Building Teacher Empathy and Culturally Responsive Practice Through Professional Development and Self-Reflection

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BUILDING TEACHER EMPATHY AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-REFLECTION

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INTRODUCTION

Today's teachers face growing demands and mandates to support every aspect of a student's academic success, with additional expectations to support students' social and emotional needs in and out of the classroom. This is no simple task as the P-12 student population is increasingly culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse and dispersed across thousands of urban, suburban, and rural classrooms. In the face of increasing student diversity, the teaching pool remains relatively homogeneous, consisting largely of white, European-American educators. As such, the disconnect between the lived experiences of teachers and their students may make it difficult for teachers to value and connect to a diverse student body, and some may even hold stereotypical notions about individuals from diverse backgrounds that they need to overcome (Picower, 2009; Taylor, 2017).

Thus, it is the job of teacher education and professional development programs to prepare teachers with the knowledge, dispositions, and practices to work with diverse students (Conklin & Hughes, 2016). Specifically, pre-service, teacher candidates and in-service teachers need tools for self-reflection and strategies to facilitate and understand the context, culture, and identities of their students within the classroom and society. To that end, this study uses qualitative methods to explore how a collaborative multi-tiered critical professional development model between a non-for-profit organization and a university, shaped educators' thinking about teaching, their students, and their role as change agents. The model (described in more detail in the next section) provides sustained pre- and in-service training in social justice, empathy-building, and culturally responsive pedagogy to help teachers support diverse student groups. In our evaluation of this program, we aim to identify the impacts of this program on teacher practice and the ways teachers repositioned themselves as reflective, empathic, culturally responsive and socially just educators.

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BACKGROUND

The Collaboration described herein was cultivated between a not-for-profit organization, Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO), and a teacher preparation program in a large, private, Midwestern urban university. Facing History and Ourselves is an international professional development provider for teachers that began close to forty years ago. It delivers programming in P-16 educational settings, focused on genocide and collective violence, racial and religious bigotry, and immigration, with the expressed goal of helping

educators understand that "education is the key to combating bigotry and nurturing democracy [and that students must] learn to [combat prejudice with compassion, indifference with participation, and myth and misinformation with knowledge]" (Facing History and Ourselves, n.d.).

The Collaboration (i.e., the partnership with the university and Facing History and Ourselves) spanned a nine year period, and was built upon shared values and mutual respect for supporting educators. From its inception, the Collaboration has had four overarching goals: 1) to innovate the curriculum so that pre-service candidates receive a broader and deeper understanding of the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be successful in their careers; 2) to help pre-service and in-service teachers understand how the past has shaped the present and equip them to cultivate a sense of ethics and a means for acting on their commitments; 3) to create a space for a dialectic exchange of ideas between university faculty and in-service educators in a related field, whereby each organization pushes the other to expand its thinking and programming; and 4) to serve as good intellectual neighbors to the surrounding community by engaging with them in seminars and lectures focusing on issues of public interest such as immigration and racism in today's schools (Wolfinger & Owens, 2016).

The intentional partnership between the University and FHAO was designed to raise awareness around complex social issues and to develop a more humane and informed citizenry through a multi-tiered, multi-pronged approach. Each tier supported learning for key stakeholders along a professional continuum: students, practicing educators, faculty, and community members (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

University and Facing History and Ourselves Collaboration Professional Development and Educational Offerings

