

A Teacher-Educator Uses Action Research to Develop Culturally Conscious Curriculum Planners

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Abstract

Experienced teachers need to have opportunities to discuss and plan curriculum in ways that meet the academic needs of a demographically changing student population. According to the experienced teachers in this study, these opportunities did not occur in their teaching environments or in their teacher preparation courses. Moreover, the literature on multicultural education supported the experienced teachers' claims. To address the problem of the lack of opportunities to discuss and plan a multicultural curriculum, a teacher educator used a self-study approach to experiment with action research as a way to change her own curriculum to be multiculturally based.

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BECAUSE OF THE increase in the number of culturally diverse students in many schools in this country, scholars and teacher-educators suggest that multicultural education or culturally responsive teaching needs to be a part of the curriculum. Gay (2003) suggests that deliberately planning a multicultural curriculum gives reality and relevance to that curriculum, transforming it into one that is representative and inclusive and, more important, promotes higher student achievement. Multicultural education has the capacity to challenge the dominant culture's standards-based definitions of curriculum and give teachers awareness—a cognizance of and sensitivity to ethnic cultures, or a cultural consciousness—when planning curriculum. However, Stanley (1995) notes that the few studies that have been conducted on infusing multicultural education in teacher-education courses show that those efforts to infuse multicultural education have had little effect in changing attitudes and teacher practice. After Stanley's article was published, other researchers wrote articles criticizing teacher education programs and teacher-educators for not using multicultural issues and themes to prepare preservice and inservice teachers to work in ethnically diverse school settings (See Ukpokodu, 2007). Weilbacher (2012) claims that after multicultural issues of ethnic, gender, and class identities appeared in professional standards, the discourse on diversity in college classrooms began to disappear.

When teacher-educator courses lack multicultural substance or fail to address or respond in context to teachers' concerns about diversity, teacher-educators send the message that they fear broaching issues of equity, equality, race, class, and gender in their college courses (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008; Stanley, 1995). Sometimes teacher-educators avoid discussing different cultures in teacher preparation courses because multicultural education is a topic about which they are not well informed or which they view as politically motivated (Ukpokodu, 2007). Ukpokodu's 2007 article is a comprehensive critique of teacher-educators' "conservative ideologies and programs that are Eurocentric and monocultural" (p. 9). She argues that the lack of knowledge and interest in multicultural education causes teacher-educators to socialize preservice and experienced teachers toward the status quo. She articulates the need for change in teacher preparation programs because preservice teachers do not feel prepared to teach in urban schools.

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Vescio, Bondy, and Pockert (2009) support the notion that teacher-educators need to be multiculturally oriented. They claim that a gap exists between two different populations, that is, between White, female, middle-class teachers and those diverse students they serve. Further, they argue that the multicultural teacher-education literature can “help future teacher educators cultivate the strategies and habits of mind necessary for preparing culturally responsive teachers” (p. 5). In a case study, Sleeter (2009) describes how her multiculturally infused coursework prepared a White, female graduate student for culturally responsive teaching. Before she began her discourse about the study, Sleeter asks a critical epistemological question: “How does teachers’ thinking about curriculum develop in the context of teacher education coursework” (p. 3)? Thus, to answer the question and the call that scholars make about preparing culturally responsive teachers, I decided to use two features of action research—risk and reflection—to guide the process of changing the coursework in my curriculum to help experienced teachers reshape their views of curriculum.

Action Research, Teachers, and Teacher-Educators

The earliest studies on action research originated with Collier and Lewin and their colleagues in the 1940s and 1950s (McKay, 1992). They defined the term *action research* to mean a process that uses collaboration and collective problem solving to change organizations and environments. Some authors describe action research as a cyclical process—planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and replanning. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), well-known authors of action research, note:

The stages overlap, and initial plans quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from experience. . . . The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have strong and authentic sense of . . . the situations in which they practice. (p. 595)

The action research process is also described as having political, social, collaborative, situated, self-reflective, and risk-taking features (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Risk taking and self-reflection were the two features of interest to me. Winter (1996) describes action research as risking disturbance, “which is an understanding of our own taken-for-granted processes and willingness to submit them to critique” (p. 14). He states that researchers need to take risks, which may mean exposure to refutation, but also may mean a possibility of transformation. Other scholars (Haley & Wesley-Nero, 2002; Lee & Barnett, 1994; McKay, 1992; Miller & Pine, 1992) also discuss risk taking as a part of action research, claiming that taking risks requires teachers and teacher-educators to analyze their teaching practices in order to move away from those preferred and sometimes traditional practices—stepping outside that comfort zone. The other feature of interest was self-reflection. Carr and Kemmis (1986) assert that action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry that allows the participants to understand their practice within a social justice framework (p. 162). They also note that social practices like action research “are risky enterprises” (p. 165). Thus, risk and

self-reflection are two features of action research that guided this self-study.

