Conceptualizing identity, learning and social justice in community-based learning

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Abstract

This paper explores the process of learning to become a social justice teacher, drawing in particular on Bakhtin’s notions of dialogue in order to theorize pre-service teachers’ identity negotiations. Interpretations of learning and identity are based on the content of pre-service teachers’ narratives about community-based learning. Supported by theoretically-sensitive ways of conceptualizing identity and social justice, the author develops an understanding of the ways pre-service teachers shape their identities through participating in community events. Implications for teacher education, in terms of the design and pedagogic practices, are presented with the intent of enabling the realization of social justice teacher education.

1. Introduction

Teacher education research has a tradition of utilizing identity as a core concept (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Tatum, 1992). By employing a hybridized concept of identity in an analysis of the process of learning to become a social justice teacher, my aim is to refine our understanding of this key analytic tool for teacher education. This aim is pursued on the shoulders of cultural and discursive perspectives of teacher professional identity (Alsup, 2006; Maclure, 1993) and studies which have explored the relationship between racial identity development and social justice teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gomez, Allen, & Black, 2007; Howard, 1999; Johnson, 2002). By focusing on community-based learning (CBL), I explore a new dimension of teacher education and identity whereby learning is situated in the interactions that take place outside of the formal school contexts.

Community-based learning (CBL) is one approach used in teacher education to support culturally responsive teaching (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). In CBL, pre-service teachers attend community events and often volunteer in the community in some capacity; an emphasis is placed on the diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and ways of interacting with members of the local school community (Moll & Gonzales, 2004; Moll & Vallez-Ibanez, 1992). Ideally, the experience informs culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000) and the development of teachers who “walk the road” (Cochran-Smith, 2004) of teaching for social justice. This study of teacher professional identity is based on narrative interviews with pre-service teachers who were asked to talk about the ways they learned about social justice issues and teaching through CBL. Given this focus, I have bracketed the learning that takes place within the context of classroom practice and other teacher education experiences (e.g., writing reflective journals or discussing teaching practices with teacher educators and fellow pre-service teachers), although I recognize the ways that becoming a teacher is part of a broader learning journey (Alsup, 2006) and political context (Sleeter, 2005).

For the pre-service teachers in this research, community-based learning (CBL) formed one component of their program, where the aim was preparation for teaching in racially and ethnically diverse disadvantaged schools. Following similar work on learning that is situated in local community activities (Boyle-Baise, 2002), this paper examines ways in which CBL can contribute to the development of a social justice teacher identity. Implications for CBL are drawn not from observations of pre-service teachers’ CBL experiences, but rather emerge from an analysis of discourse and identity in the stories they tell of their experiences.

Identity serves as a bridging concept that enables the exploration of the relationship between individual learning and...
socially-situated experiences. A central claim made through this analysis is that what it means to be a social justice teacher — elaborated on in the literature, inter alia, as a “community teacher” (Murrell, 2001), a “culturally responsive teacher” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), a “culturally relevant teacher” (Ladson-Billings, 1994) — is not a stable concept absorbed by pre-service teachers in an unmediated way. Rather, a social justice teacher identity is negotiated (Wenger, 1998) with respect to lived experiences and culturally-informed reflections on those experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Data on these reflections and identity negotiations are captured in narrative interviews (Mishler, 1986). New dimensions of community-based learning are explored based on theoretically-informed conceptualizations of identity and learning. The analysis elaborates on a way of learning that has the potential to foster emergent approaches to social justice in education.

2. A framework for the study of dialogic identity

The analysis utilizes a socio-cultural discursive approach, such that meanings made of experiences are recognized for their role in constructing one’s identity (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001), which includes the kind of teacher the study participants imagine or present themselves to be in research interviews. I rely primarily on Gee’s (1999) conceptualization of identity as enacted through Discourses, or combinations of ways of thinking, acting and interacting in order to be recognized as a certain kind of person. Identity-building is taken to be one practice pre-service teachers engage in throughout their learning journey (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in relation to personal history (Goodson, 1992) and in an ideological environment encompassing cultural myths about teaching and teachers (Britzman, 1991; Grossman, 1990). I propose that a better understanding of the interface between identity and ideology (van Dijk, 1998), and the ways individuals engage with that interface, can give us insight into the different ways pre-service teachers learn to walk the road of social justice (Cochrane-Smith, 2004). This interface is characterized relationally as a process of negotiating the “voices” (Bakhtin, 1981) of authorities, such as teacher educators, parents and cooperating teachers (or teacher-mentors) to be “internally persuasive” (Bakhtin, 1981). As Bakhtin argues (1981: 293–4):

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his [sic] own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.