	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Instances	Participants Reached
COURSE PRESENTATIONS	*Secondary Education Program	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program *Educational Leadership Program	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program *Educational Leadership Program	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program *Educational Leadership Program	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program *Educational Leadership Program *Special Education Program (Pilot)	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program *Educational Leadership Program	*Secondary Education Program *Elementary Education Program *Educational Leadership Program *Special Education Program	213	3553 Pre-Service Educators
EVENING SEMINARS	*Confronting the Bully: Creating a Safe and Engaging Classroom	*Choosing To Participate - Presentation at FHAO Exhibit at Harold Washington Library *(Fall)* **Building Community:** Creating Safe and Inclusive Classrooms *(Spring)*	*Cyberbullying: Dealing with Cyberbullying in our Educational Communities	*Counselors, Teachers and School Leaders: Working Together to Create Optimal Schools	*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: How History Informs Equitable Education for All Students	* I Learn America: Creating a Culture of Learning in Schools	* American Creed: A Documentary	* Beyond Stonewall: Creating a safe environment for LGBTQ+ students	9	509 Pre-Service Educators
SUMMER INSTITUTES	*Teaching About Race, Difference, and Membership: Little Rock 1957	*Belonging in American Society: An Exploration of Immigration in American History and Its Impact in Our Classrooms	*Young People Changing the World: From the Civil Rights Movement to Our Classrooms	*Holocaust and Human Behavior: Education for Democracy	* The Reconstruction Era and the Meaning of Democracy Race in America	* Ordering America: How the Progressive Era and the Eugenics Movement Shaped Our Society	*The Holocaust and The United States: History, Identity and Religious Freedom	*Freedom Riders and Other Protests	8	297 In-Service Educators
EVENING SPEAKER	*Carlotta Walls LaNier: Lessons from Little Rock: An Evening with a Civil Rights Pioneer	*Sonia Nazario: Immigration in the United States	*Terrence Roberts: The Civil Rights Movement Then and Today	*Ava Kadishson Schieber: Holocaust and Human Behavior	*Steven Hahn: Why Reconstruction Mattered	*Timothy Gilfoyle: A Pickpocket's Tale: George Appo and the Progressive Origins of Eugenics	*Daniel Greene: Americans and the holocaust	*Raymond Arsenault: Building the Beloved Community	7	654 Community Stakeholders

Category									#	Participants
SYMPOSIUM			*Catholic Identity in a Global World	*How Can 21st-Century Colleges of Education Prepare Educators to Build an Informed Citizenry?	*How Can 21st-Century Colleges of Education Prepare Educators to Build an Informed Citizenry?	*How Can 21st-Century Colleges of Education Prepare Educators to Build an Informed Citizenry?	*How Can 21st-Century Colleges of Education Prepare Educators to Build an Informed Citizenry?	*How Can 21st-Century Colleges of Education Prepare Educators to Build an Informed Citizenry?	6	**95 Symposium Participants**
WEBINAR				*Moving Facing History into Teacher Education: Towards Collaboration for Multi-Sited Research on Enhanced Pluralistic Practice *Collaboration Building	*Strategies for Securing Resources to Support Developing a Collaboration with Facing History *Research and Assessment	*Collaboration Building *The importance of Facing History to Educational Leadership Students and Practitioners	*Using Facing History sources in the classroom	*Collaboration Building *Creating a safe environment for LGBTQ+ students	9	**85 University Faculty**
FACULTY DEVELOPMENT	*A Conversation with Facing History and Ourselves (2 seminars)	*A Conversation with Facing History and Ourselves (2 seminars)	*Faculty forums: 1. Educational 2. Leadership, 3. Elementary Education, and Secondary Education Program Faculty *In-depth training: New Collaboration Coordinators	*Planning Meeting for Secondary Education *Seminar: Online Workshop for New Faculty Coordinators	*A Conversation with Facing History and Ourselves: The Reconstruction Era and the Meaning of Democracy	*Faculty Forum: How to Tell Someone They Sound Racist?	*Free Speech and College Campuses		13	**198 DePaul Faculty Members**
SENIOR FELLOWS					*Collaboration Planning Meeting	*Collaboration Planning Meeting			2	**8 Senior Fellows**
PARTICIPANT NETWORK						*Eugenics: History and Today			1	**17 Collaboration Participants**
GRAND TOTAL									**266**	**5,415**

The first tier was designed for students aspiring to be teachers. Multiple tiered course presentations from presenters affiliated with FHAO provided undergraduate and graduate students with the opportunity to learn FHAO content and methodologies while working under the direction of university faculty and FHAO staff. Additionally, college-wide, the Collaboration created and facilitated two-hour evening annual seminars focused on timely issues, such as bullying and the creation of safe and inclusive classrooms. By moving beyond the regular teacher preparation curriculum, these seminars helped students respond to contemporary events by understanding their historical origins and collaborate through interprofessional discussions and small group sessions.

The next tier was designed to meet the needs of in-service educators. The Summer Institute, a three-day intensive professional development seminar, provided in-service educators the opportunity to examine a contemporary issue and its historical roots (e.g., immigration) with the intent to help educational professionals improve their content knowledge and practice within schools. Additionally, Senior Fellows, a select group of in-service educators and Tier 1 Collaboration alumni, participated in professional development in the period under study. The Senior Fellows also served as an advisory board for the Collaboration, helping to co-create annual programming and web-based resources.

