Cultivating an Informed Empathy: An Aspiring Teacher Examines his Talk and Actions

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Abstract: This text traces the development of an aspiring biracial teacher's growing understandings of African American youth he tutors. It deploys a Bakhtinian conceptual framework for how we might develop new understandings of ourselves through relationships and dialogues with others. It offers examples from one aspiring teacher's experiences to illustrate how when individuals look inward, that they can come to different interpretations of who people are and why they behave as they do. Further, it offers teacher educators examples of ways to engage aspiring teachers' compassion and empathy for those they see as "others."

Keywords: C*ompassion; Critical reflection; Teacher education; Empathy*

Introduction

Immersing aspiring teachers in communities unlike their own in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, and/or language background has been demonstrated to have powerful positive effects on aspiring teachers' thinking and pedagogy (Cooper, 2007; Olmedo, 1997; Wiest, 1998). Often referred to as community-based learning, preparing aspiring teachers to develop curriculum and enact instructional practices that engage with and affirm students' families, communities, backgrounds, and concerns has lasting positive outcomes for both students and their teachers (e.g., Chapman, 2007; Hargreaves, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997, 2001; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Whereas, ignoring students' families, communities, backgrounds, and concerns as opportunities for curriculum and instruction can lead to profound discord and conflict for both teachers and students, often resulting in teachers continually attempting to balance their classroom authority with their care for students.

In this study, we examine how Cameron Harris (all names of people, places, and institutions are pseudonyms), a biracial aspiring (not yet admitted to teacher education) teacher, engaged in a community-based course and as a consequence learned to become less judgmental and more compassionate about dilemmas that African American male middle school youth faced. In so doing, he shifted his gaze from what he (and others) perceived as "deviant" classroom behavior of youth to his own intentions, motivations, and goals. In considering Cameron's experiences with the community-based education course, we wanted to understand:

- How did particular aspects of Cameron's schooling at State University affect his talk, thoughts, and actions?

- What significant experiences shaped Cameron's informed empathy? And, what can we learn from these experiences?

While this study is situated within the United States, cultivating an informed empathy is imperative across

global and transnational contexts. For instance, according to the report *Preparing Teachers for Diversity: The Role of Initial Teacher Education* (2017), the Public Policy and Management Institute concluded that pre-service teacher education has an obligation to prepare candidates for the ever increasing diversity within European communities linked to immigration, migration, and globalization. Likewise, the influx of refugees to European nations also has prompted concerns for how teacher education can prepare teachers who can effectively work with such culturally and linguistically diverse populations (DeHaene, Neumann, & Pataki, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

To theorize Cameron's experiences, we first turn to Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin who wrote about how we can reflect on our biases and come to see them in fresh light. He said that we only can generate new understandings of ourselves through our relationships and conversations with others. Holquist (1990, p. 28), who translated Bakhtin, wrote:

> … in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others. Restated in its crudest version the Bakhtinian just-so story of subjectivity is the tale of how I get myself from the other; it is only the other's categories that will let me be an object for my own perception. I see myself as others might see it. In order to forge a self, I must do so from outside.

In other words, in dialogue with one another, we come to know who we are—what we believe and how it may be possible to act in particular places and spaces. We all engage in recurring sorting processes as we search for words and ideas that contribute to our commonplace understandings of who we and others are. There seem to be three significant factors involved in our development of ways of viewing the world or our "ideological becoming" (Ball & Freedman, 2004, p. 5). These include: the time and space in which dialogues take place, those with whom we are conversing, and what "authority" we call upon or represent when speaking. One's ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981) rests on struggles among these" various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values" individuals face every day around choices we make about what we think, do, and say (p. 346). Bakhtin believed that out of such turmoil, learning originates, or as Holquist (1990) put it: "… all meaning is achieved by struggle" (p. 39). Our discomfort with what others say and how they behave may enable us to call into question our own words and actions, providing an environment for self-examination. As Bakhtin (1981) argued:

> Internally persuasive discourse …as it is affirmed through assimilation … [is] tightly interwoven with "one's own word" … the internally persuasive word is half ours and half-someone else's. … It is developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts (p. 346).