Bakhtin’s dialogic perspective frames this study in two ways. First, his perspective justifies a methodology in which an analysis of discourse in research interviews can provide insight into identity (theorized as a negotiation process that takes place in and through language). Second, it allows the analyst to interpret pre-service teachers’ learning in terms of the ways they make the “voices” of their program and the local community members and families “internally persuasive.” In order to link this perspective on discourse with a method for data analysis, I drew upon Gee’s notion of Discourses (1999) to identify a set of socially-circulating notions of a social justice teacher identity (or Discourses) among one group of elementary education pre-service teachers. Also key to the analysis of discourse-in-use was Gee’s use of the concept of a “cultural model” as socially-shared resources (or storylines) that individuals draw upon to make sense of the world. These storylines are cultural resources that enable us to evoke (and recognize) particular social identities (operationalized as Discourses).

Individually-enacted identity “bids” addressed in this study are those that related to their teacher and social justice identities. These “bids,” realized in the interview discourse, relied in part on ways of thinking about social justice education (i.e. cultural models). In particular, the analysis highlights two cultural resources used in negotiating a social justice teacher identity: a) ways of participating in community-based learning in terms of how one engages their identity-in-practice; and b) shared cultural models of approaches to social justice. Reflections on the implications of this for social justice education are grounded in Fraser’s matrix of approaches to social justice (1997).

In summary, three theoretical perspectives have been employed in developing the framework for this analysis of learning through community-based learning (CBL) experiences:

1. Gee (1999) provided a theory and method for operationalizing and analyzing identity as performance in discourse (e.g. as Discourses which draw upon cultural models).
2. Bakhtin (1981) provided a way to theorize identity that aligned with Gee’s theory and methods (e.g. the tools and resources identified by Gee are understood to mediate learning as a negotiation of “voices”).
3. Fraser (1997) provided a viewpoint from which to examine the ways community-based learning in teacher education aligned with various cultural models of social justice.

Based on this framework, the following research questions guided the investigation presented here:

- What identities are implied in the stories they tell about their teaching and community-based learning experiences?
- What do their narratives of experience and expressed identities tell us about ways of learning to become a social justice teacher?

3. Context: a study of community-based learning (CBL) and identity

The students I recruited for this study were elementary teacher education students who, by applying for the Professional Development School (PDS) program at their university, expressed their interest in community, diversity, and urban teaching. This PDS realized the primary aim of the PDS initiative to strengthen the relationship between public schools and universities (Holmes Group, 1990) by situating the pre-service teachers’ field seminars in the school, rather than the university and through working collaboratively towards ensuring the school’s success. The program included several design features considered important for culturally-responsive teacher education (Murrell, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), such as a cohort model and the consistency of placements in the same schools throughout their four semesters in the PDS program. By partnering with five of the more ethnically and linguistically diverse schools in the school district, the university was able to place these PDS students in schools where the low income student population ranged between 61 and 71%, students of color represented 71–77% of the student population, and the teaching force was majority White European American.

The “community experience” is reflected in the overall mission of the program, which, according to the PDS program director “situates the preparation” of teachers in the context of the school and community. The PDS field seminar integrated aspects of the local communities’ values in various ways, such as through discussions led by local parents or representatives of local community organizations (e.g.; a Hmong community center, a Latino community center, and a local African American church). The institutional perspective was summarized in documents, such
as a handout distributed to PDS students which described the community experience as:

...for student teachers to learn more about the communities in which their students live (e.g., funds of knowledge, social networks, ways of interacting and of seeing the world). We want our students to learn how to learn about the communities where their students come from and how to translate this knowledge back into their classrooms as culturally relevant/ responsive teaching practices.

Although some activities were organized for them as a PDS group, such as a tour of the neighborhood, the expectation was that they would choose and arrange to participate in a range of activities in the community that enabled the learning outcomes described above. Some of the activities these pre-service teachers chose for their CBL experiences included: assistant coaching at Saturday sports games at the school; helping out at the evening Mathematics club or Saturday African American student enrichment program; participating in community events such as Hmong New Year celebrations or church services; making home visits to students and tutoring adult learners in English.

4. Methods and theoretical tools of inquiry

The research was user-oriented (Patton, 1988) to the extent that teacher educators involved in the PDS program were consulted in the design of the research and development of the research questions. One important way the teacher educators were consulted was in identifying a sample of pre-service teachers who had been engaged with a range of community-based learning activities and community contexts. In order to study how people learned from CBL, I wanted to hear from a PDS group for which there was evidence that CBL was part of their professional training. I thus chose to focus on the 2nd and 3rd year PDS cohorts who had their teaching placements at one of the more racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse schools in the district and for whom CBL was an integral part of their field seminars. After consulting with the teacher educator for this group regarding their other course commitments, four pre-service teachers agreed to participate in the study. Although the teacher educator was aware of her students’ participation in the research, she was not directly involved in the data collection or analysis. Her role was indirect, in that she agreed to two interviews in which we discussed issues she considered relevant for a study of community-based learning.