Action research did not gain much traction in the public schools until the 1980s. The more teachers experimented with action research, the more they regarded it as a research process that reconstructs their own knowledge and connects that new knowledge with the “wider issues of curriculum, teaching, and reform” (Neapolitan, 2000, p. 7). In many cases, action research enabled teachers to build student knowledge by creating an environment in which students have choices and become decision makers (Neapolitan, 2000). In other words, teachers found action research to be professionally and instructionally informative.

While K–12 teachers embraced action research, teacher-educators regarded action research as lacking an academic tone and rigor (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McKay, 1992). They argued that social disengagement made research more scientific, and that intellectual freedom, research, and teaching were more important than responding to the needs of people outside of the academic environment (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). However, some teacher-educators conducted studies that showed action research was used effectively and rigorously at the college level with preservice teachers (Burbank, 2003; Haley & Wesley-Nero, 2002; Martin, 2005; Penney & Leggett, 2005; Tormey & Henchy, 2008). Stanley (1995), who also used action research with preservice teachers, says, “Action research should be viewed as a flexible method for teacher educators. . . . It is a guide rather than a prescription for improving practice and the conditions under which the practice occurs” (p. 29). Neapolitan (2000) and Martin (2005) not only concur with other scholars who argue that action research improves teacher practice but also report that their preservice teachers developed and implemented action research projects that help those teachers understand the worlds of people who are different from them. The projects developed in Martin’s (2005) course help preservice teachers understand “how their perceptions of social class have the potential to influence their ability to effectively educate students” (p. 12). When these two teacher-educators assigned action research projects to their preservice teachers in the methods courses, the teachers became professionally competent and culturally conscious.

In sum, scholars have called for teacher-educators to extend their efforts to infuse multicultural education into their coursework, especially since multicultural issues and themes are becoming a part of the standards and thus disappearing from college coursework. Some teacher-educators have responded to the call and embraced action research, assigning action research projects to preservice teachers to help them develop professional and cultural competencies for the real world. However, only a few teacher-educators have examined their own curricula to determine whether or not they are inclusive, instructive, reflective, and representative of differing cultural points of view. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine my curriculum planning course through action research and then infuse multicultural themes and activities in ways that influence how experienced teachers conceptualized curriculum.

Contextual Orientation

For eight weeks I taught a required three-credit curriculum planning course in the school of education to 17 master's-level students at a predominantly White, small, private, Midwestern college. White females and experienced teachers practicing in K–12 school systems in and around a large Midwestern city were the majority of the students in the course. As a Black former teacher and administrator in this Midwestern city's school district, I had spent years observing and interacting with quite a few teachers, regardless of race, who did their best to adhere to the multicultural education principles of social justice and equity and who infused them into their curriculum. These teachers did more than include renowned people of color, diverse food, and cultural activities in the curriculum. They practiced curriculum integration (see Beane, 1991, 2005), using concepts like peace, poverty, and politics; philosophies like world-as-community; and processes like student inquiry as the foundation of their curriculum. Student inquiry is allowing students to ask and answer a question like, why does violence happen in my neighborhood? However, I also interacted with many teachers in this particular school district who appeared to struggle with understanding multicultural education. This struggle was an indicator that conversations about multicultural education seldom happened in this Midwestern school district. Knowing that these conversations seldom occurred in these school systems I felt a certain degree of anxiety about teaching this curriculum planning course because teaching it in a multicultural way would be a major departure from the way my predecessor taught the course, which was in the lecture tradition and from a historical perspective. Administration officials could give me a possible reprimand.

Of the small number of teacher-educators teaching master's-level education courses at the college, I was the only Black one. Ladson-Billings (2000) expresses the personal and professional struggles upon which teacher educators of color reflect while searching for appropriate and meaningful ways to affect an equitable education for children. She writes that the "work of scholars of color who have taken on the task of turning a critical gaze on the dominant paradigms" is important (p. 270). She adds that the multiple-consciousness perspectives that scholars of color have adds to knowledge production and social critical thought (p. 271). Would my heritage and the cultural curriculum path I decided to take be troublesome for me and to the college (see Hayes & Juárez, 2012)? In my view, the experienced teachers in my course and I needed to exchange ideas and thoughts about multicultural issues like race, class, and gender that might arise in their classrooms. Collegiality and collaboration are considered essential features of action research. While I had friendly relationships with my White colleagues, I seldom saw them to discuss aspects of my course—whether infusing multicultural issues in the course would be effective and whether experienced teachers would respond to culturally oriented curriculum in positive ways. Hence, any collegiality and collaboration would be with the experienced teachers and not with my teacher-educator colleagues.

While a number of action research scholars value collaboration and building communities of researchers, they also say that action

research could begin small, "working through changes even a single person (myself) can try" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 24). Ross and Bondy (1996) concur, saying that "some of our learning must come through self-study" (pp. 51–52). Teaching in a situation where I had few opportunities to interact with my colleagues meant that the context for this study needed to be framed in what Stenhouse (1975) calls an individualistic, or teacher-as-researcher, approach. Stenhouse says that "effective curriculum development of the highest quality depends upon the capacity of teachers to take a research stance to their own teaching . . . a disposition to examine one's own practice" (p. 156). Thus, my heritage and my multicultural and individualistic approaches, and whatever conflicts were situated therein, would be the context in which I would engage in this self-study.