Whereas authoritative discourses are those that Bakhtin referred to as "words of a father" (p. 342), signaling that these derive from some authority—a religious group, government, political party, or a

community's values, internally persuasive discourses are those individuals come to understand as having personal resonance for them. It is not that either the authoritative or internally persuasive discourse is correct, or wrong. Rather, it is a matter of which of these discourses become more influential in one's thinking at any one time. Philosopher Nussbaum (2001, 2011a, 2011b) has called this sorting among viewpoints, an exercise of the "narrative imagination," as it enables us to consider what it is like to be in someone else's circumstances and to understand what they are feeling and thinking.

As teacher educators concerned with enacting social justice, we puzzle about how best to foster aspiring and prospective teachers' rethinking of their existing assumptions, especially those circulating around individuals of color and those living in poverty. Brantmeier (2011) offers a definition of social justice as "…fair and just structural arrangements and personal/social/professional relationships that provide access, opportunity, and inclusion of historically marginalized or oppressed individuals and/or groups of people" (p. 432). Bell (1997) argues that: "Social justice includes a 'vision of society'…[where] members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (p. 3). How might we encourage aspiring teachers' examination of authoritative discourses around poverty, race, and social class that they bring to campus from their home communities, friendship groups, social media, and other sites? Often, these exclude how to "provide access, opportunity, and inclusion" to individuals or provide "physically and psychologically safe and secure" spaces to all groups (Bell, 1997, p. 3). Such authoritative discourses often privilege personal motivation and effort as keys to individuals' success, sometimes ignoring economic,

social, and racial capital that people possess. We draw on a Bakhtinian framework for understanding aspiring teachers' talk, thinking, and actions as these notions may help teacher educators consider how to interrupt or enhance prospective teachers' discourses and practices.

We also look to those who write about compassion and empathy to interrogate our views of so-called "others"—persons we see as unlike ourselves. Contemporary theorists who write about compassion originate from diverse backgrounds, including Buddhist (e.g., Chodron, 2000, 2002; Dalai Lama, 2002; Dalai Lama & Hopkins, 2002; Roman Catholic (e.g. Armstrong, 2010; Boyle, 2010); feminist (Noddings, 1984, 1995; Noddings & Shor, 1990.); and critical race theorists (Delgado, 1996; Marx, 2008; Marx, 2006; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Warren 2013a; Warren 2013b; Warren, 2015; Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). All assert that one's compassion should not be rooted in pity for another's plight. Rather, individuals should "… cultivate an informed empathy and "to feel her pain as though it were our own, and to genuinely enter his point of view" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 7). Armstrong seems to be saying that if we genuinely are willing to engage with others' dilemmas, we might understand their challenges as if they were ones in which we, too, are enmeshed. Or, as the Dalai Lama argues: "Compassion enables us to refrain from thinking in a self-centered way" (2002, p. 105) and to put others' needs and desires before our own.

We cannot mandate someone to think in a more empathetic manner regarding persons they formerly have thought about as "others." Such empathy needs to come both from being cared for, and from "taking

an inward" turn or creating opportunities for self-examination as we often castigate others for their faults and failures. Teacher educators can model compassion and empathy in our own interactions with aspiring teachers. Noddings (1995) warns, "We do not merely tell them [prospective teachers] to care and give them texts to read on the subject, we demonstrate our caring in relation to them" (p. 190). Warren (2013a, 2013b, 2015) also asserts that teachers can "learn" their students' cultures, preferences for interactions, and communication styles, capitalizing on these for the benefit of students, if they remain attuned to family and community contexts in which they are located. Warren argues that teachers require a concerted and ongoing effort to reach across racial, ethnic, language background, and social class barriers to imagine themselves invested reciprocally and intellectually in young peoples' lives. Indeed, Warren and Hotchkins (2015) caution that, "Becoming an ally [with those who differ from oneself] begins with an assessment of the nature of the oppression from the perspective of the individuals experiencing the oppression" (p 270). The authors argue that understanding of another's subjugation is a daunting task, and one that Lamott (2017) emphasizes (p. 40) is rigorous labor, encompassing "noticing, caring, accepting, helping, not running away" (p. 40) from one's obligations and responsibilities.