The primary form of data collection involved repeat narrative-focused interviews (Mishler, 1986) with PDS students (3 females and 1 male) as they completed the final semester(s) of their elementary program (preparing to teach students aged 5–11). When asked to define their social identity, all four pre-service teachers (Sam, Patrick, Aerykah and Rose) identified as White, among other social identities (e.g., sister, Jewish, British-American). Each interview lasted about 1 h, except those conducted with Aerykah, which were about 30 min each, due to scheduling constraints. These interviews were conducted on multiple occasions (3–4 sessions depending on schedules), to occur before and after their community and teaching experiences. Aerykah and Rose, who were in the 3rd year cohort, participated in the study for their final semester, while Sam and Patrick’s learning trajectories were followed over the course of two semesters.

The focus on narrative is warranted based on the notion that personal narratives are one of the ways people make sense of the world around them, and hence provide insight into social learning (Bruner, 1986, 1990). In addition, previous research suggests that a better understanding of how teachers develop a professional identity requires an examination of personal biography (Lortie, 1975; Hammond, 2002) as well as contexts for learning (Beijaard et al., 2004; Flores & Day, 2006). The study entailed a thematic analysis of multiple data sources which aimed to capture three dimensions: personal accounts of schooling, local context (i.e., school, community and university), and teacher training practices (with a particular focus on CBL).

Ethnographic case study data on the school context and the teacher education program helped me to gain a broader picture of the context and pedagogic practices of the PDS program. This allowed me to attend to Gee’s (1999) argument that interpretation of situated meanings in discourse (including narratives) depends on cultural and contextual knowledge. I also note that the context of the spoken discourse data presented here (the research interview) was a context shaped by my research aims. I made these aims clear to the participants and consciously draw on this common ground and conversational purpose in order to interpret their discourse (e.g., as discourse aimed at presenting themselves as particular kinds of teachers). I also attempted to lessen the likelihood that knowing these aims would provide ritual or expected stories by making the interviews less structured in the later interviews and by conducting interviews in multiple contexts (e.g. individual and group interviews) and on multiple occasions.

Three of the participants are presented here — Patrick, Sam, and Aerykah — because they provided me with three distinct learning journeys from which to theorize the relationship between identity and CBL experiences in the context of becoming a teacher. The insights gained from my interviews with a fourth participant, Rose, are reported elsewhere (Farnsworth, 2006). I have chosen not to discuss Rose’s learning journey here due to space limitations and because the analytic interpretations I drew from her interviews are largely subsumed within the analysis of the other three pre-service teachers. Additionally, Rose was not reachable after the project ended to comment on the analysis, whereas Patrick, Sam and Aerykah have commented on earlier versions of this analysis. Their feedback reminded me that, although my interpretations have frozen their learning in time, their actual identity development as social justice teachers is ongoing. The freezing of their learning journeys in time and in discourse allowed for an analysis of learning processes and, in particular, ways of learning which foster emergent approaches to social justice.

5. Analysis

Presented here is a discourse analysis (Gee, 1999) of narratives about CBL experiences, which involved extracting themes from the telling of their CBL experiences, with particular attention given to the cultural models they evoked as they made sense of their CBL experiences. The form of the discourse, its lexical and semantic form, was interrogated given its function, particularly in meaning-making and identity enactments or “bids” (Gee, 2004). A key starting assumption for this analysis is that people “do things with words” (Austin, 1999) and that one thing people “do” with words is enact or perform identities (cf. Butler, 1990).

Although identity was initially operationalized in terms of Discourses, Gee’s proposed aspects of identity (Gee, 2001) provided another conceptual bridge, linking identity with dialogic notions of learning or what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as “ideological becoming.” Thus, the negotiation of a professional teacher identity is first analyzed in terms of how they made sense of becoming teachers in relation to the language of authorities and cultural models. In this analysis, Gee’s notion of Discourses stands in for Bakhtin’s concept.

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2 All names are pseudonyms. Aerykah took me up on my offer and chose her own pseudonym.
of ‘voices’ or what he also calls ‘speech genres’ and it is these Discourses that are theoretically being negotiated by the pre-service teachers as part of their learning to become teachers (e.g. developing their teacher identities). However, in using Gee’s (2001) typology of aspects of identity or “identity views,” I found that identity could also be conceptualized in terms of the ways one’s identity-in-practice was a resource for learning. That is, the type of identity view they engaged within their community-based learning experiences (their practice) mediated different ways of learning and thinking about social justice education. These different identity views are presented below; but first I aim to establish learning as a process of negotiating Discourses.