Two Examples of Theoretical Perspectives on Action Research and Multicultural Education

To begin this self-study, I needed to find scholars who had theoretical perspectives similar to mine. I searched for teacher-educators who purposefully used action research to infuse multicultural themes into their curriculum. Ross and Bondy (1996) and Stanley (1995) were teacher-educators whose curriculum redesigns led to multicultural outcomes for their preservice teachers. They assessed their curricula and discovered that they were not informing and preparing their preservice teachers with multicultural knowledge and understanding. These teacher educators were the pioneers of using action research and multicultural themes to improve their practice while they prepared their preservice teachers to work in a diverse school environment. The differences between their research and mine were that my participants were experienced teachers, instead of preservice teachers; my area of concern was curriculum, instead of a certain course or discipline in a methods course; and I conducted a self-study, instead of collaborating with others.

The purpose of one of Ross and Bondy's (1996) courses was to help preservice students examine the teacher effectiveness research and appropriately apply reflection to their research findings. They used the instructional strategies of critical discussions, teacher modeling, guided practice in reflective thinking, and student writing to assess student thinking (p. 47). In spite of these strategies, their preservice teachers had not developed the analytical skills to evaluate effective teaching. Ross and Bondy modified the course using the same instructional strategies but included other topics for examination, such as equity and student empowerment, student-constructed knowledge, poor and minority students' school failure, the influence of cultural values and behavior on school success, and strategies for teaching multicultural students (pp. 46–47). For these teacher-educators, using action research led them to examine their course within a cultural framework.

Ross and Bondy (1996) claim they learned from this action research experience. They state, "First, and most important, action research provides a vehicle for improving teaching and learning in colleges and universities. Second, teacher educator action research may contribute to our knowledge about how teachers (and teacher educators) learn to teach" (pp. 51–52). They gained insights about concepts they thought they understood, such as the nature of

constructivism and the purposes of reflection. These new insights led them to try new instructional strategies.

Stanley (1995), with the help of her critical friends, conducted a critical-emancipatory action research study that focuses on social justice and equitable education for children. With this perspective in mind, she spent two years developing multicultural course work and field experiences for her physical-education preservice teachers. She was interested in comparing their attitudes with their actions in the field. Stanley assigned field experiences using videotapes to help them measure more accurately their attitudes toward people different from them. When Stanley and the teachers viewed the videotapes, they realized that their behaviors and attitudes toward people different from them were inconsistent. According to Stanley, the teachers wanted to be equitable in their practice, but their attitudes would not allow them to demonstrate those practices. Stanley and her colleagues modified the action plan to ensure that teacher placements occurred early in the teacher preparation program, that field experiences included working with children other than those needing help so that preservice teachers would not develop or perpetuate stereotypes about the culturally diverse child, and that cooperating teachers had a commitment to culturally sensitive teaching.

The changes Stanley (1995) made in her curriculum seemed to benefit her preservice teachers. Stanley cites student comments that indicate that after the course her preservice teachers no longer feared neighborhoods that the news media had stereotyped as ridden with crime, and they expressed anger over the number of Black students sent to timeouts. The preservice teachers critically examined the conflict between how the K–12 students were treated and behaved in their community settings and how they were treated in school. Stanley notes that a “promising mode of analysis for understanding the effectiveness of multicultural efforts has been identified as action research” (p. 25). This teacher-educator changed her curriculum and, in turn, informed her preservice teachers about the realities of teaching culturally diverse students.

The work of Ross and Bondy (1996) and Stanley (1995) illustrates how well action research and cultural studies connect in the higher education environment. These teacher-educators wanted to prepare their preservice teachers for demographic realities and help them teach democratically within those realities. By using action research, these teacher-educators changed their curriculum to help their preservice teachers become culturally aware and culturally sensitive. They theorized that critically examining, reflecting, and then changing the field assignments to be multiculturally oriented would help their preservice teachers think differently about the diverse groups of students they soon would be teaching. Their findings show that their preservice teachers gained an understanding of the roles ethnic culture and their own attitudes and behaviors play in helping students different from them get an equitable education. These teacher-educators also discovered how valuable the action research process is. As Ross and Bondy (1996) state, “Over time, teacher educators conducting action research will create a body of literature about their perspectives and practices” (p. 52). Thus, the theoretical perspectives using action research of Ross and Bondy and Stanley

gave me the framework through which I developed my own theoretical perspective: Using action research to infuse multicultural themes in the curriculum planning course urges experienced teachers to become culturally conscious curriculum planners.

