

THE DISRUPTIVE POTENTIAL OF HUMANIZING LITERACY PEDAGOGIES IN ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION

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In schools, children do not tend to be positioned as fully human. Strong neoliberal currents perpetuate objectification, a focus on technical mastery, and mechanisms for sorting and categorizing. As part of our ongoing design-based research to revise a sequence of 3 elementary literacy methods courses, we have collaborated as university faculty and graduate student instructors. First, we describe 3 humanizing principles that have guided our work with preservice teachers: (1) supporting asset perspectives in the ways teachers view and talk about children; (2) creating literacy learning environments that support critical conversations; and (3) utilizing texts to mediate conversations about social justice. Then, we reflect on tensions we have encountered when enacting these principles within a text-based discussion module.

As oppression seeks to dehumanize, love recognizes, recalls and resurrects human beings (Freire, 1970/2000). This recognition of human being in our students is the antidote to domination (DeLissovoy, 2010), and Freire referred to this political love as “armed love.” (Shalaby, 2013, p. 126)

In schools, children do not tend to be positioned as fully human. In addition to a general tendency to see them as incomplete “persons-in-the-making” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 178), strong neoliberal currents also perpetuate objectification (e.g., seeing children as test scores), a

focus on technical mastery (e.g., emphasizing achievement and measurable outcomes), and mechanisms for sorting and categorizing (see Lipman, 2017). This dehumanization is exacerbated for Black and Brown youth, who also experience the insidious effects of racism (Love, 2019).

Thus, humanizing pedagogies in schools are necessary, that recognize “it is in this essentially human transaction between people that the why of education is communicated, where learners begin to understand why knowledge, understanding and skills matter to people and their communities” (Ellis, Souto-Manning, &

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Turvey, 2019, p. 7). Many different educational approaches can be categorized as humanizing pedagogies, but a key quality is an explicitly antiracist focus (Kailin, 2002) that actively seeks to disrupt dehumanization (Love, 2019) and positions children as complete human beings (Yoon & Templeton, 2019).

As part of our ongoing design-based research (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) to revise a sequence of three elementary literacy methods courses, we have collaborated as university faculty and graduate student instructors. First, we describe three humanizing principles that have guided our work with preservice teachers (PSTs): (1) supporting asset perspectives in the ways teachers view and talk about children; (2) creating literacy learning environments that support critical conversations; and (3) utilizing texts to mediate conversations about social justice. Then, we reflect on tensions we have encountered when enacting these principles within a text-based discussion (TBD) module.

HUMANIZING PEDAGOGIES

Freire (1970/2000) argues that humanization is people's true "vocation" (p. 75), and that the oppressed consistently struggle for humanization (see also Baldwin, 1985; DuBois, 1903/2007; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984/2007). Price and Osborne (2000) define a "humanizing pedagogy" as one "which the whole person develops and they do so as their relationships with others evolve and enlarge" (p. 29). Central to a humanizing pedagogy is not simply transferring content knowledge but nurturing the welfare of all children. In order to accomplish this, humanizing pedagogy must center "respect, trust, relations of reciprocity, active listening, mentoring, compassion, high expectations, and interest in students' overall well-being" (Salazar, 2013, p. 129). Pedagogies insist on humanization as the central goal fundamentally acknowledge and attempt to resist oppression and dehumanization, sometimes through a focus on love (Shalaby, 2013), healing and res-

toration (Winn, 2013), joy, liberation, and/or the abolition of injustice (Love, 2019).

Humanizing literacy pedagogies, in particular, focus on these topics through engagements with literature and writing, and often examine and critique the relationships between language, literacy and power (e.g., Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). For example, Winn (2013), in literacy research at the secondary level, conceptualizes "restorative English education," which she describes as "a pedagogy of possibilities that employs literature and writing to seek justice and restore (and, in some cases, create) peace that reaches beyond the classroom walls" (p. 126). Similarly, Campano, Ghiso, and Sánchez (2013) describe "how even elementary-age children ... when afforded the curricular space, may mobilize culturally situated *organic critical literacies* [emphasis added] in order to interpret the world and act to promote change to the benefit of their communities" (p. 102). Although these pedagogies go by different names, they each exemplify literacy pedagogies centrally interested in the project of humanization in schools.

Enacting humanizing pedagogies is complex, and involves coupling particular attitudes and beliefs with actions and behaviors. Through an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 65), PSTs have accumulated a lifetime of information about traditional, oppressive practices in schools (Bryan, 2017). Particularly in teacher education programs with critical, humanizing foci, PSTs have to make sense of multiple, contradictory purposes as they make decisions (Lampert, 1985), simultaneously unlearning old attitudes while learning new information and skills. Even when PSTs demonstrate predominantly humanizing orientations, they may struggle to enact these beliefs in practice (e.g., Schutz, Woodard, Diaz, & Vaughan, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Situated in these understandings, we explore literature related to the humanizing principles

we have utilized in our teacher education courses: supporting asset perspectives, cultivating literacy learning environments to support critical conversations, and leveraging texts as stimuli for conversations about social justice.