5.1. Learning as a negotiation of Discourses

Cultural models are resources pre-service teachers can draw upon as they negotiate complex classroom interactions and teacher identities (Britzman, 1991). Cultural models that help define “good teaching” or “social activism” informed two dominant Discourses of a teacher identity evoked among the PDS pre-service teachers. I elaborate here on these Discourses, which I have called the “academic” and “community” Discourses, and review the ways Sam, Patrick and Aerykah evoked these Discourses in negotiating their teacher identities.

First is Sam, who tended to construct her identity as a teacher in relation to cultural models of teaching and learning ratified by the institutions where she worked and learned; drawing on what I call an “academic” Discourse. That is, her identity as a teacher could be seen as justified due to the training she was fortunate to have.

My teacher last semester was unbelievable … She’s like the teacher we learned about … she taught it so that it made them remember it and still made it meaningful, it was just unreal.

Her references to “community” which informed her approach to CBL also emphasized academic benefits. For example, when asked how she saw “community” as relevant to teaching practice, she described a lesson her mentor cooperating teacher planned as part of a mock-city project:

Like my teacher brought in people from the community to talk about like parking spaces, like how much a handicap space like needs room for. … My teacher was like crazy, she made them consider everything … they went above and beyond.

Sam suggests here that good teaching (going “above and beyond” what is expected) is a matter of integrating “community” into classroom learning activities by bringing in people who are “from the community” (e.g. non-school staff).

In drawing on this academic Discourse, Sam was able to express confidence in her identity as a teacher. Her language expressed excitement when talking about how she had learned about “curriculum styles and things like that”. By contrast, Patrick’s narratives consistently positioned himself as someone active in the local community, advocating for parents and families whom he met through his practicum and his community experiences (some of which he did before he entered PDS). However, he did not express the same interest in curriculum as Sam. In one story, Patrick says in his university coursework:

I’ve also reached the point where I’m not going to class because the open house is more important maybe that’s not the best attitude to have when I remember I am still a college student. My professor completely understood.

A teacher identity defined by the academic Discourse seemed less internally persuasive for Patrick.

In various ways, Patrick distanced himself from the educational philosophy of his school. For example, in the following interview excerpt, he voices the school English-only policy and positions himself in opposition to this and, therefore, as the person working to maintain a caring and nurturing school experience:

Like you have to speak in English to me cause you can. I mean, well today one of the boys, one of them fell on his face in the playground and well obviously he was hurt and his cousin came over and was speaking in Spanish and then we spoke, we’re talking in Spanish but that’s (pause) you’re crying, your face got bashed into the pavement I don’t care what we speak and this is not a teaching moment, this is a are-you-physically-ok moment.

In this excerpt, Patrick is also making note of his knowledge of Spanish, enacting an identity that shows his alignment with the native Spanish speaking community. This is a theme throughout his interviews in which he described his community experiences as projects supporting the Latino community (e.g. translating official documents for parents) and therefore, working towards being “person working to maintain.” For example, Sam’s performance of his identity as a teacher distanced himself from the educational needs of his school. For example, in the following interview excerpts provide a flavor for the “community” Discourse that Patrick drew upon in enacting his teacher identity.

Despite shared PDS norms and meanings, namely a joint emphasis on professionalization and academic expertise as well as an “ethic of service” (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008), these pre-service teachers drew on different Discourses in evoking their teacher identities. Patrick’s perception of his identity as a teacher tended to draw on the “community” Discourse and Sam’s on the “academic” Discourse. Sam’s expressed commitment to disadvantaged schools was framed in terms of providing students with quality academic experiences, whereas Patrick framed his social justice teacher identity in relation to what I associate with notions of social and community activism. Talk about community in the activist ways Patrick favored was largely absent from Sam’s Discourse, and if present was positioned as contradictory to her teacher identity and hence not (yet) “internally persuasive” (Bakhtin, 1981). For example, she talked of how she couldn’t drive a child home because of the potential for legal retribution but struggled with the implications of this district boundary policy for the student who would have to disrupt his year and change to a new school. Her story of this student shows one of the contradictions she faced:

Like honest to God, two weeks, like that’s so awful their first year of school to have to do that, you know? Like let him finish here with his friends. I’m like, can’t I just pick him up. And [cooperating teacher] goes, well yeah, everyone said that, thing is, say you get in an accident. I mean, these people could be crying for money and sue you and throw some lawsuit against you, you know, she’s just like, you just can’t put yourself in that position. And I’m like, no you know, good point, I understand that, but, it sucks.

Although reluctant, she privileges here the “voice” of the school and district.