Developing a Research Question

According to Burke (2009), research as inquiry suggests an inquisitive and scholarly activity that investigates, experiments, poses, and answers research questions, confirms theories, and explains relationships between individuals and events. Fischer (2001) supports the notion of research as inquiry. He writes that teacher-researchers “try out new ideas and reflect on their work,” and by doing so “they are able to see themselves as creators of meaning and as theory builders in their own right” (p. 47). Lee and Barnett (1994) address the act of posing questions regardless of the role educators play. They describe questioning as a dance in which the questioner leads and follows and takes cues that, in turn, lead to follow-up questions.

Using the notion of inquiry and the act of questioning, I asked teachers questions about their teaching environments in order to understand the problems they face with implementing a culturally diverse curriculum. They expressed two concerns. They wanted to learn what materials and methods would meet the needs of underachieving students. They said that they did not receive enough information in their methods courses or in the field to help them respond appropriately and sensitively to students’ cultural backgrounds. Another concern was that school district officials contracted with human relations consultants who lectured to them. These experienced teachers felt that this district’s approach was insulting, not informative, and disallowed conversation about ethnic diversity. Given their responses, I concluded that experienced teachers had what Fasching-Varner and Dodo Seriki (2012) call “dispositional commitments” (p. 4). According to these authors, teachers who have this kind of commitment engage in, have some knowledge about, or believe in culturally relevant practices. They also believe in the talents and abilities of students.

Other kinds of questions I asked these teachers during the course were: Who does the officially taught curriculum hurt or help? Why is curriculum taught in an official way? When is it appropriate to discuss the hidden curriculum (e.g., race, class, and gender issues)? How does the hidden curriculum develop an understanding of world issues? What problems in the community and the world can the curriculum address? Where is student inquiry in the curriculum? These were questions I wanted them to think about and try to answer while creating their curriculum integration units. These questions along with their readings reinforce the idea that curriculum is not just *what* and *how* but also *who*, *why*, *where*, and *when* (Lee & Barnett, 1994; Wiles & Bondi, 1998). When curriculum integration teachers ask students about issues and events in the world, they motivate their students to investigate those issues and events. Curriculum inquiry is similar to the ways detectives and journalists do their work—asking probing questions that lead to finding truth. This method of questioning is similar to what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call an active interview, questions guiding and serving more as a

“conversational agenda than a procedural directive” (p. 76), and what Burnaford (2001) describes as “improvisational, yet focused” (p. 62). Our questions and conversations about the lack of multicultural curriculum planning led us to the primary focus of this action research project: How can teacher educators help experienced teachers become culturally conscious curriculum planners?

Implementing the Action Research Plan

PART 1 OF THE PLAN

The action research plan consisted of four parts. The first part was to open this particular semester with questions, instead of a lecture. Since many teachers, teacher-educators, and scholars view the concept of curriculum in different ways and within different philosophical and educational contexts (Gewertz, 2011), I asked this group of experienced teachers to define *curriculum*. Most teachers, even those who worked in ethnically diverse schools, said the term meant state-mandated coursework, subject matter, textbooks, standards, and testing. A few teachers said that *curriculum* meant incorporating multiple intelligences, student learning styles, and the community. I probed further, asking teachers how they would define the term *multicultural curriculum*. Teachers used words like *ethnicity*, *diversity*, and *special education*. In other words, to this group of teachers, *multicultural curriculum* was a course of study about certain people living outside the mainstream. When I asked teachers what they knew about *curriculum integration*—that is, a student-centered approach to solving real-world problems—I heard silence. After listening to these various descriptions of *curriculum* and *multicultural curriculum* and then hearing no comments about *curriculum integration*, I decided, upon reflection, to modify the plan, to ask them to write their descriptions of *curriculum* to help them solidify their thoughts.

At the next class, I asked teachers to write down their definitions of *curriculum* on index cards, which they would review at the end of the course. The purpose of filling out the cards was to help them measure their growth in understanding the importance and value of multicultural curriculum planning. Their written descriptions of *curriculum* included *district-mandated materials*, *standards*, *selected courses*, and *what I teach*. Only 1 of the 17 teachers mentioned a word connected to multicultural education. That word was *diverse*. A review of the comments indicated that these experienced teachers conceptualize curriculum as an organized plan that has a set of materials and resources to support the plan. One student expressed that she was looking forward to solidifying a definition, but guessed it meant a “well-researched and documented learning plan” that aimed at teaching truths.

PART 2 OF THE PLAN

The second part of the plan was to assign multicultural reading material, which the teachers read and discussed throughout the eight weeks of the course. This group of teachers needed to read authors who challenged traditional thinking about curriculum and who discussed the historical, political, economic, racial, and even gender-based ideological influences on curriculum (Apple, 1990). Some well-known and respected authors in multicultural education and democratic teaching were on the required and recommended

reading lists: James Banks, Bill Bigelow, Linda Christensen, Alfie Kohn, Heather Lewis-Charp, Geneva Gay, James Loewen, and Billie Starnes. I also encouraged teachers in this group to read articles from *Rethinking Schools* (<http://rethinkingschools.org>), a journal that features the stories and experiences of teachers working in urban environments. One teacher asked for information on how to subscribe to this journal. The reading materials informed teachers that even the standards could be biased depending on political motivations (Spies, 2004) and that because of the standards movement, the curriculum has become standardized (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005, p. 38).

