students for Socially Responsible Global Citizenship workshop – I have revised my course syllabi and delivery of course content multiple times (exemplified in the 3 syllabi for RDG 4320 in Exhibit 1). As a result of these revisions, I have gradually seen improvements in my students’ course evaluations (see Exhibit 1).

In addition to these important changes in course content and delivery, I seek to deepen my teaching responsibilities in many other ways. For example, I have facilitated sessions at the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute for the past five years. In this capacity, I mentor colleagues across all disciplines as they try to effectively implement multicultural pedagogies into their courses. I also developed three new courses in my department (CI 5388, DE 7304, DE 7301). Most recently, I took on the responsibility of teaching University Seminar courses (US 1100), which has not only expanded my teaching repertoire, but has resulted in my exploring a more holistic approach in my teaching. I have become much more active in attending the educational events that students participate in outside of class, including Texas State basketball and football games; performing arts activities; student organization meetings; common experience and university affairs events; and the Lavender graduation ceremony for LGBTQIA students. I have also shown initiative by starting a student program in collaboration with Dr. Lori Assaf: The Quetzal Critical Film Series. By showing and then discussing films with students, our goal is to provide exposure to critical educational issues in local, national, and global contexts. This semester more than 300 people came to view our screening of *Stolen Education*.