What I have explored through this analysis is not why Patrick and Sam privileged (Wertsch, 1993) different Discourses, but how these Discourses supported different ways of negotiating a teacher identity. I argue that the ways in which they negotiated their
identity in their narratives about CBL provide us insight into ways of learning from CBL. Problematically, each Discourse potentially informs ways of approaching CBL that could diverge from the pedagogic intention of CBL – of providing opportunities for learning to learn from the local community and furthering social justice education. That is, to the extent that the “academic” Discourse defines particular boundaries and status for teachers, there remains a professional distance that may constrain critical reflection and cross-cultural relations. On the other hand, the “community” Discourse risks slipping into “helperism” that perpetuates structurally defined power relations and hinders social justice (Hyland, 2005; O’Grady & Chappell, 2000).

It is important to note that my aim is not to identify an underlying attitude system or structure of thinking within the minds of individuals, but rather to examine “how the themes of ideology are instantiated in ordinary talk, and how speakers are part of, and are continuing, the ideological history of the discursive themes which they are using”. (Potter, 2001, p. 218) This means that, rather than situating the problem within the individual, I aim to understand how it is that these themes continue, how they impact education, and explore ways to disrupt them. Sam’s meaning-making of the student who has moved out of the school district shows one way that pre-service teachers are impacted by these Discourses and the potential for slippage into deficit thinking with regards to students from low income or ‘other’ ethnic and racial backgrounds (e.g. that these people are willing to sue for money). The challenge for teacher education is to find ways to support pre-service teachers in negotiating these Discourses in ways that engage critical reflection and support a kind of inner dialogue around such contradictions.

This process of critical reflection can be interpreted from Aerykah’s interviews; rather than privileging one Discourse or another, she seemed to accept propositions entailed by one Discourse, transform others and reject those that did not fit with the kind of teacher she wanted to be. Although she openly struggled with some academic aspects of teaching, she tried to work with those struggles, to make both Discourses internally persuasive. One example of Aerykah’s dialogic sense-making comes from a group interview with Patrick and Sam in which she pointed to an inherent contradiction in that “child-centered” education is situated in a context where “society” deems what is appropriate, so what they are to learn, when and where has already been decided for them and hence the pedagogy cannot be truly child-centered. In this discussion, Aerykah revealed her skepticism of institutionally-sanctioned Discourses, in which an “academic” Discourse regarding literacy could be included. However, her utterances expressing this contradiction were made coherent within a string of utterances in which she also expressed her view of societal impositions as “something that’s here and can be worked with.”

5.2. Aspects of identity that mediate learning

Another resource in learning can be described as identity-in-practice or ways of thinking about the self when engaged in an activity. Gee’s four ways of viewing identity (Gee, 2001) provided a theoretical structure for an analysis of narratives which described their engagement in CBL. Each “identity” view represents different aspects of how identities-in-practice are formed and sustained (Gee, 2001). These four “identity” views are: Nature-identity, Institution-identity, Discourse-identity, and Affinity-identity. The first, N-identity, refers to those identities which are based on a state of being that is determined by nature, not society, such as being a twin. Although this N-identity was not evoked in narratives on community-based learning and teaching, the other three aspects of identity were and can be summarized as follows:

- Institution-identity (I-identity): an identity performance framed as a “position” that is authorized by institutions, such as being a certified teacher.
- Discourse-identity (D-identity): an identity performance that draws on an individual trait, such as being charismatic, which is evoked through individual accomplishments that are recognized through interactions with others.
- Affinity-identity (A-identity): an identity constructed through shared experiences and ways that those shared experiences define membership to a particular affinity group (e.g.; being a member of PDS).

Importantly, the four identity perspectives are not separate categories. They interrelate as an individual chooses to emphasize one view of identity or another as they “negotiate or contest how their traits are seen (by themselves and others)” (Gee, 2001). These identity views also intersect with Discourses and cultural models such that being seen as a member of an affinity group or institution, or particular kind of person (e.g. charismatic) may rely on particular Discourses or cultural models, thus complementing the previous analysis. The theoretical concepts of identity introduced here are mapped out in Fig. 1.

The following analysis considers the content of their narratives about CBL and identifies the aspects of identity which they reflected on in their narratives about CBL. Differentiating these three identity views helps us to examine different ways that identities are formed and sustained. An important feature distinguishing I- and A-identity from D-identity aspects is the formers’ reliance on ideological belief systems that help define social group identities and socially accepted group practices (van Dijk, 1998). D-identity, on the other hand, relies upon norms of social interaction or conversational practices. For example, in order to enact an identity as a PDSer, the participants relied on a particular Discourse about teaching and learning — one that emphasized the importance of being involved in the community, which was an accepted practice in this PDS. By evoking this Discourse, or A-identity, in their personal narratives, I suggest that they made the voices of PDS internally persuasive. However, this Discourse, I found, could also be privileged in a way that limited their learning to learn about social justice, whereas, engaging with a D-identity aspect in their community experiences allowed for greater “wiggle room”