PART 3 OF THE PLAN

The third part of the plan was implemented in the fourth week of the course and included four activities: examining history books, discussing the banned books list, reviewing the history of multicultural education in the United States since 1950, and filling out the What Do You Know worksheet.

First, the teachers compared the district’s board-approved eighth-grade history textbooks using three criteria: inclusion (who and how many people of color and women are represented?), depth (how many pages are devoted to these two groups?), and perspectives (to what degree are these two groups’ perspectives of an event discussed in the text?). After examining the textbooks, one Asian American teacher found that Chinese Americans were mentioned only as 19th-century railroad builders, and the Japanese were described only as 20th-century internment camp detainees. Grant and Tate (1995) note that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) made a call for the examination of texts for bias in 1939 in a pamphlet entitled *Anti-Negro Propaganda in School Textbooks*. Grant and Tate give a historical overview of the studies conducted and books written about textbook bias, many of which concluded that history textbooks were inaccurate and continued to promote racial stereotypes.

Second, the teachers discussed the list of books school districts around the country had questioned or removed from school libraries and why these districts considered them harmful to children. Judy Blume, J. K. Rowling, Harper Lee, Shel Silverstein, Maya Angelou, and Walter Dean Myers were a few of the authors on the list. Reviewing this list of books, teachers saw how community values influence the degree to which a diverse group of literary works and authors are accepted or not accepted in the curriculum.

Third, we reviewed a timeline of multicultural education in schools since the 1950s, noting how it increased or decreased depending on the politics and events of the time, such as the civil rights movement, wars, (im)migration patterns, and the standards movement.

Fourth, the teachers filled out a What Do You Know worksheet. This worksheet asked them what they knew about certain concepts like democracy, people like Patsy Mink and Marcus Garvey, events like the Tulsa race riots, and groups like Progress for a New American Century (PNAC), an influential conservative think tank. One teacher said that had this been a test, she would have failed. After these exercises, some teachers began critically

questioning their curriculum knowledge base, especially the use of textbooks.

PART 4 OF THE PLAN—PROJECT 1

For the fourth part of the plan, teachers completed two projects. Assigned in the sixth week of class, the first project asked teachers to interview someone they considered a curriculum expert. The purpose of this assignment was to give them an opportunity to find out how their fellow educators conceptualized *curriculum*. They were to ask these experts at least five questions related to curriculum or curriculum planning. Two of the questions had to be on how the experts defined *curriculum* and to what degree multicultural curriculum was a part of their curriculum planning. The teachers could ask follow-up questions. The interviewees' names and school districts would be kept confidential.

In the next class, the teachers reported their findings. Some of the curriculum experts they interviewed were veteran teachers, curriculum directors, learning coordinators, principals, and superintendents. The data the teachers gathered and analyzed were used for class discussion purposes only. One teacher said that she interviewed her former grade-school superintendent, who still lived in the small Southern town where she grew up. When asked how he defined *curriculum*, the superintendent expressed helplessness over his inability to make changes in the curriculum due to inadequate funding but also said that the "government sets the curriculum." He directed his teachers to "teach to the test" and to use computers to teach English to the Spanish-speaking student populations. The teacher was disappointed that this superintendent viewed curriculum as testing but added that this attitude is reality for the people who live in that small Southern town.

Like that teacher, other teachers reported that their interviewees also said that *curriculum* meant "testing" and that the testing requirements of the new federal legislation interfered with curriculum planning and took time away from the academics. Although only a few of the interviewees mentioned the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) by name, most of them indicated that they felt pressured to comply with the new law and school district administrators' directives to show increased test scores. They felt that this new federal mandate forced them to make testing an integral part of how they viewed the term curriculum.

While some interviewees defined *curriculum* as "testing," other interviewees defined curriculum as standards. One interviewee said that since the standards were put in place, "teachers have no true control over curriculum" and that now *curriculum* meant "keeping order." Even though these interviewees wanted more time to plan a curriculum they thought students would like, they felt compelled to follow state standards. Interestingly, a private school teacher said her school was not required to follow state standards, so teachers could develop the curriculum as they saw fit. They did so with parent input, which the school valued.

In sum, most interviewees viewed testing and standards as integral parts of the definition of *curriculum*. They said the standards movement and NCLB, with its focus on testing, influenced the way in which the experts defined *curriculum*. According to the experienced teachers' interviews, the interviewees felt some

pressure to follow school officials' directives to increase test scores and adhere to state standards in order to feel comfortable in their work settings and keep their jobs. After listening to the results of the interviews, a few teachers expressed a sense of disbelief at the degree to which standards and testing had permeated the way *curriculum* was defined, developed, and delivered. Interestingly, these teachers did not comment on how similar their definitions of *curriculum* were to those of their interviewees. Upon reflection, I realized the missed opportunity here, that I should have asked teachers to compare their curriculum paradigms with those of people they considered experts.