As we examine the stories that aspiring teacher Cameron Harris tells about his teaching, we see that sometimes he heeds the Dalai Llama's words and thinks about youth he tutors and their needs and desires first. At other times, Cameron considers these after an initial turn towards judgment and disapproval of their actions. Rather than first imagining the emotional state of teens when failing tests or directed to leave the classroom due to rule infractions, Cameron often took a distanced and disparaging view of youth behavior. Taking an inward gaze means carefully examining one's own perspectives and goals prior to acting. An inward turn means engaging in continual self-examination before risking judgment. These are cautions that we believe all teacher candidates might incorporate into their practices. Next, we present Cameron's stories of his tutoring of middle school youth. However, before doing so, we locate him in overlapping contexts: the state and city where he was born and grew up, and the campus where he studies.

Context

Cameron grew up in Lake City, a mid-sized Midwestern city of 230, 000 where State University is located. Lake City is 79% White, and roughly 7% of the population is from each of three groups: African American, Latino/a and Asian (U.S. Census, 2010). Only 50% of students of color achieve high school graduation in Lake City (Department of Public Instruction, 2012) and African Americans are 8 times more likely to be suspended from school than their White peers and 4 times more likely to be suspended than their Latino/a peers (calculated across all grade levels) (Lake City Metropolitan School District, 2012). In 2011, Lake County's African American third graders were 4.5 times more likely not to meet reading proficiency standards and eighth grade reading scores for African American youth were, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) the worst in all 50 states of the United States (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2013). As reading proficiency is a crucial

indicator of contemporary as well as future achievement and high school graduation of youth, these are alarming statistics to read. Lake City elementary schools now enroll over 50% students of color. In the past twenty years, there has been a 500% increase in English language learners, most of whom are Spanish speakers (Lake City Metropolitan School District, 2008). Additionally, national trends for high school graduation, school achievement, child poverty, and incarceration of males of color mirror and often exceed those of neighboring states (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2013).

There also have been increasing tensions around relationships between Whites and persons of color living in the community. In winter 2015, a White Lake City police officer, responding to a 911 call, shot and killed an unarmed African American male teenager. The officer later was exonerated of intentional homicide, leading to weeks of protest by citizens (Becker & Culle*n*, 3.6.15). The State University campus also has been a site of conflict between Whites and persons of color over many years. Several incidents sparked concern by groups concerned with social justice on campus. These have included but are not limited to: racist incidents by anonymous individuals such as hanging an effigy of a Black "superhero" from a campus apartment balcony for all to see (Huppert, 6.15.11); and institutional attacks as when a conservative political group alleged that African Americans and other non-White groups garner special privileges in State University admissions and hiring decisions (Ziff, 9.13.11).

In 2012, State University enrolled nearly 30, 000 undergraduates—23,000 of whom are White and over 4, 000 of whom are persons of color with others categorized as international students (State University Data Digest, 2012-2013). In 2012-2013, 14% of 100 elementary education majors admitted for study were students of color, and in secondary English, mathematics, social studies, and science (grades 6-12), 15% of admitted undergraduates were students of color. Most prospective teachers admitted to elementary and secondary education programs at State University grew up in middle class families in small towns and suburban areas of the Midwestern state where the university is located, or in other bordering states (State University Data Digest, 2012-2013). The racial and social class homogeneity of the undergraduate population at State makes the cultivation of compassion for people initially seen as "others" a challenging task. It is within these contexts that Cameron Harris begins to sort out what he thinks about young people who are struggling in school, and what he might do to help them. Next, we describe the course in which Cameron was enrolled.

