Georgia Educational Researcher

Volume 10 | Issue 1 Article 3

Spring 2013

Boxes and Quilts? I Thought This Was College! Utilizing Pedagogical tools to Access Students' Sociocultural Selves

Mari Ann Roberts
Clayton State University

Marquita Jackson-Minot
Georgia Gwinnett College

Boxes and Quilts? I Thought This Was College! Utilizing Pedagogical tools to Access Students' Sociocultural Selves

Abstract

This reflection on practice discusses action research involving two pedagogical tools, identity boxes and culture quilts, which utilize the praxis of culturally responsive pedagogy. These tools were used to build classroom community and help students examine how their lives and education reflected "cultural themes of the society, personal themes, institutional themes, and social histories" (Creswell, 1998, p. 49). A qualitative examination of student response to the use of these tools indicated a strengthening of classroom community and the beginning of a transformative openness to, and critical examination of, cultural concepts based in what the authors term differentialities.

Keywords

Culturally relevant pedagogy, Cultural critical consciousness, Teacher education, Multicultural education, Sociocultural consciousness

BOXES AND QUILTS? I THOUGHT THIS WAS COLLEGE! UTILIZING PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS TO ACCESS STUDENTS' SOCIOCULTURAL SELVES

Mari Ann Roberts, mariroberts@clayton.edu
Clayton State University, Morrow, GA
and
Marquita Jackson-Minot, mjacks17@ggc.edu
Georgia Gwinnett College, Lawrenceville, GA

Abstract: This reflection on practice discusses action research involving two pedagogical tools, identity boxes and culture quilts, which utilize the praxis of culturally responsive pedagogy. These tools were used to build classroom community and help students examine how their lives and education reflected "cultural themes of the society, personal themes, institutional themes, and social histories" (Creswell, 1998, p. 49). A qualitative examination of student response to the use of these tools indicated a strengthening of classroom community and the beginning of a transformative openness to, and critical examination of, cultural concepts based in what the authors term differentialities.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural critical consciousness, teacher education, multicultural education, sociocultural consciousness

In the end, as any successful teacher will tell you,
you can only teach the things that you are. -Max Lerner

What is one question you want to ask a member of another
cultural, racial or ethnic group?

What culture other than your own would you like to know more about?

How do you see yourself and how do you think others see you?

Introduction

As we acknowledge the present homogeneous U.S. preservice teaching population, which we also see represented in our own classes at a majority European and African American college, a main purpose of teacher education emerges. As teacher educators, we are responsible for helping preservice teachers recognize that the ways in which people perceive the world, interact with one another, and approach learning are deeply influenced by factors such as race/ethnicity, social class, language, family, and prior experiences both personal and professional. In order to develop these understandings, it is imperative that we help our students cultivate cultural critical consciousness. Cultural critical consciousness (CCC), as argued by Gay and Kirkland (2003), requires our students to develop an understanding of who they are as people, the context in which they teach, and the ability to question their knowledge and assumptions concerning cultural

others. These types of understandings, though complex, provide hope in that they enable teachers to bridge cultural boundaries that separate them from their students and thus, enable them to better address students' needs. To guide preservice teachers in the development of cultural critical consciousness, teacher educators need to create curricula that "have relevance and meaning to students' social and cultural realities" (Howard, 2003, p. 196).

Researchers and teachers have used many methods to help students reach a better understanding of themselves and others, some through conversation, some through writing and reflection, others through arts-based media (e.g., Barone & Eisner, 2006; Christenson, 2000). In an attempt to engage students in the social and cultural realities of teaching and learning, we utilized the medium of art to help them gain a better understanding of their sociocultural selves. To do this, we used a blend of culturally responsive pedagogy and autobiographical life history in which students examined their individual lives and how their lives reflect "cultural themes of the society, personal themes, institutional themes, and social histories" (Creswell, 1998, p. 49). The questions posed at the beginning of this article are examples of the kinds of sociocultural realities we ask students to reflect upon and represent through two arts-based mediums, *identity boxes* and *culture quilts*. Our use of the aforementioned mediums caused us to wonder about the effectiveness of their implementation. Specifically, our research questions were, what (if any) change in classroom community/climate is observed through the use of the identity box and culture quilt? and, what (if any) professed change in the perception of student sociocultural identities of self and other takes place during student sharing of the culture quilt and identity box? Findings demonstrated that the use of these pedagogical tools had a positive effect on our students' cultural critical consciousness, classroom community, and sociocultural identity. Furthermore, the tools created a safe space for students who were willing to engage in more honest and open discussions on issues of identity and diversity.