PART 4 OF THE PLAN—PROJECT 2

On the last day of class, the teachers, in their table groups, planned an integrated curriculum unit. This activity took three hours to complete. Before they began, the teachers reviewed the questions I asked earlier—when is it appropriate to discuss the hidden curriculum (e.g., race, class, and gender issues)? what problems in the community and the world can the curriculum address? where is student inquiry in the curriculum?—and I reviewed how these questions can be answered through the curriculum integration approach and can meet multicultural education goals. I also asked them to think about and discuss the exercises and the readings and how they could use these experiences and the topics therein—such as race, class, gender, equality and equity, and historical dishonesty—to construct their curriculum.

Since each table group included teachers from various grade levels and disciplines, contributions to the unit would be representative. Here is one example of a unit and how it came about: On newsprint, the teachers drew a figure resembling a spider's web. In the center of the web, they placed the word *money*. Each radius was labeled with *poverty*, *health*, *education*, or *wealth*. Underneath *wealth*, the teachers wrote, Who has the most money, why, and how did they get it? They wrote questions for the other concepts, sometimes composing them in ways that linked one concept with another (e.g., why do poor people have poor health? how is poor health related to educational success?). After brainstorming other concepts and questions in this manner, they created activities, which they wrote around or within the web's outer circle. For example, they thought their students could write a newspaper article or create a skit comparing how wealthy people made their money with how migrant farmers made theirs. This kind of activity fostered higher-order thinking skills, met the state's standards, and met the criteria for an integrated curriculum in several content areas like language arts, math, social studies, art, and music. This unit was titled Show Me the Money. The titles of other units were Conflict and Immigration Is US.

Results of Implementing a Teacher-Educator's Multicultural-Based Curriculum

At the end of the course, I returned the index cards to the teachers. I asked them to review those first definitions of *curriculum* and then compare them with their current definitions about the term *curriculum*. As Table 1 shows (see Table 1 in the Appendix), the revised responses differed from the original responses.

In the revised responses, the teachers defined *curriculum* as “questioning,” “integrated curriculum,” “economic considerations/diversity,” “multicultural,” “biases,” and “the world.” Two teachers retained their definitions of *curriculum* as a “road map,” but one teacher added “multiculturalism” and “learning styles,” and the other said that curriculum had a “much broader definition.” One teacher said, “Over the time of this course my views on curriculum have greatly broadened.” The theme of learning styles appeared in the comments of two other teachers, one who said, “Curriculum is meaningful instruction and activities that cross all cultural divides, learning styles, and abilities,” and the other who said that curriculum “should meet the needs of a diverse population of students who may have different learning styles.” Three teachers used the words *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *how*, and *why* in their revised definitions. One teacher specifically stated, “If you go back to the Latin, curriculum is a race course, but we need to think about *who* is racing, *how* they race, *what* they race with, *where* they are racing, *when* they race, and *why* they are racing in the first place.” These comments are evidence that the teachers began thinking differently about curriculum.

The revised responses these teachers gave indicated willingness to question and reshape the definition of *curriculum* to become a concept with which they could understand and accept. As one teacher said, “I have learned to look critically at what is taught and what is not.” These responses also showed that they began to view curriculum as more than state-mandated content and textbooks and as more of a way to include student inquiry, world points of view, and project-based activities. From these results, I concluded that these experienced teachers did not solidify their concept of curriculum to the depth and complexity that some democratically oriented, multicultural curriculum scholars have, but at least they began to modify their definitions to include concepts that they had not considered before.

Discussion

To review, the purpose of this study was to examine my curriculum planning course through action research as I infused multicultural themes and activities in ways that would influence how experienced teachers conceptualized *curriculum*. The results were that the teachers modified their definitions, expanding their original definitions and descriptions to include a cultural view. Through the action research process, which helped me revise my curriculum, these experienced teachers had the capacity and willingness to view curriculum differently. This finding came about through various pathways: questioning teachers about their work environments, recognizing teachers’ dispositions, taking risks, carefully selecting readings and activities, and reflecting on my own struggles, all of which are discussed in this section. The limitations and the importance of the study are also discussed.

THE FINDINGS AND THE LITERATURE

Early in the course, the teachers expressed that when they inquired and requested knowledge about diversity in the classroom, the district responded with a human relations and lecture approach. They also said they did not receive enough information in their

methods courses or in the field to help them respond appropriately and sensitively to their students’ cultural backgrounds. Their concerns support the literature that suggests preservice teachers receive inadequate teacher preparation in the area of multicultural education in their courses (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008; Stanley, 1995; Ukpokodu, 2007; Weilbacher, 2012). Given these feelings about the district and methods coursework, this group of experienced teachers needs to be recognized for the willingness to participate in the activities I provided. The teachers’ response to these activities supports what Fasching-Varner and Dodo Seriki (2012) say about teachers having dispositional commitments toward culturally relevant practices. After engaging in the activities, the teachers made their own discoveries. For example, one White teacher said that after completing the What Do You Know worksheet, she felt she had a lack of ethnic cultural knowledge, and the Asian American teacher discovered that the history textbooks did not treat Asian Americans fairly. One teacher wanted to subscribe to a certain journal that features teachers’ stories about teaching in urban schools. The experienced teachers’ dispositions worked in my favor—reducing some fear or apprehension I had about whether or not these activities would be successful.