![Fig. 1. Teacher identity resources: mapping key theoretical concepts.](image-url)
Evidence of engagement with D-identity in CBL came from all three research participants. For example, when responding to a question I posed (based on previous discussions with PDS students), “how do you not be the great White hope?” (and hence avoid “helperism”), Patrick chose to describe his experience at the Saturday African American School. In his response, he commented “I think a lot about the way you present yourself” and described himself as “just the guy on the floor scrubbing.” This narrative of his community experience stood out from the others because his A-identity (i.e., affinity to the school, Latino community and PDS) was not the most prominent identity aspect, as I noticed in most of his other interviews. Instead, he focused on his D-identity with regards to how he interacted with local community members in order to be recognized in a particular way (i.e., “just the guy”).

Moreover, drawing on this D-identity in CBL seemed to enable him to better negotiate conflicts in his teaching practice. That is, Patrick talked about how working at the Saturday School gave him a new perspective on classroom management strategies, which he learned from observing an “afro-centric curriculum”:

…just getting to watch people teach in different contexts and, I’m picking up little pointers. … It’s just to watch other people do that and realize that even though when I get direct sometimes I think I’m being mean and then no…actually, they’re still happy. They did exactly what they’re doing or what you wanted them to do and now they came to new learning because they’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing. It’s just a good thing. Like, I don’t need to feel so bad.

His D-identity as someone who is learning by observation enabled him to reflect on the ways he could apply what he observed in his future teaching practice. This experience also gave him new insights which helped him negotiate a new perspective on two issues he tended to struggle to merge — keeping kids happy (part of a “community” Discourse) and supporting academic learning (part of an “academic” Discourse).

Sam also engaged with this D-identity work in her community-based learning, particularly the time she went to an African American church service. In her final interview, Sam referred to this experience as her “biggest learning” experience and reflected on what it was about this that made this experience unique:

[It’s] things like that where you really are puttin’ yourself in the minority position. Those are always — I don’t even know how it’s a learning experience, it’s just like, you put yourself in someone else’s shoes for a second.

In retelling her experience of attending this church service, she gave an account of the practices she observed, which drew on A-identities of both herself and the people at the church. That is, people at the church were defined in relation to their shared church practices and the ways those practices differed from practices she shared in common with people from her own church. However, the narrative of this experience also expressed feelings of discomfort that related to being “one of maybe seven White people” in the church. This discomfort emerged from not knowing how to present herself in this new situation, for example, not knowing how much to dress up, and feeling “awkward” despite people being “welcoming.”

As the above quote suggests, it was her engagement with D-identity that made this her “biggest learning” experience. Sam’s narratives, however, did not elaborate on how this experience of being in a minority position could inform her teaching, such as by enhancing her ideological awareness of the wider (racial) social order and the socializing role of schools (Bartolome, 1998). Instead, she told me about how she would like to incorporate music in her future lessons, having seen how engaged the young people were in singing and dancing during the church service. In other words, although her narratives of the CBL experience reported on her engagement with her D-identity, she privileged an academic Discourse and her A-identity when reflecting on her teaching practice.

Aerykah’s narratives suggested a potential way pre-service teachers may directly link CBL (mediated by D-identity) to teaching, providing further insight on what it means to learn from CBL. In one narrative reflecting on her CBL experience, she commented that by developing relationships with students and their families one-on-one, such as home visits, she “learned how to listen to people more effectively.” She found this skill in listening to be useful in parent—teacher conferences where she learned “how to take whatever my values are and put them aside and really identify what this conversation is about, what these parents want for their child.” By really listening, she could then take this information “back to what I and Standards [state curricula] and the school see as a direction for this kid.” In her final semester, she decided to do more things in the local community, everyday things like her grocery shopping. She spoke of the community experience as her “being present in the community,” but not in a bid to express her I-identity as a teacher or establish her A-identity as someone engaging in the shared struggles, but as someone who, by being there, was part of the community.

Gee’s identity views (Gee, 2001) help us to conceptualize a significant resource in learning and enables us to focus on one particular identity view — D-identity — that mediates pre-service teachers’ learning from community experiences in particular ways. Aerykah’s D-identity as a listener, for example, seemed to mediate her negotiation of ‘community’ and ‘academic’ Discourses so that they both were internally persuasive, rather than privileging one or the other. Aerykah expressed a purpose for community-based learning as “to find out where my kids are” in “this web of people being connected together,” yet also noted her own struggle with being able “to recognize myself in that, as well” and to “not feel like a burden.” The analysis suggests that CBL can provide opportunities to engage with the kinds of identity struggles and negotiations that are so central to becoming a teacher (Alsup, 2006).