Supporting PSTs' Asset Perspectives

Teachers must pay attention to the ongoing constructions of race, class, language, and gender in schools (Bartolomé, 1994). One place this is visible is in the ubiquitous labels, qualifiers and phrases teachers use to describe young people in schools (e.g., *struggling reader*, *limited English proficiency*, *at risk*, and *achievement gap*). Such labels can position a “person as broken, as less than fully human” (Shalaby, 2013, p. 129), or even as a test score or object to be fixed. This is particularly problematic given that the standards and assessments in U.S. schools are biased to value Eurocentric knowledge and literacies (Love, 2019), meaning that *by design* children of colors’ cultural knowledge and brilliance are not valued. The result is that children of color, in particular, are seen as “at best culturally disadvantaged and in need of fixing, or, at worst, culturally or genetically deficient and beyond fixing” (Bartolomé, 1994, p. 180). Educational scholars have advocated for the abolishment of labels like “struggling reader” and “at risk” because they perpetuate colonial frameworks (Sailors, Martinez, Goatley, & Willis, 2017) and deficit narratives about students, while implying a static status that undermines the dynamics of reading and learning (Frankel & Brooks, 2018), and ignoring underlying problems in schools and society (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Because these deficit perspectives are so ingrained in schools, and the labels are so “sticky” to children, we must intentionally aim to identify and disrupt them with PSTs. One way we have attempted to support PSTs in adopting and enacting asset perspectives—in which teachers value and nurture the cultural, linguistic, and literate resources learners bring

to classrooms—is through a deliberate focus on seeing, treating, and positioning literacy learners as sensemakers (Schutz & Woodard, 2019) and their interactions around texts as acts of sensemaking (Aukerman, 2013).

Creating Literacy Learning Environments that Support Critical Conversations

Teachers must cultivate learning environments that center respect and trust (Salazar, 2013). This involves creating physical environments that allow for movement of bodies (Bresler, 2004), as well as social environments that value critical thinking and caring (Hertz & Mraz, 2018), focus on meaningful topics that attend to issues of power (Bomer & Bomer, 2001), and support critical conversations around texts (e.g., Hartman, 2018; Kleeklamp & Zapata, 2018).

These conversations around texts require attention to power and discourse patterns within classroom spaces, so that the purpose of the discussion is to nurture students’ sensemaking, rather than seek a “right” interpretation (Aukerman, 2013). This understanding, coupled with some intentional moves (e.g., eliciting student thinking and orienting students to peers’ ideas as opposed to the teacher’s) have the potential to shape the kind of social environment needed to allow children to coconstruct meaning together (Alston, Danielson, Dutro, & Cartun, 2018).

Utilizing Texts to Support Conversations about Social Justice

As U.S. classrooms continue to become more diverse, it is also imperative to engage PSTs in conversations about the importance of representative texts. As Bishop (1990) explains, texts should be reflective of “all the children from all the cultures that make up the salad bowl of American society” (p. 1). Research has demonstrated that when children read texts where they see themselves as well as

their cultures represented, respected, and acknowledged, they are more engaged in the reading process (Bishop, 1990; Fleming, Catapano, Thompson, & Carrillo, 2016). These “enabling texts” move “beyond a sole cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include an academic, cultural, emotional, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find relevant to their lives” (Tatum, 2006, p. 2).

Teacher educators have the responsibility to support PSTs in understanding that reading and discussion in schools serve a purpose beyond just learning to comprehend texts. Texts can serve as stimuli for promoting and fostering authentic discussions about real life issues of power and justice. But the texts we choose matter. Howard and Ticknor (2019) describe “facilitative texts” as those that “facilitate discussions in three ways: present social justice topics from characters’ lived perspectives, provide affirmative and accurate language about the topics, and mediate productive discussions about social justice topics” (p. 32). Using enabling or facilitative texts is different than using texts exclusively or primarily to teach skills. Texts can open spaces in classrooms for difficult discussions about issues like race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Similarly, using them in methods courses allows teacher educators an opportunity for modeling text selection, leading class discussion, and disrupting deficit thinking for PSTs.

METHODS

This practitioner inquiry (Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff, 2009) is situated in ongoing design-based research (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) in the implementation of our literacy methods courses. Our team of four teacher educators consists of two university professors and two graduate students. We situate this exploration of humanizing principles within a module focused on TBD during a second-semester preservice teacher education literacy methods course. We draw from the

syllabus, assignments, course activities, PST work, and our reflective notes to provide illustrative examples of our attempts to use the above principles to guide our instruction, and describe some of the tensions we have encountered throughout this process.

Positionality

We are all former K–12 classroom teachers who are committed to humanizing pedagogies and collaborative inquiry into our teacher educator practice. All four authors are able bodied and cisgender. Kristine is a heterosexual White woman who is a former bilingual elementary school teacher, and has been a teacher educator for 11 years. Rebecca is a heterosexual White woman whose family is bicultural. She is a former elementary and middle school ELA teacher, and has been a teacher educator for 13 years. Amanda is a heterosexual woman and identifies as half White and half Mexican American, however her light skin often conceals her Latinx identity. She formerly taught middle and high school English and is a doctoral student. William is a gay White genderqueer individual who, prior to beginning a doctoral program, taught second grade and middle and high school ELA for 10 years.