When diversity education is limited to one-way learning ("we" learn about "them") and relies on discrete categories of content, the richness of pluralistic self-identities is difficult to incorporate. Consequently, preservice teachers may struggle to apply what they learn when they encounter their own students who identify as members of multiple groups. Introducing our students to their own identities as well as those of their classmates, helps, as was our intent, to make a transfer in which they move from a place of individuality into a collective cultural critical consciousness and thus, are better prepared to comprehend and receive the knowledge of self and other.

Theoretical Framework

As teacher educators, we attempt to teach and model ways to be culturally responsive. We do this with the hope and expectation that when preservice teachers enter their own classroom and engage with students, these practices will come forth. Thus, this work relates closely to the several salient philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g., Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1990, Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and "cultural critical consciousness" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003;

Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). For example, in terms of culturally responsive pedagogy, Villegas and Lucas (2002) propose the necessity of a curriculum that "builds on principles of social justice and advances the culturally responsive teacher" (p. xiv) and argue that culturally responsive teachers are those who have sociocultural consciousness, value students' prior knowledge and beliefs, and design instruction that builds on the familiar while stretching even further beyond. Irizarry (2007) suggests that culturally responsive pedagogy should be more broadly conceptualized to acknowledge the hybrid nature of culture and identity and include students who are multiethnic/multiracial. Most importantly, researchers such as Young (2010) lament the mis-use or under-use of culturally relevant pedagogy and call for further dialog between scholars and practitioners to more consistently and appropriately use the theoretical framework in research and practice.

One of the many positive outcomes of the use of culturally relevant pedagogy is the development of an increased cultural critical consciousness. Gay and Kirkland (2003) refer to the necessity of teachers developing a *cultural critical consciousness*. The researchers express the belief that preservice teachers are unfamiliar with ways to reflect on the sociocultural self and call for teacher educators to foster a deeper self-reflection in their students. Kumagai and Lypson (2009) extend this concept further into the realm of medical education when they propose that "multicultural education must go beyond the traditional notions of 'competency' (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes). It must involve the fostering of a critical awareness — a critical consciousness — of the self, others, and the world" (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 782). The authors also call for a commitment to addressing issues of societal relevance, such as racism, in health care and health care education.

We believe that activities such as the identity box and the culture quilt answer this charge by creating a safe classroom climate, developing a consciousness of self, and later, fostering a deeper understanding of "other" for our preservice teachers. When students become familiar with one another and see their differences as well as commonalities, they are more willing to share and know one another more intimately. Our work is also related to art education, art theory, and Erickson's (1980) theory of psychosocial development; however, for the purposes of this paper, we do not utilize these concepts as theoretical frameworks.

Methods

An arts-based educational research methodology was used for this study. Barone and Eisner (2006) describe arts-based educational research (ABER) as having two criteria. First, it is "meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities" that "are educational in character. Second, arts -based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry process and the research 'text'" (p. 95). They argue that most educational research is designed for the purpose of arriving at conclusions that are valid, reliable, and as trustworthy as possible. However, that is not the case for ABER. The primary purpose is to describe the enhancement of perspectives and aim to suggest alternative ways to view educational phenomena. The identity box and culture quilt are examples of the ways arts-based

methodology was used to gain a better understanding of the perspectives that students bring into the classroom.

This qualitative action research study was conducted in a graduate course in teacher education and one undergraduate course. Ninety-six percent of all participants had not taken a diversity course prior to enrolling in the course. The research questions were: What (if any) change in classroom community/climate is observed through the use of the identity box and culture quilt? And, what (if any) professed change in the perception of student sociocultural identities of self and other takes place during student sharing of the culture quilt and identity box? Data were collected from multiple sources such as student reflective essays, participant observer notes, and student oral responses. Students, whose works were used, granted permission through signed consent.