Literature (Lee & Barnett, 1994; McKay, 1992; Miller & Pine, 1990; Winter, 1996) supports the nature of risk, an action research feature. Risk is a behavior that these authors encourage as part of an educator’s growth. Abandoning the lecture method was a risk because this method is part of my college’s tradition and that of my predecessor. Changing the content of my own curriculum to a culturally oriented one was a risk as well also because of my predecessor’s historical approach. Discussing the work of multicultural authors was an important conversation to have with teachers, but it had to be done without giving the impression that they were ignorant of multicultural literature or that they might possess intolerance or prejudice toward students of color. Assigning the textbook bias activity was a necessary risk because the teachers needed to understand the historical dishonesty about people of color and women in the texts they might be using (Grant & Tate, 1995). Even though working toward a culturally oriented curriculum might have been a risk too great for these teachers in their practice because of district anxieties about standards and test scores, I found that carefully and appropriately infusing cultural themes in my curriculum planning course was a worthwhile risk for me to take.

The second action research feature I used was reflective questioning, which is also supported in the literature (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Lee & Barnett, 1994; Ross & Bondy, 1996). Throughout the course, I asked myself questions about abandoning traditions, about the kinds of questions I should ask the experienced teachers, and about the influence my heritage might have on the success of the action research plan. I probably was the first and only Black teacher-educator these experienced teachers had had as an instructor. Given this assumption, I struggled with other questions. I wondered whether I should go forth with infusing multicultural education in the course, and whether I could handle any consequences from doing so, either from disagreeable teachers or from the college administration.

These questions support the literature, which discusses the struggles that teacher-educators of color have (Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2000) mediating internal conflicts in their teaching environments. Thus, practicing reflective questioning required that I (a) continually questioned my commitment to the action research plan and (b) presented teachers with meaningful questions and activities about which they could discuss multicultural-based issues comfortably. Like risk, reflective questioning became an important part of my curriculum planning course redesign.

LIMITATIONS

The first limitation of this study was that since I was the only teacher-educator teaching curriculum planning at this college, I was not able to collaborate with other teacher-educators in the curriculum field to implement the action research plan. By not discussing the plan, the readings, or the results of the plan with others in the field, I did not have the benefit of their suggestions for improvement. The second limitation was the teacher-researcher role. After reflecting on my role, I felt I played the teacher role more than the researcher role. Because of my teacher preparation habits (i.e., preparing lecture notes and the activities, getting technology ready, and evaluating written assignments), I did not record students' remarks in detail and I did not probe enough. My field notes were sketchy. For example, I should have asked teachers more questions about their experiences with their district's lack of professional development opportunities regarding cultural diversity. I should have asked them about the ways they educated themselves about cultural diversity. Even though I had data sources like responses on index cards, assignment sheets, a syllabus, student papers, and projects, which showed the development of my multicultural-based curriculum, my data collection methods still limited my analysis. If I could plan my action research project with what I know now, I would include my writing daily in a journal, having the teachers write about how the readings and exercises impacted their views of curriculum, or asking the teachers for interviews. These data collection methods might have provided more evidence to support my theory, which essentially was that multicultural education and action research can work in tandem to change teaching philosophies and practices. In this case, a teacher-educator and experienced teachers together became culturally conscious curriculum planners.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

In spite of the limitations, this self-study is important because, first, no literature is current or available that discusses how teacher-educators use action research to redesign their own curriculum to help experienced teachers become culturally conscious curriculum planners. Second, this self-study adds to those theoretical perspectives presented by Ross and Bondy (1996) and Stanley (1995). These teacher-educators experimented with action research, through which they discovered they had to revise their curriculum to include multicultural issues. As a result, they gained new insights into their teaching practice. Third, this study is notable because it shows that when experienced teachers, especially those who are

struggling to meet the academic needs of a diverse student population, are given the opportunity to express their feelings about and experiences with the *limited* learning value of the official curriculum, they will appreciate the *limitless* value of studying curriculum from multicultural approaches. These teachers modified their attitudes about how curriculum is defined, described, and delivered. In the future, they may define *curriculum* as a set of experiences, concepts, and events to be studied in the lives of culturally diverse people and, thus, begin walking down the path to teaching and learning in democratic ways.