Context

We teach in an undergraduate program at a large urban university in the midwest. Our college has a commitment to educational equity with a focus on preparing PSTs to teach in our city’s public schools. Most recent demographic reports (fall 2017) listed 244 students in the program. According to university reporting, 210 students are female and 34 male; 54.5% are identified as Hispanic, 23% as White, 14% as Asian, 6.6% as Black, 1.5% as two or more races, and 0.4% as Indigenous or Native.

Our 4-year program is designed around a decolonizing framework that recognizes that schools have always been a place for acculturation and colonization, and prepares teachers

to simultaneously teach in and resist that context. The scope and sequence of the 4-year preparation program is organized around five areas of focus within the decolonizing framework: landscape/foundations; professional stance/teacher identity; interdisciplinary praxis; rehumanizing spaces; and critical reflexivity (Trinder, 2014).

The program includes three literacy methods courses taught sequentially during the junior year and first semester of the senior year. The courses unfold in a developmental sequence, and are grounded in sociocultural theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical theories (Freire, 1970/2000). Courses support PSTs in learning to see and treat literacy learners as sensemakers with diverse linguistic, literate, and cultural resources (Schutz & Woodard, 2019), and to disrupt damaging labels such as “struggling reader” (Schutz et al., 2018).

We are committed to situating PSTs’ learning inside practice—including foregrounding issues of power and justice, developing knowledge for teaching literacy, and learning instructional practices that provide an entry point for PSTs to engage in responsive, learner-centered teaching that recognize the strengths of children and their communities. We provide opportunities for PSTs to see and unpack “representations” of practice including videos, transcripts, and teacher educator-modeled teaching; engage in deep analysis to “decompose” and name visible aspects of practice and the intentions behind them; and engage in intentionally scaffolded “approximations of practice” (e.g., role plays) to support PSTs in preparing for live teaching with children in their field placements (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 2055).

The course we focus on in this analysis is offered second semester during the junior year, and supports literacy teaching and learning in upper elementary classrooms with attention to reading comprehension, composition, and word knowledge. While taking the course, PSTs partner at field placements, typically in third through sixth grade classrooms, at urban

schools. PSTs observe, teach, and conduct assessments for their methods courses in this context for the full school day twice a week throughout the semester.

Focal Module: Text-Based Discussions.

One module in the course focuses on supporting PSTs in learning to plan and facilitate text-based discussions (TBDs), where the PST stops at preidentified places to ask questions to support students in coconstructing meaning as they read (Kucan & Palincsar, 2013). This module positions discussion of texts as a powerful method to enhance and/or disrupt thinking (Hartman, 2018; Kleekamp & Zapata, 2018), and to support comprehension (Almasi & Garsas-York, 2009). We encourage the use of TBDs to discuss issues related to power and injustice, and hope PSTs will tackle critical issues of importance to their students. The TBD module includes five foci: introducing TBDs; working on targeted aspects of TBDs; planning for TBDs; enacting TBDs; and analyzing/reflecting on video records (see Table 1).

We use a variety of activities and materials to support the foci in class and through fieldwork and homework, including teacher educator modeling, simulated activities, role plays, the discussion of texts and videos, text analysis, and field activities (see Table 2).

PSTs work with partners from their shared field placements to plan, facilitate, and analyze a critical TBD which they lead on two consecutive days. PSTs choose a set of facilitative texts provided by course instructors (see Table 3) and lesson plan using an instructor-provided template. In this particular year, themes of the text sets were inspired by issues from our class text, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (Curtis, 1995/2013) which takes place in Flint, Michigan and the rural south. The text set themes included: prejudice, discrimination, and justice, (dis)abilities, poverty/food insecurity, and environmental racism. Lesson planning includes two parts: text analysis and discussion planning. PSTs write questions to pose during the TBD and identify potential points of student confusion; anticipate potential “hot spots” or areas where students may

TABLE 1
Foci Descriptions in the Literacy Methods Course TBD Module

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Description</i>
Introducing TBDs	TBDs are introduced as an instructional activity where teacher and students coconstruct meanings about critical ideas in texts. TBDs are positioned as an opportunity to “see” student thinking, coconstruct meaning, develop reading comprehension, access complex texts and ideas, build community, and address misunderstandings, stereotypes and biases.
Working on targeted aspects of TBDs	PSTs learn to <i>elicit</i> student thinking, <i>orient</i> students to the text and each other, and <i>disrupt</i> problematic ideas during TBDs.
Planning for TBDs	<p>PSTs select a thematic text set to use in TBDs with a small group of students. They also receive a planning template that includes two sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text Analysis (learning goals, text challenges and resources, putting the text in conversation, applying a critical lens, potential “hot spots”) • Planning Before, During, and After Reading Activities <p>PSTs are asked to script their language in the plans, writing out their stopping points, questions, and possible follow-ups.</p>
Enacting TBDs	With a partner, PSTs lead a 2-day TBD with the same group of students. One text is discussed each day. While one PST leads the TBD, the other video records and takes notes. They switch the next day.
Analyzing/reflecting on video records	Each PST uploads the video recording of the lesson they lead to an online platform that allows them to comment directly in the video. They identify and reflect on 6 moments (i.e., Moment 1: children as sensemakers; Moment 2: eliciting student thinking; Moment 3: orienting; Moment 4: rich point; Moment 5: discretionary moment; Moment 6: goal setting). A course instructor provides targeted feedback on the selected moments and PST’s comments.