The data were analyzed through content and narrative analytical approaches. Textual and narrative content were coded by both researchers for emergent themes, coding was compared to determine inner-rater reliability, and then finer codes and overarching themes were developed. These themes were: willingness - students expressing willingness to discuss issues involving self and race; acceptance - students expressing increased acceptance of and openness to varied perspectives; friendships - students establishing new friendships in and outside the classroom; curiosity - students expressing curiosity about unfamiliar cultural concepts; and change - student expressions of change or growth regarding previously held perspectives about self and others.

The content approach, used with student reflective essays and participant observer notes, focuses on analyzing the explicit or manifest content as well as attempting to interpret the latent content, which can be interpreted or interpolated from the text, but is not explicitly stated in it (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). The narrative analytical approach, which takes stories as its investigative focus, was used with recorded student oral responses and stories "told" in student written reflections. According to Chase (2005), narratives or stories may be oral or written, elicited or naturally-occurring, short or long, and may focus on ordinary stories people tell as a way to share everyday experiences. Researchers who use narrative analysis have come to understand that personal, social, and cultural experiences are constructed through the sharing of stories (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). The recognition that both our students' in-class stories and their responses to the project was key to the determination of an increase in cultural critical consciousness, classroom community, and awareness of student sociocultural identity; all of which generated the use of these methods of data analysis.

Our Contexts

One author is an African American female who teaches at a predominately African American public institution of higher learning in the southeast. There are approximately 6000 students in attendance at this coeducational institution, which is located in the metropolitan area of a large city. Here, education courses are offered at the undergraduate and graduate level to prepare students as middle grades and secondary educators. The class in which the tools pertinent to this discussion are used is *Exploring Socio-Cultural*

Perspectives class, which focuses on readings and discussions pertaining to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In this class, her students construct culture quilts, interpret films and participate in other activities that involve the investigation of various topics surrounding culture, diversity, and social justice. For the purposes of this work, respondents came from a class of 41 preservice teachers, 14 male, 27 female, 10 students identified as European American or White, 3 as Latino, 1 student as Black, and 27 as African American.

One author is an African American female who teaches at a predominately White private, female, liberal arts institution located in the southeast. Here, there are just fewer than 1000 students in attendance. This school is also located in the metropolitan area of a large city. Presently, education is a certification-only program at the undergraduate and Masters level. In the undergraduate class pertinent to this discussion, *Understanding Learners*, there is a great emphasis on students learning about their sociocultural selves in the context of learning about others. The class consisted of 20 students, all female, 6 African American, 2 Hispanic, 2 Middle Eastern, and 10 European American. Her students create identity boxes and culture quilts in addition to other activities that allow students to fully explore diversity.

Our Pedagogical Tools

Identity boxes and culture quilts are pedagogical tools that we use to create a classroom climate of trust and inclusion. They help students communicate aspects of their personal selves that are not usually shared in a standard classroom setting. We believe using these tools at the onset of class is essential because their use creates an intimacy, encourages "real" dialogue and communication between students, breaks down barriers, and helps to create an atmosphere of openness and trust. As students present their various artistic creations and ask questions of each other, the developing classroom climate helps to ensure that future conversations about diversity can and will be addressed in a safe environment.

The identity box is a physical box upon which students visually and symbolically represent their visible and invisible selves. Students are instructed to use images, words, found objects, artifacts, pieces of music, photographs, any items of particular significance to artistically and metaphorically represent their “visible,” how others see them, and “invisible,” how they personally identify self. The identity box has been used in various contexts, but emerges from the field of art education/art therapy. It combines the theory and practice of art, education, and adaptive education with a focus on using tools to represent social perspectives. In support of extant literature in this field, our students’ identity box perspectives have often “include(d) attention to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, special ability, and other body identities and cultures; socioeconomics, political conditions, communities, and natural and humanly-made environments, including virtual environments” (Freedman, 2009, “Social Perspectives section, para.1).