Tiered programming was also implemented for university faculty members. An annual symposium brought together faculty from colleges of education to learn more about the Collaboration, examine its values, and discuss how the work of the university partner might be extended to other universities. Additionally, FHAO facilitators provided professional development workshops (e.g., talking to students after an election, etc.) as part of College-Wide faculty meetings. Lastly, an annual evening speaker event brought nationally known experts to campus to present to educators participating in the Summer Institute and also to the broader public about issues of concern in the educational system and larger society. This intentional, targeted and systemic programming created opportunities for engagement at multiple levels within the educational community. Programming at each tier emphasized skills and best practices related to social emotional learning, empathy, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

RELATED LITERATURE

Support for educator learning is essential at all career stages, from preservice teachers through experienced, veteran educators. Prior literature indicates that professional development programs that teach socioemotional competencies, specifically empathy, and culturally relevant pedagogical strategies—the core components of the FHAO model—have historically been effective in helping students connect to diverse student groups. While the development of social-emotional skills is complex, it begins with teacher awareness in order to help students grow in this area. Use of culturally responsive pedagogy has been further demonstrated as essential for teachers to make strong connections between their curriculum and the students in their classrooms.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACROSS TEACHER LIFESPAN

Teacher professional development begins in teacher preparation programs and continues throughout the life span of a teaching career. Pre-service teachers learn their craft through coursework, practicum experiences, and student teaching. In-service teachers may receive a variety of different supports, such as workshops, coaching, or online trainings.

Professional development has three major areas to effect change: 1) in the classroom practices of teachers; 2) in the attitudes and beliefs of teachers; and 3) in the learning outcomes of students (Guskey, 2002). Effective professional development design and delivery require specific components to impact teaching practice. Garet et al. (2001) recommend sustained and intensive professional development, with subject matter content accompanied by hands-on experiences necessary to fully integrate changes in one's practice. They further recommend strategies that involve collective teaching and active learning, such as: observing experts, planning how

to use and implement new curriculum, and leading discussions or making presentations. More recently, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) found effective professional development incorporates most, if not all, of the following elements: professional learning that is content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support and is of sustained duration. Necessary to this process is also the development of teachers' individual capacities for reflective practice and the development of self-knowledge (Sellars, 2012). Teachers need to "…examine their own perspectives on the issues they face critically and analytically" (Sellars, 2012).

Finally, it is critical that professional development is relevant, engaging, and prepares teachers for the field; course content should be linked to current societal issues and to student needs. However, very few states require teachers to take a course on cultural diversity for their teacher accreditation (Akiba et Al., 2010). Taylor (2017 suggests, "… the issue of diversity in US schools requires significant training and experiences for pre-service teachers to recognize the importance of students' socio-cultural, religious values, and the influence their cultural background have in their quest to succeed in their educational endeavors" (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 42). While Sleeter (2011) advises a single course may not fill the gaps to prepare pre-service teachers to understand cultures outside of their own or implement culturally responsive learning strategies, there is agreement that these gaps must be filled in the pre-service teacher's career.

PD FOR SEL SKILLS & EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT

Socioemotional competencies are "the processes by which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage their emotions, to feel and show empathy for others, to establish and achieve positive goals, to develop and maintain positive relationships, and to make responsible decisions" (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 495). Teaching social emotional competencies has been found to favorably impact the development of children's social emotional skills, and, in turn, has resulted in positive academic gains for students (Taylor et al., 2017). Teachers also need these competencies in order to create a safe, caring,

and supportive classroom community (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Jones et al., 2013).