TABLE 2
Key Activities and Materials Used to Learn About and Prepare to Facilitate TBDs

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Key Activities & Materials</i>
Introducing TBDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Educator models TBD with PSTs using an excerpt from <i>Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School</i> (Shalaby, 2017) and debriefs.
Working through targeted aspects of TBDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View and discuss video: TEDx Talks: <i>When Teachers Listen and Learners Explain</i> (Duckworth, 2012) • In-class simulated activity focused on eliciting (TeachingWorks, 2016b) using <i>Nasreen’s Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan</i> (Winter, 2009) • Field activity: PSTs try out eliciting and interpreting student thinking using the text “Our Good Day” from <i>The House on Mango Street</i> (Cisneros, 1984/2009) (TeachingWorks, 2016a) • Introduction to and problematizing of <i>talk moves</i> (Chapin, O’Connor, & Anderson, 2013) • In-class role play focused on orienting using “Our Good Day” (Cisneros, 1984/2009) • Prompted role play focused on disrupting problematic talk in response to an excerpt from “An Inclusive, Anti-Bias Framework for Teaching and Learning About Race with Young Children” (Beneke, Park, & Taitingfong, 2018)
Planning for TBDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze how the text <i>Red: A Crayon’s Story</i> by Hall (2015) could be used to discuss “concepts for critical reading” that focus on the “political dimensions of life” (Bomer & Bomer, 2001, p. 29). Work with a small group to identify questions they might ask in a TBD. • Model TBD with an excerpt from <i>Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom From Young Children at School</i> by Shalaby (2017), and then debrief with attention to TBD structure (before reading; during reading; after reading) • PSTs read and select paired “facilitative texts” from a set of preselected texts based on their students, contexts, and own understandings • Teacher educators and PSTs collaboratively unpack the planning template and highlight important considerations and tips • PSTs collaborate with field placement partner to plan TBD, and receive feedback from an instructor.

TABLE 3
Text-Based Discussion Text Sets for PSTs to Use With Students

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Text Sets</i>
Prejudice, discrimination, and justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Marian’s Revolution” (Bardhan-Quallen, 2016) • “The Many and the Few” (Lewis, 2001)
(dis)Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A Girl and a Word” (Linn, 2011) • “An Unlikely Friendship” (Carloni, 2012)
Poverty/food insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Many homeless children need help, but it is hard to find them, a study says” (Stateline.org adapted by <i>Newsela</i> staff, 2015) • “Why Chicken Means So Much to Me” (Alexie, 2007)
Environmental racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Flint residents must now pay for their water, but they can't drink it” (<i>Washington Post</i> adapted by <i>Newsela</i> staff, 2017) • “At Standing Rock” (Wood, 2017)

share assimilationist, deficit-oriented, racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory thoughts; and script possible responses to such “hot spots.” PSTs facilitate the discussions on two sequential days with the same group of students. Then, they upload videos of the discussions to an online platform, watch their teaching, and identify and comment on specific moments.

The humanizing principles are threaded throughout the TBD module. For example, as PSTs discuss children in videos we share during the module, select students for the TBDs they will lead, anticipate how students will respond to the texts, and analyze their teaching, we model how to *view and talk about children* in humanizing ways, problematize moments in which PSTs adopt deficit language or assumptions, and mirror back language that conveys our commitment to seeing children as whole beings. We guide PSTs in coconstructing inclusive and *humanizing learning environments* with their students by providing alternatives to commonly used “management tools” that seek to control children’s bodies. We also teach PSTs instructional moves such as orienting students to one another’s thinking during TBDs as a way of disrupting hierarchical discourse patterns in schools. Finally, we are *intentional about our text choices* throughout the module, selecting “facilitative texts”

that provide PSTs with an opportunity to grapple with the power of texts and representation, and begin to consider the ways in which interacting with these texts may serve as an onramp toward dismantling oppressive systems.

This analysis explores tensions, the “opposing forces” (Berry, 2008, p. 32) that were visible to us, the course instructors, in the operationalization of our three guiding, humanizing principles within the TBD module. The four authors met after the culmination of the course to collaboratively discuss and analyze the data. We reviewed PSTs’ assignments (including videos and reflections, as well as planning documents), coursework, and our reflective notes from across the course to identify patterns where the data were at odds with our humanizing principles. We identified multiple tensions: cultivating asset perspectives; designing learning environments; using facilitative texts; grouping practices; and using mandated curricula. Then, we created detailed descriptions of these moments within the TBD module specifically, and mapped them onto the syllabus and course activities to gain a deeper understanding of factors that potentially fueled the tensions. For the sake of space, we highlight three of the tensions that have been most generative in our ongoing conversations about supporting humanizing pedagogy in the TBD module.

TENSIONS IN CULTIVATING HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY IN TEXT-BASED DISCUSSIONS

Tensions Cultivating Asset Perspectives

One tension we noted as we fostered asset perspectives about children through the TBD module is that PSTs' analysis and reflections surfaced assumptions they held about the children and contexts in which they were teaching. These assumptions were often a result of PSTs' growing, yet still limited, knowledge of children, development, texts, and concepts.