The Course

Mary Louise has taught the three-credit undergraduate course Critical Aspects of Teaching, Schooling, and Education for six years. During the course, students explore race, ethnicity, social class, gender, language background, and sexual orientation through: course readings found on a campus website; viewing of videos concerning, for example, the history of racism, poverty, and discrimination against African Americans, Native Americans, Latinas/os, and Asians; guest speakers who represent varied communities; student debates; and a 25-hour community-based field experience component. We define this field experience as tutoring, working in an after school athletic program, or supporting students

as a "lunch buddy" in local schools or community centers with substantial numbers of children from low-income families who also are children of color. There is one 75-minute lecture including a guest speaker, faculty talk, or video presentation each week, and a 75-minute long discussion group of about 25-30 students (in each of two or three sections) to accommodate everyone's participation. Often, what students talk about in discussion is their confusion about what they have learned at home, in schools, in their communities; why it contrasts with what they are learning on campus; and what they see as missing in their prior school curricula. Or, sometimes, they remain silent. Mary Louise sees her role as facilitating these dialogues rather than replacing one set of authoritative discourses with others, as well as supporting students in developing discourses more personally resonant for them.

Methodology

We see life history as a means to generate, collect, and analyze individuals' stories of their experiences and to discern patterns in these across people, places, and time. Frank (1995) argues that: "Life story researchers … examine the cultural scripts and narrative devices speakers use to make sense of their own life experiences" (p. 255). Mishler (1999) states that "…we are social actors in selecting and organizing the resources of language to tell our stories in particular ways that fit the occasion and are appropriate for our specific intentions, audiences, and contexts" (p. xvi). And, Linde (1993) refers to occasions persons choose to narrate as landmarks in their lives—prominent events resulting in understandings of who they are, what they know, and what they can do. Cole and Knowles (2001) emphasize the intersections between one's life and

the context/s in which it is lived out, saying that life history research …is intertwined with understanding "the complex interaction between life and context, self, and place" (p. 11). We choose to retell stories Cameron Harris recounted because they seem to exemplify the power of relationships and dialogues with others for generating new understandings of self.

Participant Recruitment

Mary Louise gained permission from the Institutional Review Board at State University to interview and collect artifacts from course enrollees who agreed to be study participants. She also enlisted a graduate student not affiliated with the course to come to one of the final classes each semester, and to offer aspiring teachers the opportunity to be study participants after grades were submitted. No students were aware that a research project invitation was to come at the end of semester. Further, this research did not receive any funding from agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Collection

Mary Louise conducted interviews in a place participants chose, often a quiet conference room in the building where class was held. Mary Louise has interviewed 75 university students (of 600 who enrolled) over the six years (12 semesters) she has taught the course. The interviews each lasted a minimum of 60 minutes in duration, often requiring second and third interviews for member checking, clarification, and elaboration. These were semi-structured and covered experiences in students' earlier lives such as: their K-12 schooling

experiences; their family lives; their friendship groups; their own and their families' perspectives about diverse people; and their experiences in the required community-based field experience component of the course. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Mary Louise also retrospectively collected papers from the course website that each aspiring educator had written. These included: required journal entries on various topics such as how students' race, social class, and/or gender and sexual orientation have affected their lives; an essay concerning travel to parts of Lake City to which they had not before visited—contrasting where individuals of particular social class groups lived and shopped; and a synthesis of what they learned in the course. We masked participants' identities, offering pseudonyms for their names and their family members, their high schools, work places, and hometowns.

Our choice of sampling selection procedures is one of five common kinds that Merriam and Tisdell (2016) name. These include: typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, and snowball sampling. This study employs a unique purposive sampling rationale, one that "… is based on unique, atypical perhaps rare attributes, or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 97). We chose this strategy as Cameron Harris was one of few students of color (from a total of 15) who had enrolled over time in the course.