Of particular importance is a teacher's empathy (Warren, 2014). Warren and Goodman (2018) noted that empathy is an efficacious tool for teachers working in multicultural and multiracial educational settings (Carter, 2009; Dolby, 2012) and that it facilitates cross-cultural and cross-racial interactions with students and their families (Peck et al., 2015; Warren 2014; Warren & Talley, 2017). Drawing on Davis (2004) and other scholarship on the construct of empathy, Warren (2014) described empathy as comprised of two domains—the emotional, linked to feelings of compassion for others, and the intellectual, relating to others' psychological perspective in the form of "perspective taking" (Davis, 2004, p. 57). While empathic concern allows one to imagine how others are feeling on an emotional level, it does not extend to understanding students' differences relative to their backgrounds and lived experiences. Rather, perspective taking requires putting aside personal beliefs and assumptions as the precursor to being able to place oneself in another's circumstances. Cultivating empathy framed in terms of perspective taking assists teachers in becoming aware of their unique assumptions and perspectives, and further expands their knowledge of their students' backgrounds.

The development of social and emotional skills has historically focused on developing students' skills with less attention to their development in teachers. Social emotional competencies encompass emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation. Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) suggested training for teachers to develop these skills, proposing schools should integrate practices to build emotional awareness, incorporate reflection into daily practice and create a culture of continuous improvement and learning. Reflection in this context allows teachers to change in order to improve practice and further develop self-knowledge and understanding (Sellars, 2012).

Research on the development and training of teachers in empathy is more complex and not easily studied. The multiple competencies that comprise empathy require training and professional

development to be ongoing and embedded into daily practice (Borba, 2018). However, an overview of previous literature found lack of consistency with empathy definitions, validity/reliability issues, and inconsistent methodologies with limited empirical evidence regarding successful strategies (Bouton, 2016; Lam et al., 2011). Agreement exists that empathy is an essential teacher skill, but how it should be developed remains unclear.

PD FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY DEVELOPMENT

By recognizing students' cultural differences and lived experiences as assets, teachers engage students in purposeful and relevant learning opportunities and generate positive academic gains. Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) represents a body of research that has offered theoretical constructs for understanding the opportunity and achievement gaps between diverse student populations and their more advantaged peers, as well as strategies that can be implemented in the classroom to close these gaps. Drawing upon scholarship (Gay, 2000, 2010, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, & 2014), CRP embodies instruction that makes intentional connections between curriculum and students' cultural backgrounds; challenges Eurocentric frameworks that have historically marginalized diverse communities; and supports cultural awareness and recognition of culturally and linguistically diverse students, their families and communities (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017). As such, teachers who adopt and implement CRP into their practice do so through a sociocultural framework that affirms students' cultural differences, exhibits empathy and understanding to their students' circumstances, understands that learning is socially constructed, and integrates aspects of their students' lives into the teaching and learning process (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Given the changing demographics of today's classrooms, scholars have argued for CRP to be an integral component of teacher education so that teachers understand students' differentiated learning needs in terms of their particular backgrounds and lived experiences, both of which are seen as rich resources, and "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). As Gay (2010) has pointed out, there is a need for teachers who draw on "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of students to make learning encounters [more] relevant and effective for them" (p. 29, as cited in Taylor & Sobel, 2011, p. 6). Teaching strategies that are filtered through students' cultural frames of reference hold great promise for learning opportunities that are engaged and meaningful for diverse students, in particular.

Professional learning designed for culturally responsive pedagogy highlights the role of culture in teacher learning, with consideration for the ways in which educators learn and make sense of their daily practice (King et al., 2009). Research in this area emphasizes how educators' biographies, professional identities and awareness of technical, contextual and critical aspects of education impact professional practice. King et al. (2009) describe four areas for professional learning in CRP to occur: 1) teacher inquiry; 2) learning in a professional learning community; 3) professional learning school; and 4) content knowledge learning to content specific pedagogy. In this vein, Sleeter (2011) distinguished two designs to support teacher growth: a technical-rationale design where experts train teachers, and in contrast, a design that repositions teachers as learners.

SUMMARY

Professional development which begins in pre-service teacher training and coursework, and continues throughout a teacher's career, provides a vehicle for teachers to develop the skills to understand and engage a diverse student body. Developing empathy among teachers may help to create the conditions for care, high academic expectations, and asset-based framings of youth. Moreover, professional development centered on building teachers' awareness of CRP can further position students' cultural differences and lived experiences as assets to the classroom. While there are a number of models for delivering this learning, professional development must create opportunities for authentic learning on the part of the teacher. It must help them make sense of their own identities, culture, and biases so they are more equipped to help their students engage in this critical reflection.