6. Discussion: which road to social justice?

The learning challenge for these PDS pre-service teachers concerned with social justice is successfully negotiating “academic” and “community” Discourses to be meaningful and to confront conflicts dialogically rather than by privileging one Discourse over another. CBL offers a potentially new set of resources for pre-service teachers engaging in this identity negotiation. That is, CBL can allow for engagement with an aspect of identity that is typically overshadowed by group-affinity identities; this other aspect of identity emphasizes how one acts and interacts with others. Engaging with D-identity in CBL, however, does not necessarily mean that a pre-service teacher will then translate what they learned from CBL into social justice teaching practices. To explain what I mean by this requires explicit reflection on the meaning of social justice and an exploration of the relationship between social justice and the learning processes described above.

Fraser’s (1997) matrix of social justice helps to unpack the cultural models of social justice that are both informing learning and are learned by these pre-service teachers in their journeys to becoming teachers, in negotiating Discourses. My aim here is to show how D-identity supports a model of social justice that Fraser has presented as best able to attend to the complexities of social justice. The complexities that Fraser identifies are reduced, for
analytic purposes, to typology which establishes one dimension of social justice in terms of whether the approach is affirmative or transformative.

For example, in the Saturday school experience described above, Patrick drew out implications of this experience for his future teaching – an approach which would affirm and recognize culturally-informed ways of learning (and being taught). Sam's learning also inferred an affirmative recognition approach to social justice, such as in her account of her African American Church experience. In describing the sermon as “so much music based" she reflected on the value of this for her teaching:

I'm getting to see like where they're coming from and like how important it is in their life and [Val: yeah] and where all this music comes from...

Common to both these approaches to social justice is the act of affirming cultural differences.

A problem with affirmative approaches is that without a transformative angle, even attempts to redistribute or reallocate goods across sectors of society may still affirm the “liberal welfare state" and other ideologies, such as a color-blind ideology, which reproduce existing social relations. For example, Sam's concern for the child who has to change schools two weeks before the end of the school year did not challenge stereotypes of "people like them." Patrick's caring and supportive approach to help parents play the field (e.g. interpret school policies), given a social context that constructs unequal power relations (Bourdieu, 1977), may also still affirm status quo relations if his actions are interpreted by others as "helperism". This suggests that forms of "misrecognition" (Bourdieu, 1977) entailed by even well-intended actions need to be explicitly acknowledged and resisted: Patrick's act of being "just the guy" scrubbing the floor may be one example of this form of resistance and recognition.

As Fraser (1997) argues, affirmative approaches have limitations in terms of their potential for furthering social justice if they do not transform the social systems that support inequality. To address systemic inequalities, a transformative approach is needed (Fraser, 1997): social justice which is transformative and redistributive can restructure the relations of production. Transformative recognition differentiates social identities, such as racial identities, and involves destabilizing those identities through deconstructive practices. In terms of social justice teacher identities, approaches which affirm diversity and cultural responsiveness need to be reformulated to be more deconstructive and address the deep structure of "relations of recognition".

The current analysis suggests that D-identity, which enables reflection on the ways an individual situates himself or herself in the community learning experience, can support opportunities for dialogic negotiations of Discourses. This dialogic approach means engaging with and confronting inner contradictions rather than privileging one or the other; the analysis showed ways in which this dialogic negation was mediated by a discursive or interaction-based perspective on identity. This conceptualization of identity development as dialogic parallels a possible way of conceptualizing transformative practices in social justice education. That is, rather than privileging a particular Discourse (or group of students), a teacher would encourage his/her students to negotiate Discourses, which would sometimes mean reflecting on tensions between competing Discourses.

An example from one of Aerykah's narratives about her teaching practicum illustrates this parallelism. The story was about a lesson in democracy that emerged after she and her cooperating teacher abstained from saying the American Pledge of Allegiance. In this narrative, she held her cooperating teacher in high regard for the risks he took in raising the topic of racism with his students by asking them to consider together why someone would refrain from saying the Pledge. She described the "fascinating conversations" and in the process double voiced (Wortham, 2001) her cooperating teacher in a way that suggests this Discourse of challenging racial ideologies was internally persuasive for her:

“Ok what about this last part, ‘equity, freedom for everyone.’ Is the country free and equal for everyone?” and the kids finally, one of the kids said “no some people are rich and some people are poor and that’s not fair" and we were like, "this is a great point." “Ok so maybe people don't really think the country's fair"... And then [teacher], I was so proud of him, he's like, “what about racism?” And the class was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. And what was interesting is that those White kids, I swear to you, the White kids put their hands on the desk and stared at their hands, totally mortified. And the three, there were three Black girls in the class and all of ’em looked like [ready] "We, ok--" And they did, they were like, “I know racism...”