Determining "Appropriate" Texts

Many of these assumptions were coded within PSTs' talk about what they deemed "appropriate" in terms of texts for children to read and discuss. When introducing TBDs, we stressed the role of the teacher as mediator of reader-text and reader-reader interactions, and emphasized how this mediated support makes TBDs an ideal instructional event to support readers with diverse strengths and knowledge. This important mediator role enables teachers to scaffold children's interactions with sophisticated texts and concepts. We also coached PSTs as they learned and practiced specific practices and techniques to take on the role of a mediator by orienting students to one another and the text. In some cases, this work involved helping children understand the literal meaning of the texts; in others, it involved helping coordinate student contributions to disrupt discriminatory thinking and comments related to the concepts in the text. Yet, comments in PSTs' teaching analyses suggested that many possess static views of readers and simplified views about texts, grouping, and topics.

Many PSTs worried that if students encountered any difficulty decoding the texts, then the text was not "appropriate" as it was not at their "reading level." For example, in his video analysis, one PST, Pablo, identified a moment where students wanted to read aloud individually, but because the text was "above their

reading level" he "knew they were going to struggle reading some words if they read it by taking turns." Pablo's comments suggest that he sees a text that students can accurately decode as the marker of an appropriate text.

We hypothesize that this overemphasis on the match with students' decoding abilities as the marker of an "appropriate" text for a TBD with a group of students has been shaped by a number of factors and experiences of our PSTs. Many PSTs have been in classrooms or had experiences with traditional grouping practices where children are grouped heterogeneously according to their reading level as dictated by assessments of reading accuracy. Although we discuss how groups are flexible and designed based on the instructional activity and types of support to be provided by readers, many PSTs have only seen groups organized by reading levels. Thus, Pablo's dissonance as he attempts to take up this new idea is not surprising. Even with explicit attention to disrupting the common practice of leveling/labeling readers, the residue of matching books to readers remains. Second, although we spend time early in the semester unpacking the complexity of the reading process and text features, PSTs are still developing their knowledge around factors that impact readers' interactions with texts. This developing knowledge undoubtedly impacts how PSTs see readers.

PSTs also questioned if the topics in the texts or surfaced through discussion were "appropriate" for the children they were teaching. Throughout the module, we introduced PSTs to many facilitative texts that addressed social and political issues. Yet, many PSTs still questioned if such texts were appropriate for children to read or appropriate topics for classroom discussions. In this way, they made assumptions about children and what they could "handle" based on often limited understanding of their students and an overprivileging of what felt right based on their own experiences. For example, in a discussion after viewing the stage performance of the class text, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*,

PSTs questioned whether the text was too traumatic for students. They were concerned about young children being exposed to the topics of racial violence and death and asked at what age is it appropriate to read such a text.

Similarly, PSTs were also concerned if the types of conversations fostered by facilitative texts were appropriate in school contexts, even though they recognized their importance. For example, when a question she posed about word choice in a poem ignited a conversation about racial violence, Eve reflected that it was potentially “problematic because it is a conversation about violence which is something not tolerated at [her field placement school].” Yet she reasoned that she needed to engage students regardless of her interpretation of this rule “because it’s better for [students] to understand and identify with the truth of this violence ... rather than be shielded to [*sic*] it.” Although troubled that it might be against school norms to discuss such topics, Eve recognized that with appropriate guidance from the teacher, it was necessary to address this potentially “problematic” topic to begin to engage in the disruptive work of teaching she had learned about throughout the program.

Anticipating What Children Know

PSTs also brought assumptions about what students would talk about and what they knew about topics related to the text sets. As PSTs analyzed texts during their lesson planning, we guided them to think about the background knowledge their students would bring to the text discussion and how this would impact the discussion. In their analyses, many PSTs noted that they underestimated the understandings their students would bring to the activity. For example, one PST, Jessica, commented on a moment in her TBD using the text, *Marion’s Revolution*:

In this moment, I was thrown off guard by the students’ ability to relate the text we just read to such a historic Civil Rights Movement.

The text that the students were going to be reading the next day was about this very topic, so I had not planned on addressing it.

While anticipating students’ understandings in the planning stage, Jessica assumed that students would not know much about the Civil Rights Movement, and that her partner would need to support them in discussing it the following day. During in-class debriefs with teacher educators, many PSTs also shared comments like, “I had no idea my students knew this much!”

PSTs also made assumptions about what children would know based on school-assigned labels children carried. Catalina, a PST who self-identifies as a native Spanish speaker and had discussed interactions she had as a child with her immigrant parents, led her discussion with a group of third-grade students labeled by the school as English learners. As she planned her TBD using the text about the Library of Congress eliminating the term “illegal alien,” she assumed her group of students would be familiar with the term; this proved to be an assumption that caught her off guard during the discussion. In her video analysis, she wrote:

During this moment the students shared with me that they had never heard the term “illegal alien” before. The questions that I had prepared for that stopping point assumed they knew this information. I had to ditch some of the questions I prepared and try to explain what that term is and how it was used. I had to take a few seconds to try to explain this the best I could without it sounding offensive and derogatory.

As Catalina recognized, the ways in which a teacher supports conversation has the potential to reinforce marginalizing perspectives and harm students. As such, our role as teacher educators in preparing PSTs for discussions about such texts is critical and likely involves disrupting multiple assumptions about young people and texts.