Specifically, literature suggests that knowledge and training that is content focused, delivered over time, and integrated, creates the space for deeper learning and real change in practice, while fostering one's core beliefs and understanding of self.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on critical professional development (CPD) as a lens through which to understand the impact of the partnership and its activities on teachers. The model has its origins in the dialogical practices of Freirian-based community organizing for social justice and broader transformation (Kohli et al., 2015). In contrast to traditional professional development models that are scripted and position teachers as passive recipients of information, CPD is structured to "provoke cooperative dialogue, build unity, provide shared leadership, and meet the critical needs of teachers" (Kohli et al., 2015, p. 4). This framework acknowledges the structural inequities that shape the immediate realities of diverse students outside of school and are integrally woven through the fabric of educational policy and practice. As such, critical professional development opportunities create space for teachers to interrogate their own personal assumptions and develop empathy for others' lived experiences which they are then compelled to model for their students. With an enhanced awareness and understanding of social injustice as it plays out in their students' lives and in schools they have capacity to enact transformative pedagogies oriented for social justice and systemic change (Kohli, 2019). The FHAO Collaboration provided an opportunity to connect components of CPD to transform pre-service and in-service teachers in their understanding and their actions towards a more just society.

METHOD

This exploratory thematic analysis aims to capture how individuals make meaning of their everyday lives as they unfold in particular contextual conditions and the meanings they attribute to real-world experiences (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). Our study was conducted at the university partner site, where programming associated with the Collaboration was delivered to pre-service teachers,

practicing teachers and educators, community members, and alumni and faculty over multiple years through a variety of formats. Prior to the start of data collection, the study was presented to and reviewed by the University Institutional Review Board to ensure ethical compliance. A purposeful sample of six participants, five female and one male, all of whom are Senior Fellows, was recruited through an email invitation to participate in a series of interviews to better understand the impact of this initiative. Participants were selected from a group of Senior Fellows who were nominated by a faculty member for having demonstrated a strong interest in promoting social justice, and who had participated in Collaboration programming. At the time of the study, five of the participating Senior Fellows were employed as educators in the Chicagoland area, and one was teaching in a large urban center on the West coast. The Senior Fellows participated in two, hour-long, semi-structured focus groups (two of the six Senior Fellows were not able to participate in the focus group; consequently, individual phone interviews were conducted with each of them using the same protocol). The first round focus group protocol consisted of four questions and explored the impact of the Collaboration on the participants' teaching and sense of themselves as reflective practitioners (see Appendix A). A second round follow-up focus group protocol, made up of seven questions, further explored how the Collaboration shaped participants' views on the role of empathy within their schools and classrooms and its impact on their commitment to issues of identity, diversity and inclusion (see Appendix B). All focus group sessions and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants.

Senior Fellows also shared a sample of blog posts about their experiences integrating FHAO curriculum, lesson plans, and student engagement with classroom content. Blog post topics included encouraging open discourse in a politically polarizing time, engaging youth from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and methods for addressing anti-bullying and ostracism. Specifically, in the blog postings, Senior Fellows discussed how they were addressing issues of identity, belonging and community within their

classrooms. They detailed specific teaching methods that incorporated FHAO primary sources and classroom strategies that fostered generative conversations, empathy-building and inclusivity. These documents provided further insights into their engagement with core principles of the Collaboration and their emerging development as reflective practitioners and, as such, helped to confirm and strengthen findings.

DATA ANALYSIS

The research team consisted of the first three authors. The data analysis process began by each team member becoming familiar with the data through independently reading the transcripts and collected documents. The documents and transcribed focus group sessions and individual interviews were initially analyzed manually through open coding, where segments of data were assigned initial codes, that is, a word or wording that attributes meaning to the data (Creswell, 2013). The research team then met to share initial codes until consensus was reached. Next, the team conducted lengthy team meetings to create more focused and selective coding that involved the condensing of initial codes into categories that were further clustered until patterns suggested emergent themes across the data (Bailey, 2018; Saldana, 2016). This process was ongoing until data saturation was achieved and new themes no longer surfaced.

FINDINGS

In this section, we unpack three core themes and their implications for educators engaged in critical professional development opportunities.