According to Freedman (2009), the common ground among art education and art theory perspectives is that they are based on the conviction that the visual arts are vital to all societies and that representations of art in education should seek to reveal its complexity, diversity, and integral cultural location. Freedman emphasizes that these types of perspectives are not, "just political," and reminds us "they represent the lived meanings of visual culture and communities" (para.1**)**. Thus, in keeping with Freedman's ideals, art as a universal medium was used to help students investigate their sociocultural selves. Specifically, we wanted to challenge them to think about how they view themselves politically, socially, racially, ethnically and what this information means as they embark into their teaching careers.

The culture quilt consists of a four by four grid with 16 distinct squares. When asked to create the quilt, students are encouraged to think about who they are under the following headings: cultural self - family, cultural "other", cultural self - personal and cultural self - professional. Students must provide a representation (pictorial and written) of each square and explain each to the class at large.

As with many good pedagogical tools, our adaptation of the culture quilt has a rich history. We adapted the culture quilt project from Dr. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, from Emory University. However, as we understand it, an elementary teacher named Vivian Stephens may have originally developed this project.

During this project, students fashion their quilts in any way they are able to conceptualize within the theoretical guidelines. Students have chosen such creative means of displaying their quilts as: sewing actual quilts, creating sculpture, constructing Power Points or Prezis, and/or creating individual textile squares. In the next section we will discuss our findings by discussing student responses to each project. These illustrate some of the ways in which our preservice teachers begin the process of developing a cultural critical consciousness.

Findings

Our research questions examined whether any change in our classroom community/climate would be observed through the use of the identity box and culture quilt, and what (if any) professed change in the perception of student sociocultural identities of self and other would take place during student sharing of the culture quilt and identity box? The main emergent themes that addressed these questions were found in the textual and narrative responses of a majority of students in each of our classrooms. These themes are as follows: willingness - students expressing willingness to discuss issues involving self and/or race; acceptance - students expressing increased acceptance of and openness to varied perspectives; friendships - students establishing new friendships in and outside the classroom; curiosity - students expressing curiosity about unfamiliar cultural concepts; and change - student expressions of change or growth regarding previously held perspectives about self and others. In brief, given the findings above, the use of the identity box and culture quilt did in fact result in increased cultural critical consciousness, classroom community, and awareness of sociocultural identity for our students. Examples of student responses to each project are provided below.

The Identity Box: Student Responses and Emergent Themes

The identity box activity was given to students on the first day of class. They had several days to think about and construct their boxes before presenting them to a class of virtual strangers on the second day the class met. This activity was used as a way of bringing to surface a level of consciousness about who we are and to demonstrate themes of connectedness.

Upon examination of the data, there was a prominent connection to the overarching theme of cultural critical consciousness; specifically, in the context of students' ability to question knowledge and assumptions concerning self and cultural others and in the connection to their future role as teachers. Out of the five emergent themes previously mentioned, the themes of curiosity, willingness, and acceptance were most notable in the data. These themes are addressed below under the headings of cultural critical consciousness - self and cultural critical consciousness – in the context of teaching.

Cultural critical consciousness: Self. Students' statements mentioned in this section demonstrate how they struggled with the aspect of CCC which involves knowing the self. As it was only the second day of class and a safe classroom environment had not been yet established, many of the students mentioned a hesitancy to share who they were to a group of virtual strangers, especially as it pertained to who they were on the inside. There were many opinions. The majority of students said they enjoyed the process of creating their boxes and thought it would be an easy task - proclaiming that they were fully aware of who they are on the inside and outside. Some admitted that they never gave any thought about their identities. Others admitted that they were not sure how friends and family viewed them – so they asked for help. In their reflective essays many students commented that they were scared to share such personal aspects of themselves and chose to disclose only information that was "safe" and often superficial. More often than not, students talked about their hands shaking as they presented. One student saw this theme emerge in many of the presentations. She said,

> The biggest thing I discovered about many of my classmates is that they're afraid to share what's on the inside of their boxes. People began their presentation with the outside, and spent more than half of the time on the outside. I wonder if some people were hesitant to share darker things about themselves. I wanted to see more deep reflection from them. What are they afraid of? What worries them? I wanted to see more of their insides.

This response demonstrates an example of curiosity because this student expressed a desire to know more about her classmates.