Data Analysis

We analyzed all data inductively and deductively (Graue & Walsh, 1998). We began inductively by reading the interview transcripts and papers on multiple occasions, and coded patterns within and across interviews and documents. We next reread the data to verify and narrow these themes, and chose those we believed illustrated patterns present in the corpus of data. We attempt to understand, as Mishler suggests (1990): "how individuals interpret events and experiences, rather than assessing whether or not their interpretations correspond to or mirror the researchers' interpretive construct of 'objective reality" (p. 427). For example, university students of color said that youth they tutored might behave as they do because their families often had multiple jobs and unavoidably, were not home to help their children with homework or transport them to clubs and after-school activities. They also spoke about having empathy for students living in poverty; and wondered how families ended up homeless, with so few economic resources to sustain them.

Analyses were deductive in that we read the data patterns against our own professional and personal knowledge. First, we read the data patterns against a research literature focusing on service learning and its potential for altering how students think, talk about, and interact with persons different from themselves (Clayton, Bringle, & Hatcher, 2013; Eyler & Giles, Jr., 1999; Jacoby & Associates, 1996). We then reread the data patterns against our personal experience about who succeeds and who fails at school. For example, Mary Louise grew up in a Latino working-class family in New England; her father learned English at school while speaking Spanish at home. He reported few teachers who encouraged his continuing schooling. Much like Cameron Harris and his tutees, he hid his promise as a scholar beneath a "class clown" demeanor. While he and his youngest brother completed high school,

seven other siblings dropped out in discouragement, and went to work in factories to support their widowed mother, who spoke little English.

Amy, a European American woman married to a Latino, has two bicultural/biracial young children. She comes from a working class family and her own mother traveled great distances from home in order to pursue post-secondary schooling. Such experiences have enriched her insights into teaching youth from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, both of us have taught many children whose families have suffered economic challenges limiting their meal, housing, and transportation opportunities. We recognize that frequently no amount of ambition or hard work may enhance the options that people have for food, shelter, or acquiring higher education or job training.

We also understand that while we gathered a lot of data from the interviews and related artifacts collected, that it is not possible to capture all of someone's life in one or two or a few hour-long interviews—even when our participants are young adults. Rather than trying to portray their entire lives, we tried to capture salient events (through their interviews and papers for the course) that contributed to their understandings of themselves and the students with whom they worked (Viernes Turner, 2007).

Cameron Harris

Cameron Harris was 19 years old and a sophomore undergraduate when he enrolled in the course in January 2015. We particularly chose Cameron as a participant about whom to write as he was biracial,

and had experienced adversity in his life, including his adoption as an infant and early diagnosis of a hearing loss. Cameron's birth parents were an African American male and a White female teen who chose a couple who mirrored their own racial backgrounds as his adoptive parents.

He grew up in a primarily White, middle class neighborhood a few miles from the diversely populated middle school that he attended as a youth, and where he conducted his community-based field experience. There, he tutored two eighth grade African American boys who were as unengaged in school as he also had been as a middle schooler. The synergy between these factors: Cameron's racial identity, his adoption, and his former attendance at a school he later tutored in, seemed to make him an intriguing participant about whom to think and write. Mary Louise interviewed Cameron three times (for a total of three and one half hours) after she had submitted grades in the summer of 2015. The interviews covered his life as a family member, as a student in school, his out–of-school activities, what he read and reflected on from the course, and his experiences and interpretations of tutoring conducted at Riverside Middle School. In Cameron's interviews and papers, Mary Louise paid particular attention to how he characterized the intersections of his family life and school experiences, and how he used these understandings to think about the school behavior of his tutees. Later, Mary Louise sent him the audiotaped and transcribed interviews so that he could add, delete, or alter anything he had said. Ultimately, he chose not to make any changes.