AUTHENTIC EMPATHY

Our study participants spoke candidly and compassionately about how FHAO professional development activities cultivated their capacity to understand empathy within their teaching practice and ultimately how to model and teach this concept to their students. They described empathy in dynamic terms. As they saw it, empathy was more than understanding; it involved stepping back and honoring the relationship with another through acknowledging their lived experiences. Authentic empathy allowed teachers to obtain first-hand

knowledge of their students so as to engage them in purposeful ways; that is, teachers better understood the classroom from their students' perspectives and how to help their students develop empathy for others. This is reflected in Maria's observation:

> When I think of it [empathy], I think of it more in terms of an active role in a relationship or in a classroom. Just the willingness to try to understand someone else instead of just listening and learning – "oh, that was a rough time for you, or whatever." But actually, um, taking another step back towards taking responsibility for acknowledging someone's pain or experience, and taking a step further than that, acknowledging – "no, I'm never going to know how you feel, but I want to try and understand what you have gone through." So, almost putting yourself in someone else's shoes in a way, I think, is the one way I think of it.

Similarly, Yevette stated:

> [The professional development] really has made me reflective myself. It makes me stop and ask myself, are there other factors that are determining how I am dealing with this subject matter or the situation or even the students. So, do my students perceive me a certain way because of their background, do I perceive them a certain way because of their background, and how can I grab onto that to make sure that the students are receiving an equitable education? So something that really comes to mind is when we did go on a trip to New York, and it is interesting to see how the students are dealing with some of the situations in historical museums or we visit plantations or things like that. So, it really helped me to reflect on, you know, where they are coming from, where am I coming from, and how can we, you know, learn from each other in that way.

According to Ellie, this concept was sharpened by watching her students engage in empathic understanding as well:

> So I think what students are seeing from empathic educators is that taking a step back and actually thinking through a problem, and not feeling like you have to lend a voice to it immediately when you don't understand

fully yet, um, is a perfectly good and okay thing to do. I think my students have been stepping back and not commenting until they have gotten all sides of the story. Maybe we need to hear all the other sides before we really have a conversation about this.

Moreover, participants began to infuse teaching empathy into their teaching practice as noted by Ellie in her blog post:

> Since the [2016] election, I have been working with my students to widen their perspective beyond our urban mindset. Using Facing History and Ourselves methods, I learned through the Collaboration, we have been examining and trying to understand and empathize with the experiences, hardships, and priorities of people in rural America as well as the working class all over our nation. In doing so, our eyes have been opened to many different undercurrents of frustration in America that we hadn't recognized before. My students are no longer looking at people and seeing two diametrically opposed teams...they now see fellow citizens who struggle and want a better life just like they do. It has changed all of our perspectives and allowed us to all be calmer, kinder, and more focused on making things better – not just ourselves but for everyone.

Susan echoed Ellie's comments, saying:

> One other thing I just thought of when we were talking about like empathy earlier, it's just also making sure that, like, we bring empathy into the classroom. One thing I like with Facing History and Ourselves is how many witness accounts they have [in curricular materials]. Some of it with the Holocaust this year, which I had, like a week to teach the Holocaust – it was very, very fast. But just being able to bring in the voice of the people involved. I think that helps my students understand why the people make the choices that they made and why things happen, and then they can also apply it to their own lives and think about choices that are being made in their own lives.

Participants spoke at length about how they grew in their capacity to understand the role of empathy. They were able to reflect on others' histories and experiences, allowing them to better understand and connect this knowledge to their teaching and, thereby, assist their students to do the same.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Participant perceptions revealed how involvement in the Collaboration and serving in the role of Senior Fellow impacted their practice. Some participants described subtle changes to their teaching, while other participants shared greater, more in-depth influences that had occurred as a result of their training and involvement in the collaboration. The range of responses provided evidence of impact on teacher's use of culturally relevant practices, from teachers strategically setting personal viewpoints aside to modeling perspective taking for students. Susan described how the Collaboration impacted her intentionality around planning:

> I definitely think it helped me kind of rethink how I teach something, maybe not teach something the way it is in the textbook, but before I plan what I am going to do, thinking about what kind of students I have in my classroom and how they are going to react to it and what connections they themselves, they can make to what we are learning and how they see themselves in the topic. I think about things before I do it more than without the collaboration.