Tensions Designing Learning Environments

Another tension we experienced during the TBD module was helping PSTs design and support learning environments for small group discussions without utilizing “behavior management” approaches that are primarily oriented to compliance and controlling students’ bodies. Particularly during the “planning” focus in the TBD module, we engage with various readings, class activities, and simulations to discuss these issues. For example, when we first model TBDs we talk about the constructs of freedom and obedience in schools with an excerpt from Shalaby’s (2017) *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom From Young Children at School*. Before beginning to read, we show a slide with a historical and contemporary image of bodily control in schools—one from a Civil War-era reading series demonstrating the proper “standing position” in school (see Siegel, 2016), and another from contemporary times called the “Magic 5” that shows students five ways to demonstrate that they are listening while sitting at the rug.

With PSTs, we discuss how text-based discussions should create learning environments that support dialogic conversations rather than the traditional teacher-centered initiate-response-evaluate (IRE) discourse pattern that is typical in oral conversations (Cazden, 1988). The IRE pattern is aligned with getting the right answer, rather than grappling with ideas. We want to foster participatory sensemaking, which means intentionally disrupting students’ typical orientation in school to the teacher as authority. To disrupt IRE interactions, we support PSTs to *orient* students to the text, *orient* students to one another, and *elicit* and *disrupt* ideas. We practice orienting and eliciting in simulations and model a TBD in class, and each teacher candidate tries eliciting one on one with a student. We also ask PSTs to explicitly script how will they will introduce interactional norms during the “before reading” portion of a lesson plan.

Establishing Interactional Norms

During the implementation of TBDs, though, we have noticed PSTs grapple with some of these ideas. On the one hand, as some PSTs attempted our encouragements toward freedom, they did not establish clear interactional norms or intervene in problematic behaviors. For example, in one PST Nura’s video students were walking around and not engaging in discussion, but Nura did not explicitly address these behaviors before or during. In another example, a student made an insensitive comment during the TBD, and the PST moved on rather than addressing it or returning to the discussion topic. The PST reflected:

I interpreted one of the student's comments as being purposely silly.... I tried to dismiss his comment without discouraging him from speaking up in the rest of the activity.... Right after this some of the students asked unrelated questions to the text, and after talking about it for a little I moved on without readdressing [*sic*] my question. I'm not sure if these were good decisions or if I could have facilitated the activity a little better.

On the other hand, some PSTs moved the other direction, desiring or implementing strategies to explicitly limit movement and talk during discussions. For example, even though one PST, Kamaria, did not describe this in her lesson plan, in her video, we saw her introduce and use “Franklin the Talking Turtle,” a stuffed animal that students had to hold in order to talk. After reviewing, we realized that her partner PST was Nura, who had struggled with students walking around the day before. We recognized the “Franklin the Talking Turtle” was their attempt to create clear interactional norms. However, talking sticks are particularly limiting in small group discussions. In another example, a PST suggested that allowing “the students to speak freely without directing them to raise their hands...encouraged ... [a] tangent.” We had discouraged enforcing hand-raising during

small group discussions because of the way it reinforces the teacher as authority, but this PST resisted this idea.

Disrupting and Extending Student Thinking in the Moment

PSTs also described struggling to support student-to-student interactions and critical thinking. For example, it was hard for many PSTs to engage with in-the-moment disruptions of students' problematic thinking or extensions toward critical thinking during discussions. Kamaria, in reflecting on a "missed opportunity" in her video describes how:

[Student A] brings up how if Donald Trump were present during the Rosa Parks incident, "he would've called the police too." If I could go back to this moment, I would connect [Student A's] idea about police and institutionalized racism with the ideas that [Student B] brought up earlier about his police do not treat Black people fairly even in our current time.

Describing a different TBD using the same text, another PST, Abby, described how when she asked students what might have motivated Rosa Parks to give up her bus seat, and a student responded, "Because she deserves it just as much as White people do—we're all people right?" this could have been an opportunity to have "oriented other students to the student's response and we could have built upon it." However, she moved the discussion forward without responding.

Disrupting IRE Discourse Patterns

Another way that PSTs struggled to cultivate learning environments that supported critical thinking and conversations was that they had a hard time orienting students to one another to disrupt IRE discourse patterns. For example, in his video reflection, Miguel described,

Throughout my discussion, I felt the students were mostly talking to me than with each other, and it is my fault for framing questions in a way that made it seem like they were answering rather than discussion.

Similarly, Nura described that

I noticed that many of the students were talking directly at me and not to each other. I also was not connecting students' thinking to each other, which would have helped students see the similarities between everyone's answers. I need to improve on connecting students thinking to another's during group discussions.

and Camille wrote,

My goal for my next TBD is that I will try to have more student to student talk instead of students looking at me and talk. I noticed that when I would ask questions, they would talk to me more instead of each other. I need to practice this to run a successful TBD.

As teachers, we all miss opportunities to challenge and extend thinking during conversations, and to orient students to one another (and the text) instead of to us. This is easier said than done, though, as it is a radical restructuring of the traditional power hierarchies in school that support answering teachers' questions rather than engaging in dialogic conversation. Becoming skillful at disrupting, orienting, and eliciting are three methods that we use to create positive learning environments that can foster critical conversations, but they require planning and lots of in-the-moment practice with other PSTs, teacher educators, and students.