In considering whom he would be tutoring, Cameron recalled his own mischievous, often inattentive

school behaviors. Their teacher told Cameron that both boys (David and Kendrick) he would be tutoring were failing their mathematics and science classes. Cameron observed the boys' classroom behaviors, and chuckling, said:

> At first, they seemed a lot like me in middle school; they enjoyed being class clowns laughing, talking, joking, and distracting others from their work. I remember my own glory days as a class clown and how incredibly thrilling it was to receive praise from my classmates and to portray a bad boy image. An image that simply stated, indicates I did not care about my work or my teachers. However, I also remember thinking that having a tutor would completely ruin my image. The thought of forever being ridiculed and teased for my need of academic assistance by my fellow classmates, left me with a sickening feeling that I never would be considered cool again.

Cameron saw that David and Kendrick were unengaged in school, just as he had been. However, he also saw their behavior as somehow more aberrant than his own, perhaps entwining their low socioeconomic status with their seeming disinterest in school.

He said: "I saw these two students as being disrespectful to their teachers, coming late to class, then falling asleep, and seeming to work hard at not succeeding in school. I began to wonder: Why did David and Kendrick consistently behave as they did?" One day, after dismissing David and Kendrick

as lazy, Cameron asked David why he had come late to class and promptly had fallen asleep. In questioning David, Cameron was beginning to step outside of his orientation of "blaming" the boys, and instead was trying to understand *why* they were behaving as they did. Cameron initiated seeing himself as someone who genuinely was trying to see another's viewpoint.

Tearfully, David told him that he could not sleep at his house as "everyone" was "up all night and yelling." Frequently, David then became upset and could not sleep. This scenario had never occurred to Cameron as his own home life was supportive and quiet when he needed space to study or sleep. He said, "I never had to worry about noise or arguing at my house at night or having a quiet time to study. My parents made sure that I had quiet study and sleeping time." His recognized that his family had prioritized his well-being.

In one paper, Cameron recalled reading Bassuk, Konnath, and Volk's (2006) text on complex trauma and its effects on youth, including absence from school, lack of focus while in school, and lack of participation. He speculated that David might be undergoing some trauma as a result of not sleeping and all of the nighttime noise at his home. He wrote:

> I am not at all sure if David has been experiencing anything like what Bassuk, wrote about. I do not want to make assumptions. But, it is clear that David's home life like not sleeping and being upset a lot, is negatively affecting his presence in school, participation grades, and important relationships with

his teachers. It is *not* (Cameron's emphasis) all his fault.

Cameron also observed teachers' behavior in the school. He attributed students' dismissals from class not only to teachers' exasperation with difficult behavior but to their impatience and failure to do what he called "mediate or understand their students' misbehavior." He began to see that students were not solely responsible for their school difficulties, but that with many teachers, they engaged in a cycle of escalating negative behavior resulting in dismissal from the classroom. He said:

> I tallied a total of six students who were asked to leave the classroom today due to talking back, being off-task, or refusing to participate. The majority of the time students were given zero warnings. Instead, following their undesirable behavior, students were asked to simply pack up their stuff and immediately leave the classroom. … This happened with some students more frequently than others, especially boys. The teacher showed no empathy for them, and did not inquire into reasons for their behavior.

He was beginning to discern that teachers and schools quickly might dismiss some students and their behaviors as undesirable while tolerating that of others. Further, he began to wonder how curriculum is structured for working-class students or those from lower-income families. Referring to one of our course readings, he wrote:

This [pedagogy he had witnessed] caused me to reflect back on Anyon's (1980) *Social class and the hidden curriculum*, where she discusses how teachers within working class schools often make their students follow certain procedures, which are usually incredibly mechanical, and involve rote behaviors with little decision-making and choice. This was almost identical to what I witnessed at Riverside.

Rather than solve problems in a prescribed manner, Cameron suggested in one discussion group that drawing on students' existing assets and working as a collaborative team might engage David and Kendrick more in learning mathematics. He began imagining them as youth who could learn if the curriculum was intriguing and the teachers demonstrated their caring and responsiveness with them as well.