Another student stated, "Assembling my identity box was not the easy arts–and–crafts project I assumed it would be." She went on to say that she was afraid that she would not be able to accurately represent the way people see her and struggled with this portion of the box saying it required her to think, a lot. She added, "The inside was what scared me the most" as she was not ready to share such personal information with a group of people

she did not know. This student was not alone in this aspect of creating her box as corroborated by another student who had similar feelings.

Figure 1. *Picture of outside of identity box.*

Her box, pictured in Figure 1, is indicative of her being guarded. The outside is decorated with stickers, bells, jewels, and knick-knacks she felt represented her on the outside as she is "a joyful person who always enjoys fun, flowers, color, randomness, friendships, cupcakes…." However, upon examination of the inside, she placed ribbons on the top so you could not see inside. You had to put your hand in through tightly placed ribbons and pull objects out to see what she placed on the inside (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Inside of identity box.*

While many students were hesitant about sharing such personal information, others openly shared the inside of their box – exposing the internalized self. A student compared creating her identity box to a therapeutic exercise. She disclosed being abused by her family and then being placed in foster care at the age of sixteen. In her reflective essay she said,

> As I sat listening to everyone describe their boxes and discuss their own identities, I was simultaneously eager, but also hesitant and apprehensive about presenting and thinking 'gosh I hope I don't burst out crying when my turn comes.' Well, what do you know, I did and I hated that I did. I cried because I still carry with me a lot of pain and sadness.

Yet, another student openly placed an empty prescription bottle inside her box and talked about her former addition to cocaine. The last two quotes are examples of students expressing the theme of willingness.

Another theme that emerged from the data was acceptance – students expressing increased acceptance of and openness to varied perspectives. A student shared,

> Listening to my classmates share helped me to see so much deeper into who they are. I feel like I am much better prepared to listen to my classmates and see them as a whole, instead of just what I see when I look at them. I discovered that some of them have many things in common with me, and some of them are very different from me.

Cultural critical consciousness: In the context of teaching. Students were asked to speculate why they were given this project. Many of them said in their reflections, that the intent was to create a safe place and build a foundation of trust in order to have meaningful conversations about hard topics. They were also aware that it was intended for them to see and experience the differences and commonalities shared of the group. Students did not mention the intention that they also develop their consciousness about the context in which they would one day teach, however, this emerged from the student data when analyzed. One example is when a student shared,

> It was interesting to see how easily some people were able to speak with no problem as all, while others (like myself) were unable to present without shaking. … I believe these differences are also a part of the logic behind this project, I suppose that in order to "understand learners" we have to understand ourselves – both alone and in contrast to others.

In the student's discussion of "understanding learners" we are able to see an emergent awareness of the need to connect knowledge of self to knowledge of others in order to be effective classroom teachers.

Although many students were guarded, and rightfully so, in presenting who they are inside and outside on the second day of class, this activity started the process of allowing students to take risks and, thus, laid the foundation of creating an open and inviting

classroom space. As a student concluded her reflection she shared, “I think this class will be a journey in self-discovery, and if I’m lucky I’ll find out new things that I didn’t know before. This was a good place to start, remembering ground that I have gone over before.” We fully concur with her assessment. As multiculturalists, we believe it is paramount to know and acknowledge the various contexts of self. With this knowledge, we are then able to become more effective teachers of others.

The Culture Quilt: Student Responses and Emergent Themes

When creating the culture quilt, our findings showed that students connected aspects of their personal culture and educational experiences to a larger mosaic of humanity. Our research inquiries, which searched for change in student sociocultural understandings of self and other and improved classroom community, were addressed by students’ responses to, or discussions of, many of the quilt questions. These responses coalesced into the emergent themes of willingness, curiosity, change, acceptance, and friendship discussed previously in this section. In an attempt to illustrate these, some individual student responses to the following quilt questions are shared: Who are you? What negative comment or stereotype have you heard people make about the members of your cultural, racial, or ethnic group and how did it make you feel? and, Who was your most influential teacher?

Who are you? Answering a question like "who are you?" seems simple on the surface yet, when examined in a cultural context, often begets complex answers. In the years of assigning this project, students have identified themselves in multiple ways: through jobs, hobbies, and favorite things, but the overwhelming way in which students have answered this question is through displaying their connection to family, as depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Culture quilt square.*

As this picture demonstrates, this African American male student saw himself through the lens of his relationships with other important family figures in his life.