In contrast, Ellie saw the impact on building relationships with students:

> I think [the professional development] has helped me build great relationships with students, great relationships with colleagues, and make my classroom a place where kids know that they are going to walk in and have things that are going to reflect them, and then I am going to ask them to look beyond themselves as well, to look at the experience of others.

Similarly, Maria identified a change in interactions with her students:

> It sort of has given me a path to follow to seek knowledge and to better interact with

students and think about where they might be coming from and what they need in order to grapple with a situation. Or what situations they've grappled with, and I can, perhaps, help them navigate through that in order to learn and grow as well.

Jenny described the influence on teaching from multiple perspectives:

> I think for me, the classroom piece, it's been more, in like how I approach things. I think about American exceptionalism, and it really has pushed me and pushed my students to look at different perspectives and to teach from different perspectives, does that make sense? So, it's some of a balance, but it enabled me to be even more balanced in my approach than I was before, and to think through that balance and to help students to, like I said before, they really have no point of reference for something that is different than they are used to. I think that happens pretty much anywhere you are at a certain age, but I think that has been really, really helpful within the classroom.

Participant interviews highlighted the new learning that teachers experienced through their participation in the Collaboration, and the influence these experiences had on their teaching practices. In particular, they pointed to the value of professional development emphasizing the importance of curriculum that connects to students' lives and beyond. Learning side by side with their students they were positioned as learners themselves, embracing other perspectives and ways to integrate and model strategies for their students.

TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS

Participants' understandings of how the Collaboration has impacted their classroom practice involved their repositioning as active agents for change; their words expressed an urgency and a new voice to ensure they built a social justice culture in their classroom. Issues related to equity and social injustice were addressed in their teaching. Specifically, the participants saw it as their core responsibility to model for their students the

importance of taking action for broader change. To create the conditions for students' active engagement, however, the classroom must be an intentional space for developing critical problem-solving competencies and bridging differences, as Jenny described it:

> I think there is a responsibility to make sure that you are giving them the freedom and opportunity to develop those skills to resolve problems, to cope with differences, not impress yours upon them that you've developed from your own experiences. To do that, I think, is powerful and great.

As such, teachers prioritize students' learning that they can, indeed, think and speak for themselves as a fundamental condition to building a purposeful and inclusive learning community, invested in working for change. Maria captures this dynamic in her observation:

> I believe that through the work that we are doing, we can help students to gain this feeling or at least a bit of empowerment or at least overcome some helplessness…Um, I don't need to quit school and create a peace militia, right? That seems really drastic, but I can do one tiny thing every day if I am coming from a place of empathy and considering those around me. No, so I think those little bits are important to help students to not feel overwhelmed or powerless. I feel like the number one, they [students] need tools to take in a lot of information and separate facts from fiction and recognize bias and think about how situations happening in Charlottesville, which is so far away, maybe I can't pick it out on a map, but what is happening there? What does it have to do with me? And is there something, a role I can play to affect change or do I want to? I feel like it is terrifying to watch the news every day, but how can we do this together to take in the information and tear it apart, and figure out little by little what are some good things we can do in the world?

Finally, Maria saw the power in serving as a role model for her students:

> I think it's important for students to see

that their teacher is also learning, um, and that   you can't always predict, you know, sometimes, how things are going to go.

Participants were able to describe how their involvement in the Collaboration provided them with a new lens for how they viewed themselves and their roles as teachers. Prominent in their language was how they felt empowered as change agents, responsible to impact society and model advocacy, empathy, and critical decision-making for their students.

DISCUSSION

Teacher candidates need to have professional development opportunities through which to learn pedagogical approaches that will help them make thoughtful connections with other students and sustain students' perspectives based in sociocultural differences in school contexts. The FHAO Collaboration appeared to meet this need through building teacher empathy and culturally responsive engagement, and positioning teachers' as change agents in their classrooms.

A key finding in this research included ways the Senior Fellows understood the role of empathy in their own lives and then sought to translate this meaning into their teaching practice. Similar to other research findings (Stern et al., 2015; Warren, 2017), this study highlighted how focusing on authentic empathy can build bridges in diverse settings and promote shared learning and understanding inside and outside of the classroom. Evidence of teachers' empathy was apparent in the emerging empathy in students and in their self-reflection around adopting culturally relevant pedagogical strategies. Strategies learned and implemented evoked better student understanding of backgrounds and experiences, with a more developed awareness and improved understanding of others. Drawing upon the critical professional development model of effective professional development, changes in their practice indicated a commitment to self-reflection, relationship-building, and becoming a culturally reflective and responsive teacher.