Cameron also noticed that one of David's and Kendrick's chief admirers, an African American boy named Denton, seemed very disappointed with the attention accorded to them. Much to his surprise, Cameron said, "Denton told me I was *ruining everything* (Cameron's emphasis), and taking David and Kendrick away from him."

One day, when Cameron decided to speak with Denton and explain why he was encouraging his two friends to focus, he saw that Denton was staring at a paper labeled with a poor test score in large numbers at the top of the page. In a paper Cameron wrote about his interactions with Denton, he stated: "Although I could understand his frustration [with my stopping all the joking around], it was a little

disappointing that my presence and actions were affecting a student in such a negative way, regardless if my intentions were good or not. ... ."

He decided to explain his actions to Denton. Seeing Denton about to cry, Cameron instead began to comfort him. He found that Denton had failed five quizzes in a row and feared his Mother's anger when she saw the latest score. Cameron analyzed the quiz and saw that while Denton's calculations seemed fine, his answers all were wrong. Denton explained that he often was distracted by his classmates' joking around, would begin to panic, and then run out of time to check his answers. Cameron thought about this, and suggested to Denton and his teacher that Denton should perhaps take his test in an alternate quiet setting, away from other students. Denton and the teacher agreed this idea might work and both said they would try out his suggestion. Cameron closed his essay by writing:

> For the rest of the semester, Denton and I developed a strong level of respect and liking towards each other. ... I made a valid effort to not only work with David and Kendrick but to also work with Denton. In return, Denton stopped nagging David and Kendrick and started to focus a lot more on his own work than he had before.

Cameron said when discussing these circumstances,

> I guess I saw a lot of myself in Denton, someone who is willing to voice their opinion, is vocal, and determined to make a difference. ...I am really glad that Denton and I were willing to work past our differences and form a bond

during the semester, one where he could confide in me for support, suggestions, and advice ... What I learned from this experience is to never give up on those individuals in whom you see something.

He began to understand that he and Denton could show compassion for and enjoyment of one another, forgiving their initial suspicions. Thinking about Denton, Cameron recalled viewing the documentary *Precious Knowledge* (Palos, 2011*)*, a film that narrates how the ethnic studies program in Tucson, Arizona ended through legislation enacted by conservative lawmakers. He saw how the Latinx Tucson teachers cultivated strong relationships with their students and wrote:

> As we saw in *Precious Knowledge*, each student expressed that one of the best things about their teachers was that they were incredibly relatable and cared deeply for all of their students. ... What made the teachers so wonderful was their ability to extend themselves to all of their students while presenting an image that they cared about each of them in a unique, different, and special way. This has made me conscious of the work and effort that I must put in to be an effective, caring, and compassionate teacher.

Here, he acknowledges that he needs to work hard to be an "effective" teacher, even with youth who may be hard to care about and wishes to avoid. And, that to be "effective," he needs to show youth he cares

about them. He slowly was examining biases that he brought to classrooms.

When Cameron read class material or viewed videos or heard guest speakers, he began to ground his listening or viewing with classroom experiences that enabled him to develop more internally persuasive discourses regarding youth, curriculum, and teachers' options for behavior. Over time, he began to take a less judgmental stance on why youth might be struggling in school, learning that one might ask why individuals behave as they do before presuming deficiencies. He could see that when he took extra time to inquire about their needs and interests, that positive outcomes may accrue.

Cameron could see that certain males are viewed as not only as boisterous, but also as willfully causing their teachers and other students problems. At his tutoring site, teachers often did not acknowledge race or ethnicity, and/or poverty as reasons for their requests for students to leave the classroom. As hooks (2010) writes: "Issues of diversity both inside and outside of the classroom once openly addressed are slowly being pushed back into the realm of silence and misinformation" (p.110). Just as Riverside Middle School teachers sometimes failed to engage in critical self-examination regarding their thinking and behavior, Cameron also did not acknowledge how race and social class may have grounded his own initial assumptions about David, Kendrick, and Denton. He seemed as dysconscious (King, 1991) of his own biases as those teachers whose behavior he criticized.