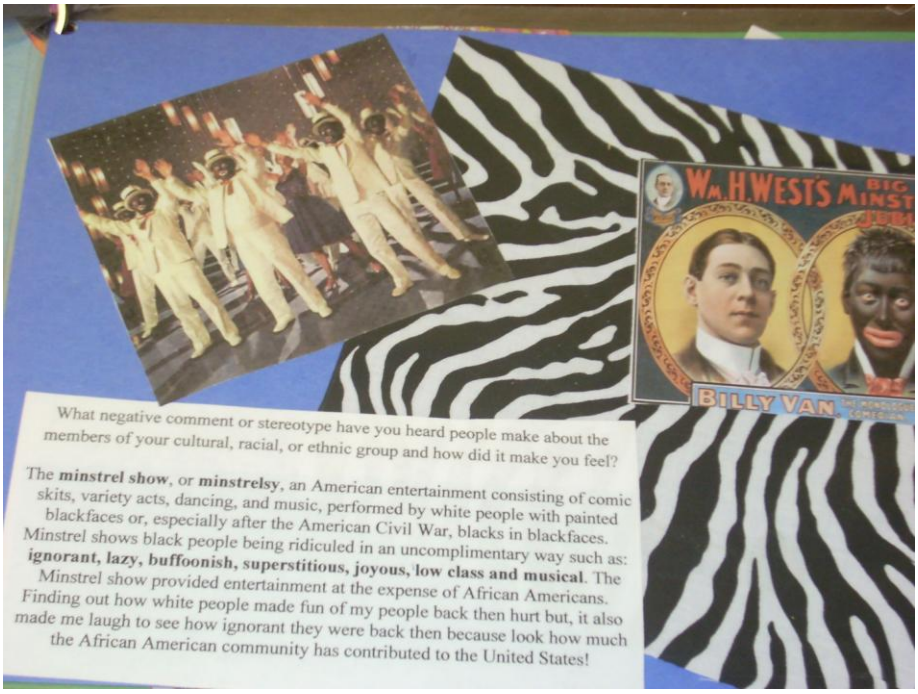
When attempting to explain the idea of "cultural self" to other class members, students often share intimate thoughts and concerns with the class. This action of openness, demonstrates our theme of willingness – in which students are willing to share personal and/or racial issues with their classmates. To illustrate, when presenting his culture quilt through the venue of a PowerPoint presentation, the aforementioned student also shared memories of the murder of his father, mentioning that the tragic death made his family pull together and become very resilient, thus making them even more closely knit. Upon hearing this revelation, other students who lost parents also began to share the devastating effect the loss had on their families. It was at these moments feelings of community began to build.

What negative comment or stereotype have you heard people make about the members of your cultural, racial, or ethnic group and how did it make you feel? The quilt is based around the sociocultural context of education that is inherently connected to race, yet, like the identity box, when presenting the quilt there are times when students, particularly European American students, go out of their way to refrain from directly addressing this potentially uncomfortable topic. Nevertheless, one particular square always serves as a catalyst to personalized critical conversations about race and racism between students; this square asks students to share a racial stereotype they have heard about members of their race and explain how that stereotype made them feel. Responses to this question have been varied.

Here, the European American students often struggle to identify stereotypes concerning their race. Problems with identifying White racial stereotypes frequently lead to conversations about why there is such difficulty in identifying negative stereotypes of European Americans. This is a demonstration of the theme of curiosity. In this, students often find themselves wrestling with the reasons why many stereotypes of European Americans exist, but the culture has become so much a part of the fabric of U.S. society that its members' stereotypical behaviors are practically invisible, accepted as norms, and masked in descriptions such as middle class or standard. This happens for multiple reasons, but often, in part, because racial categorizations are not as prevalent (or as easily identified) for members of a dominant group.

In the analysis of these conversations, there was often a demonstration of the themes of change and acceptance - the first awakenings of cultural critical consciousness in the students. The European American students are experiencing, many for the first time, an awareness of the dominance of European American culture in U.S. society, while students of color experience, many for the first time, the feeling of freedom inherent in being able to express their frustration with the dominant culture to members of that culture (willingness). A further awakening takes place as students of color, usually African American students, begin to share the depth of injury and hurt they experience when stereotypes of their race, which are often negative, are invoked (see Figure 4).