Tensions Using Facilitative Texts

A final tension we have experienced during the module is helping PSTs use facilitative texts to promote, encourage, and foster meaningful classroom discussions. To do this, we must cultivate PSTs' background knowledge as it relates to the topics of the texts, their

knowledge of children generally, and their relationships with the specific children they are teaching. In an effort to scaffold PSTs' selection of instructional texts, we constrain the options (Schutz, Danielson, & Cohen, 2019); however, these texts have presented challenges for some PSTs.

Selecting Facilitative Texts

In previous years, PSTs have reported feeling limited in their abilities to answer children's questions and facilitate the discussion because of their own limited knowledge. For example, Faith, a PST placed in a fourth-grade classroom, led a TBD using a text about poverty and homelessness, and an unexpected focus on ObamaCare came up during the discussion. One boy claimed that "ObamaCare helps homeless people" and a classmate added that "things were better under ObamaCare." Rather than responding, Faith moved on to her next prepared question. In her video analysis, Faith tagged the moment and reflected, "I didn't have all of the details about ObamaCare and didn't know how to guide their thinking to each other or ask more questions." As a result of this uneasiness, she rushed to her next prepared question without stopping to discuss the thoughtful and complex issues raised by other students, and students likely left the conversation with misconceptions regarding the Affordable Care Act.

While planning their TBDs, PSTs are prompted to consider what might be confusing or interfere with students' understandings, and what might be helpful to students in building understanding. Although we understood the impact of a teacher's own content knowledge about the topics/issues in a text on their ability to facilitate a productive discussion, we were not explicit about this in our work with PSTs in early iterations. Recently, we made efforts to emphasize the importance of building PSTs' own background knowledge about the issues/topics presented in the texts, as well as those

that may surface based on their knowledge of the students in their small group. By constraining text set choices and relating them to broader themes of texts that have been discussed at length within the university classroom, our hope is that candidates' own knowledge about these topics and issues enables them to feel better prepared to respond to and leverage student contributions during the TBDs the lead with children.

PSTs also experience discomfort in discussing topics related to power, race, and oppression—all themes present in the texts we provide. For example, in 2018, Xinyi, a PST from China led a TBD with a text centered around homelessness. In her analysis Xinyi marks a moment which she described as "challenging." In this moment she asks a group of five second graders, all of Asian descent, "Why do you think there are so many homeless people in the richest country in the world?" One child responds by stating that there are so many homeless people in America "because they don't want to work." Xinyi responds saying, "Or maybe they cannot find a job." The child agrees and adds "because they are African American." At this moment, it appears that Xinyi is unsure of how to proceed. Xinyi then explains that homeless people have a hard life, and this makes it difficult to get a job. She adds that not all homeless people are African American. There is no further mention of race or ethnicity in the discussion. Within a minute, Xinyi returns to the text and continues to read. In her analysis of this interaction Xinyi writes that she felt like there was an opportunity for her to connect his comment to his learning in social studies about the Civil Rights Movement, but she was unsure how to do this. This exchange between Xinyi and the child demonstrates the tension that arises when leading a carefully planned TBD, but then encountering a moment of discomfort when a student steers the conversation into the realm of stereotype and misguided or uninformed thinking.

Building Deep Relationships With Students during Field Placements

A humanizing pedagogy is reliant upon deep, personal relationships with students and knowledge of students' lives in and out of school (Salazar, 2013). That said, our PSTs have limited time to develop such relationships during their field placements. Relationship building is also challenging to support from our primarily campus-based methods courses. While we believe teaching PSTs to lead TBDs with texts around critical issues is important, we recognize that there is a possibility for harm when facilitating conversations around potentially triggering topics. PSTs in our course lead TBDs after spending two days a week for eight weeks in their field placements, an insufficient amount of time to build deep relationships.

We have seen this play out when PSTs unknowingly select texts and plan conversations which may be upsetting for students. For example, Maha, a PST from the spring of 2018, selected a text from outside of the constrained choices to better suit her sixth-grade students. Guided by the critical issues outlined by Bomer and Bomer (2001), she selected a text about the death penalty. After facilitating the TBD, Maha reported to the university teacher educator that during the discussion, there was a difficult moment in which she did not know how to proceed. She described how a student asked classmates how they would feel if a family member was killed, and another student became visibly upset and asked her peers not to use family as an example. However, the conversation continued, and the student then began to cry. Upon noticing this, Maha paused the conversation and asked the student if she would like to step out. The student declined and the conversation continued.

Situations like this make us question the potential harm in having our PSTs facilitate critical conversations with children they do not know well. Discussions about potentially triggering topics require teachers to have deep relationships with children, understand their

histories and backgrounds, and have strong ties to their families, school, and community. Without this, it is difficult to create and nurture safe spaces for the diverse groups of learners our PSTs interact with daily. On one hand, we are committed to encouraging and supporting our PSTs to use text to explore issues of power and justice in their classrooms and believe that work cannot wait until PSTs are in full-time student teaching placements or have classrooms of their own. On the other hand, we question the appropriateness of engaging in such activities when PSTs lack the time and space to develop deep relationships that are the foundation of this work.