Discussion and Implications

What can we learn as teacher educators from Cameron's experiences? Generating empathetic and compassionate discourses cannot derive from simply providing a time for aspiring teachers to discuss their interactions with youth. Rather, more structured discussions are required where participants are prompted to connect what they are observing with their own classroom experiences. They might ask one another: What did your favorite teachers do when you were not able to complete your homework? How did they help you accomplish your work? What can we do to facilitate work completion?

It only was when Cameron began to see how when he was a middle school student, he behaved much like David, Kendrick, and Denton, sometimes avoiding his homework and often flaunting the "rules" of school. Yet, as a middle class student with parents who participated at school, he had evaded censure for these. He slowly began to examine how that had come about, and how teachers had talked and acted instead of abruptly dismissing him from the classroom. He began to consider what alternatives there were for telling students: "You need to go now."

Placing a greater amount of emphasis on such reflection regarding our own and others' actions may be beneficial for aspiring teachers. The point is not agreement or consensus around the causes of youth disengagement from school or investment in learning, but debating what we have read, seen, and heard. Thinking about what worked for us as students can help us all see what is missing in analyses of our own behavior and that of youth as well. Only through

what Armstrong (2010) has called "cultivating an informed empathy" might we "genuinely enter" another individual's point of view and understand their dilemmas as though they are our own (p. 7). From this vantage point, an informed empathy enables teacher candidates to bring compassion and understanding into their developing practices. Such compassion and understanding becomes a lens through which they interpret their experiences and interactions with children and families so that such interactions are affirming. Through growing relationships and affinity with children and families both like and unlike themselves, teacher candidates can learn to support all students' development as learners.

Also, debates among persons who differ from one another are important as these may uncover varying dimensions of what might be happening in any single situation. Such debates may surface how race, ethnicity, and/or social class distinguish those whose behavior is excused or ignored, and those whose actions are quickly punished in classrooms with little time for problem-solving between teachers and youth.

Further, we might ask aspiring teachers to name examples of authoritative discourses they brought to campus and questions they now are asking about these as a result of their courses and community-based field experiences. Students might try on different discourses surrounding teaching youth and imagine what sorts of outcomes these might have for various individuals. This exercise could provide greater clarity for students around their beliefs and encourage more internally persuasive and generous responses to youth.

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Excerpts from talks given at the conference serve as case studies in this paper, without the intention to generalise about discourses of democracy in education. The results hint at uncritical attempts, often based on pathos, to totalise and generalise 'democracy/the democratic' especially within discourses on 'democratic schools'. Such discourses can contribute to cultural othering and stereotyping, as well as, simplistic assumptions about how 'democracy' functions and comes-into-being. They can also help the utterer hide their sentiments. Cultivating an Informed Empathy: An Aspiring Teacher Examines his Talk and Actions. October 2018. Mary Louise Gomez. I believe it is our responsibility to help teach students how to engage in courageous conversations and civil dialogue. In middle school, we begin with an initial conversation on understanding group norms: How will we make space for everyone's voice, not cutting anyone off and holding no judgment? We also encourage listening to one another and perspective-taking, trying to understand why they feel the way they do. Expand collaboration opportunities: Build or modify an activity that asks the students to interact with another student, teacher, parent, or friend outside of their classroom. In my position as an edtech instructional coach, I bounce between classrooms and help students and teachers on technology-based projects. Empathy is an emotional experience between an observer and a subject in which the observer, based on visual and auditory cues, identifies and transiently experiences the subject's emotional state [3]. In order to be perceived as empathic, the observer must convey this understanding to the subject. During the initial phase of the process, the observer must not only identify but also understand the basis of the subject's feelings. Alternatively, he may not have experienced death in his family but may understand the emotional response to death in the patient's culture. Researchers have long examined and discussed the utility of empathy in medicine and have found differing results.