Conclusion

Several scholars call on teacher-educators to infuse multicultural content into their courses to prepare preservice teachers to teach culturally diverse students. This call is supported by the remarks from the experienced teachers in the course. They felt that teacher-educators did not prepare them for the real world. They did not like their districts using human relations and lecture approaches to inform them about the needs of their culturally diverse students. The experienced teachers in the course did not want to take the risk of focusing on a multiculturally based curriculum because doing so went against the district's focus on state standards and required testing. To help experienced teachers feel multiculturally knowledgeable and competent while planning curriculum, teacher-educators need to examine their own curriculum to find ways to incorporate issues like race, class, and gender in their coursework so that thoughtful and multiculturally oriented curriculum discourse can occur. Action research has been around for a long time, and the positive effects for classroom teachers and a few teacher-educators are well documented. I suggest that teacher-educators who are apprehensive about infusing multicultural education into their curriculum try the action research approach because of its reflective feature. It is a risky business, but an equitable education for children is at stake.

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Appendix

Table 1. Experienced Teachers' Original and Revised Definitions of Curriculum

Original Definitions	Revised Definitions
My idea of curriculum is meaningful instruction and activities that teach others content and life skills. (AS)	Curriculum is meaningful instruction and activities that cross all cultural divides, learning styles, and abilities, that teach others content and life skills. (AS)
Curriculum—the materials that an educators uses to fulfill the state's educational requirements for his/her students. (BR)	Should meet the needs of a diverse population of students who may have different learning styles. (BR)
Curriculum—the support network that defines what I teach. It has suggestions, definitions, and resources. (CP)	Curriculum (very hard to define): If you go back to the Latin, curriculum is a race course. It is that, but we need to think about <i>who</i> is racing, <i>how</i> they race, <i>what</i> they race with, <i>where</i> they are racing, and <i>when</i> they race, and <i>why</i> they are racing in the first place. (CP)

Table 1. Experienced Teachers' Original and Revised Definitions of Curriculum (*continued*)

<i>Original Definitions</i>	<i>Revised Definitions</i>
The classroom plan and agenda. What a teacher hopes to accomplish with her students including goals, lessons plans, and course preparation. (DO)	I feel I have parts of my definition that still hold true, but I would now add the aspect of integrated curriculum because it is something I feel strongly about. (DO)
Curriculum encompasses all that is taught in the various subjects or areas in a school. (EN)	While my earlier definition is adequate, curriculum also encompasses who, what, where, why, how and when. It is an all-encompassing process of providing education to the students. It includes multicultural issues and integrated curriculum. (EN)
Way of structuring and planning a classroom situation in which to maximize retention and knowledge of students. (FM)	The who, what, when, where, why, and how of an educational situation. The way in which we place value upon what is taught. (FM)
What I teach—the content. (GL)	I still think of curriculum as what I teach, but my depth of understanding of all the components has deepened—history, philosophy, and biases. I have learned to look critically at what is taught and what is not. (GL)
Curriculum is the material, content, and resources that direct and guide instruction. (HK)	Curriculum is more than just the what—it is also the motivation that drives the how, why, when, where. (HK)
The organization or setting of a given school system. It is made up of a number of selected courses to suit the said system. (IJ)	Curriculum for me entails what happens in any given school setting taking in consideration what the students know and don't know. Curriculum also takes in consideration all that happens in a school. It is not static but ever changing. (IJ)
Curriculum—The standards, goals, materials and philosophy used to educate students in our diverse culture. (JH)	Curriculum is not a means to an end. Instead, it is an organized plan to support students as they create meaning for themselves in becoming successful lifelong learners. (JH)
I'm looking forward to solidifying a definition . . . For now, my best guess would be: a well-researched and documented learning plan that aims at teaching truths to the best of our knowledge. (KG)	My definition has changed and I would [add] to my previous definition, social, cultural, economic considerations/diversity and looking at standards (which I've learned are increasingly important and I have mixed feelings about). (I still am trying to solidify a definition—which is great! I know that I'll always be question[ing] the important building blocks of a good curriculum.) (KG)
LF chose not to define at this time.	Over the time of this course my views on curriculum have greatly broadened. I like the definition I got from my C & I director, "Curriculum is anything that involves students." (LF)
Curriculum begins with assessment. The assessment drives instruction. Lessons are designed to meet the needs of the student. We teach students based on where they are now and know where we need to get them based on the standards. (ME)	To have an integrated curriculum rich in learning, questioning, and reasoning. (ME)
Curriculum is the road map of material needed to help students, learn, grow, and develop. (ND)	I still believe it to look like a road map or flight plan where different avenues of planes enter into the plan along the way. For example, standards tests enter in, multiculturalism, learning styles, content—all infuse along the path, none having more influence over the other. (ND)
Curriculum is . . . what is taught. (OC)	Curriculum is . . . what students take away from school. It can include knowledge, skills, and beliefs about the self, the world, and the future. (OC)
Curriculum = road map. (PB)	Initially, <i>road map</i> to me was really just about the what; what is how I thought of curriculum. Now, I still view it as a road map, with a much a broader definition considering the delivery, audience. (PB)
Curriculum = an engaging, organized delivery of a subject based on professional standards or academic peer reviewed standards adhering to a meaningful framework overall. (RA)	Central meaningful questioning, integrated, multicultural, philosophy. (RA)