DISCUSSION

PSTs in our courses have experienced tensions around each of our guiding humanizing principles in the TBD module. We documented them attempting to disrupt deficit thinking, but sometimes falling into dominant discourses around "appropriate" texts and making false assumptions about what students would and would not know. As they tried to create productive learning environments for TBDs, some did not establish any interactional norms whereas others implemented norms that limited conversations. Many expressed how challenging it was to disrupt and extend student thinking in the moment, and to orient students to talk to one another instead of to the teacher. And as they used facilitative texts, some PSTs experienced discomfort or demonstrated limited background knowledge about the topics. The limited time in their field placements also made it challenging to build the deep relationships with students that are necessary to engender dialogue and critical reflection.

Teacher Educators' Positionality Matters

Regardless of our varied experiences and personal identities, each of us presents as White and, for the most part, we are able to

choose when to conceal or display our other identities (e.g., Latinx, gay). Three fourths of the students in our program identify as people of color. As teacher educators attempting to design opportunities for PSTs different from what we have experienced in our own teacher preparation and experiences as in K–12 schools, we have a privilege that many of our PSTs and colleagues do not. For example, when we discuss issues of race and discrimination, we do not tend to have to worry about being negatively stereotyped and having our work dismissed. When we worked in K–12 classrooms, our Whiteness also protected us from backlash from parents, colleagues, and administrators, which provided us with the freedom to challenge the status quos of schools without being viewed as a threat.

When teaching TBDs and how to facilitate a discussion we recognize that these interactions are guided by cultural norms. Almost 90% of the children in the district where our field placements occur are students of color. Having PSTs plan and execute TBDs without deeply knowing and considering the culture of the communities in which they are placed separates them from the children they work with and is at odds with humanizing work.

Affordances and Tensions When Centering Humanizing Principles in Teacher Education

There are numerous affordances of centering humanizing principles in literacy methods courses. First, through humanizing principles, we can begin to help PSTs to see how the ideological work of teaching is intricately connected to their teaching practice. That is, issues of power reverberate in how we talk, plan, teach, and assess. Further, we hope to illustrate for our PSTs that issues related to social justice are not separate from actual teaching but must permeate all decisions a teacher makes. As course instructors, too, these principles help us to better intentionally disrupt the traditional theory versus practice dichotomy that has been pervasive in teacher education. We see our

PSTs striving to make the connections day in and day out, and this must be celebrated. That said, we must note that one tension that we, as TEs, experience is the disconnect from human beings in schools. To us, there are misalignments between the incentives and structures of R1 universities and deeply embedded fieldwork upon which methods courses are dependent. Moving forward, we must consistently and deliberately work to ensure that we “name, problematize, and interrupt overt and covert systems of oppression enacted in and through teacher education” (Souto-Manning, 2019, p. 16).

Our primary focus in this analysis, however, was on the multiple tensions our PSTs experienced in a literacy methods course utilizing humanizing principles. While the word tension often connotes rigidity and discomfort, it also suggests being stretched. It is within these moments as we are stretched as thinkers and learners, that change occurs. We view these tensions as fertile spaces for interrogating and developing teacher practice—both our own and that of our PSTs. We have seen that our PSTs’ greatest learning often occurs in these “problem spaces” where they trouble and puzzle over their teaching practice. Likewise, naming and problematizing these tensions in our work as teacher educators has and will continue to shape our teaching, not with the goal of eliminating them, but to leverage their disruptive potential.

Implications

Implications for our own teaching include continuing to iterate and improve our activities and instruction with the TBD module. For example, in our next implementation, we intend to do more practice with in-the-moment disruptions, particularly in response to problematic comments. We will also ask PSTs to reflect more deeply about why they select particular students, and to identify *themselves* and *with each other* implicit deficit assumptions in their TBD reflections and assessments (rather than doing it for them as

the teacher educators). Long term, we see potential to collaborate more significantly and strategically with PSTs through research and lengthier partnerships beyond their time in the program. Research implications include supporting practitioner inquiry (Goswami et al., 2009) partnerships between teacher education program faculty, graduate instructors, and PSTs. Further, ongoing design-based research (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) within and across programs has the potential to both improve teacher education programs and deepen our knowledge of how to most effectively foster humanizing, critical pedagogies within methods courses and across disciplinary areas.

CONCLUSION

Humanizing pedagogies are necessary in schools that are characterized by capitalistic goals of sorting, efficiency, and productivity, as well as histories of racism, sexism, and xenophobia. In teacher education programs, as well as literacy pedagogies, it is necessary to centrally commit to foster justice and education (Philip et al., 2019). These are not purely ideological matters. They require unlearning beliefs, behaviors and practices that contribute to oppression, the learning of new behaviors and practices, and ongoing critical reflection. In particular, we have noticed the implicit ways that deficit assumptions about children, and communities of color, are embedded in schooling-as-usual planning, instruction, and assessment practices. Our current work seeks to make these ideologies more visible inside of practice in order to disrupt them. This is necessary to help PSTs see all children not as persons in the making, but as fully human participants in the world. Insisting on humanization as the primary goal of schooling and a central tenet of literacy pedagogies is full of tension, but is also brimming with disruptive potential for teacher education.

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