She concluded the story by saying what the experience also taught her about how kids “come in with other people's stuff on them.” The term “other people's stuff” in this context referred to racism (given surrounding co-text referring to students' cultural experience of a racist system). Although this may not transform larger economic systems, the relations of recognition in this classroom were momentarily altered. This destabilization allows for the possibility of negotiation and restructuring of social meaning-making.

7. Conclusions

Learning to be a teacher is a complex process, which for the sake of this analysis has been examined in terms of identity development and a process of making socio-culturally and historically formed Discourses one's own. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of negotiating the "voices" or genres offered a frame within which to explore the development of social justice teacher identities, whereby learning to be a "culturally relevant" educator (Ladson-Billings, 2001) and to "walk the road" of social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2004) entails the negotiation of Discourses. Gee's (2001) distinction between identity aspects offered conceptual tools to better understand the ways identity can mediate learning. This analysis then provided insights into learning and identity in the context of community-based learning and social justice approaches to education.

If teacher education is about supporting individuals in becoming a certain kind of teacher, then ways of engaging the self in the learning process matters (Wenger, 1998). Teacher education that is designed with this in mind can draw on this analysis in several ways. Firstly, teacher education would have as one of its aims the goal of enabling identity negotiations. This means explicitly challenging the uncritical habits of mind that King (1991) refers to as "dysconscious racism." Secondly, learning would involve critical reflection on personal narratives, a strategy included in many teacher education programs (e.g. Gomez, 1996). Reflection would mean questioning the ways Discourses are negotiated or privileged. The aim would be to open up possibilities for transformative social justice approaches in which socially constructed identities, Discourses and ideologies are destabilized and deconstructed. Thirdly, pre-service teachers would ideally have opportunities to engage with D-identity in the course of their education and training. The study showed ways that identity-in-practice can mediate learning and the negotiation of Discourses that define what it means to be a social justice teacher. When a D-identity aspect was central to the learning experience, community-based
learning became a process of learning to learn about communities not just for their cultural dimensions and supporting identification with group identities, but also in relation to critical considerations for ways of self-positioning in interactions with others. D-identity was identified as a type of identity view that mediated learning in ways that could enable transformative social justice.

The analysis presented here can be seen as offering a set of conceptual tools that could support pre-service teacher’s reflective practice (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In particular, reflective journal pieces on CBL could be analyzed for an implied identity view or views. Aerykah illustrates an example of what could be interpreted as engagement with D-identity when she describes her community experiences as:

I learned places where I feel really uncomfortable like I learned um that it’s really hard for me to just to cold go up to a parent and say I know your kid, great to meet you. And beyond that it’s really hard for me... I just don’t know how to be appropriate all the time and I want to be appropriate and then I recognize too that my appropriate is not going to be everybody’s appropriate. So I’ve learned how to make mistakes. And how to be as neutral as possible and how to be as sensitive as possible so I could try and fit in but also understand that I’m not going to fit in everywhere.

My argument is that notions of D-identity need to be part of cultural storylines or cultural models about what it means to engage in CBL if the goal is to support teachers in the process of negotiating Discourses. D-identity may also be a valuable concept to invoke in cultural models of what it means to be a social justice teacher.

As Thompson argues, a necessary part of social justice activism, especially for White European-Americans who are typically positioned in privileged positions (Frankenberg, 1993) is to performatively try on new assumptions (Thompson, 2003). The ultimate value of engagement with D-identity lies with the potential it offers individuals to temporarily step away from their group-affinity (and ideological) identities for a moment, to allow for the negotiation of potentially conflicting ideologies, cultural models and identities. As Aerykah suggested, community-based learning can provide the space and time in which to re-position oneself, or negotiate multiple identities on the way to becoming a “community teacher.” (Murrell, 2001) Thus, one final implication is that becoming a teacher would be recognized widely as an ongoing process that involves moments of instability and uncertainty. The aim of community-based learning should be to afford pre-service teachers a new perspective on self by mentally orientating one’s identity away from group affinities and instead reflecting on one’s interac-tionally-acknowledged identities. Providing pre-service teachers support and the cultural resources to enable critical dialogue, reflection and identity negotiation would not emerge from community experiences and community-based learning alone, but would necessarily be part of a coherent teacher education program (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Michael Olneck for guiding me through the research project from conception to completion; Mary-Louise Gomez for her encouragement throughout the research process and for being my resource for all things related to narrative inquiry and Bakhtin; Ken Zeichner for his expertise on teacher education and for introducing me to community-based learning; and Pauline Whelan, Pauline Davis and the reviewers for their critical commentary. Finally, I am grateful to the participants who gave their time and energy to meet with me, offered their critical comments on earlier drafts and who made this project possible.

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