As such, this study highlighted the importance of

professional development that is critically-oriented and self-reflective, engaging teacher candidates and in-service teachers in continuous self-reflection on their own personal beliefs, values, and assumptions as a matter of equity and social justice in teaching diverse youth. It underscored that this process is integral to their learning, with emerging self-knowledge a critical element for serving as agents of change in their schools and in the educational policy arena (Kohli et al., 2015, Ayers et al., 2017). Through this critical professional development opportunity, participants in this study became increasingly aware of their responsibilities to assist students to thoughtfully reflect on complex social and political issues and events that might be outside the orbit of their immediate lives. Furthermore, they came to believe that modeling self-agency, critical thinking and empathy were central to their emerging identities as transformational leaders within their schools and communities.

Overall, our results suggest that the FHAO Collaboration provided an important foundation for self-reflective practice through ongoing and sustained professional development opportunities for critical engagement with systemic power, privilege and oppression. While impactful professional development uses active learning, a content focus, and is sustained over time (Garet et al., 2001), this multi-tiered critical professional development model broadens and deepens traditional professional development frameworks as evidenced by participants' cultivation of authentic empathy, culturally responsive engagement that bridges differences and positioning as committed agents of change. The FHAO program created the space for CPD to occur, in particular activities allowed teachers to dialogue together and across content areas. Senior Fellows were key in leading partnership activities and responding to the needs of the teachers. Inquiry communities were created through intentional spaces for dialogue, sharing of resources, curriculum and program development, and modeling of equity and social justice practices for effective instruction. We believe that this recursive professional development program allowed teachers to model for their students how to

better interact and connect with others both inside and outside their classrooms (Rychly & Graves, 2012), thereby empowering them to work towards individual and collective transformation.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study should be viewed within the context of its limitations. Focus groups provide rich opportunities for participants to share and expand upon their lived experiences. However, confidentiality within a focus group cannot be guaranteed, and participants may answer in ways they deem socially desirable. Moreover, while the impact on teacher practice was evident through analysis of data, the transformation was limited to single classroom experiences and was not shared on a departmental or school-wide level. The researchers were able to observe individual teacher change in practice and awareness, but it was less clear how these educators were drawn to participate in the Collaboration. Additional research examining whole-school transformation as a result of participating in multi-tiered, multi-year professional practice models such as this one is warranted.

CONCLUSION

The preparation of effective educators and their ongoing professional development as provided through this Collaboration allows future and current educators the opportunity to engage in critical self-reflective work on personal attitudes and beliefs about others. Through this experience, the participants better understood how they were unwittingly complicit in reproducing cultural invisibility of others, and the educators became more knowledgeable about their students' lives, their families and their communities. We believe that multi-tiered professional development that provides pre-service and in-service educators opportunities for critical engagement that aims at enhancing self-awareness and deepening understanding of student context, culture, and identity creates the necessary conditions for preparing active, participatory, global citizens and advancing structural change. In an increasingly polarized and divided society, critical professional development of this kind is imperative for shaping a more humane, just, and engaged world.

Appendix A

Focus Group/Interview Protocol

1. What impact has the Collaboration had on your teaching?

2. What impact has the Collaboration experience had on your development as a reflective practitioner?

3. How do you see the role of the teacher in today's polarized climate?

4. What role has the Collaboration played in your development as an agent of change in your classroom, your school and your community?

Appendix B

Focus Group/Interview Protocol

1. How has the Collaboration shaped your understanding of empathy?

2. How has the Collaboration and this understanding of empathy impacted your practice?

3. How has the Collaboration and this understanding of empathy shaped your relationship with students?

4. How has the Collaboration and this understanding of empathy shaped your relationship with colleagues?

5. How has the Collaboration and this understanding of empathy shaped the culture of the classroom?

6. Given your understanding of empathy, what role do you think it plays in working with diverse students and more homogeneous (class/race) groups of students?

7. How do you see the role of the empathic teacher (educator) in today's politically charged society? How has this further shaped the way you look at the world today? How has your thinking about issues/events in the past informed how you think about issues/events in the present?

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