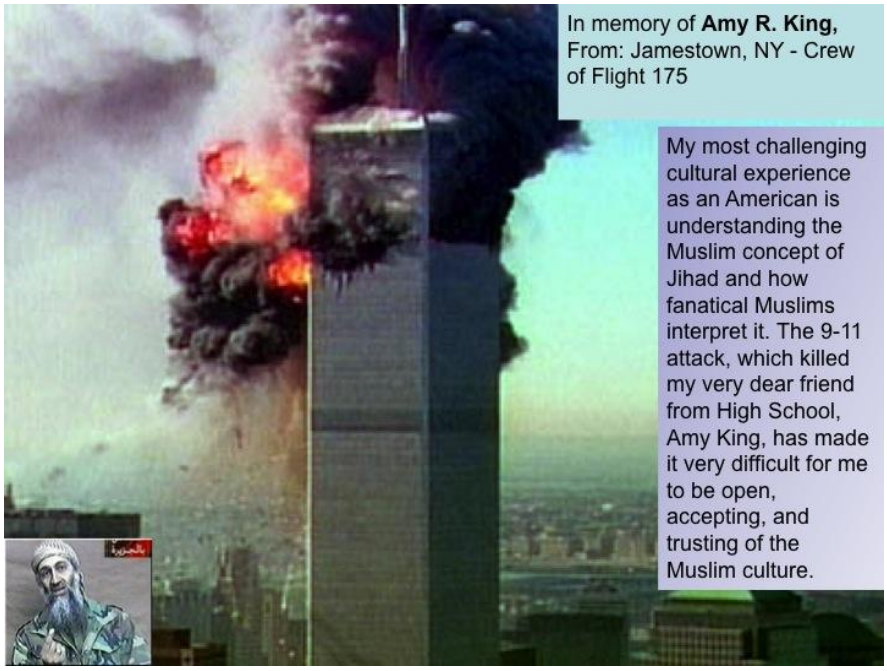
Figure 4. *Page from culture quilt book.*



This example, provided by an African American student who created a culture quilt "book" with individual pages, verbally and visually communicated both her pain and her resiliency when faced with negative racial stereotypes. Her honesty evoked a response in one European American student who demonstrated the themes of acceptance and curiosity when she remarked, "I don't see how you do it. If people talked about me like that, I would either start to believe it or want to fight!" The European American student's comment evoked a brief discussion of internalized racism, but when it stalled and some students began to shift uncomfortably as if waiting for the difficult moment to conclude, we also discussed what it means to be placed on a learning edge and how important it was to stay there and learn, instead of running away.

A demonstration of a new theme, change, along with another demonstration of the themes curiosity, acceptance, and willingness was experienced when a student shared the portion of his quilt that dealt with his most challenging cultural experience. To explain, he demonstrated curiosity as he shared that he lost someone very close to him in the 9-11 terrorist attack in New York, and expressed a desire to better understand the "Muslim concept of Jihad and how fanatical Muslims interpret it" (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Image of terrorist attack on 9-11.*



Many in the class spoke positively about his expressed desire to learn instead of hate (change, acceptance) and other students, who also experienced loss in connection to that event, began to share their stories (willingness).

Finally, a student garbed in a hijab began to talk about the persecution that she and members of her family experienced during that time. This part of the conversation evoked tension; of key importance, however, was the fact that we were able to have the conversation at all (willingness). In evident yet respectful interest, another student asked what the "scarf she wore meant" (curiosity) and the covered student patiently began to extol the virtues of her dress, explaining," when a woman is covered, men cannot judge her by her appearance, but are forced to evaluate her by her personality, character, and morals." The way in which the students handled this quilt-induced conversation about culture, diversity, social issues, real experiences, and real concerns, supported the burgeoning feeling of community and kept the class honest and respectful. This discussion, one among many held regarding the quilts, found the students learning about one another, questioning previously held assumptions, and beginning to develop friendships. A group of students, who started out as strangers unwilling to freely discuss or examine race and racism, were developing community and exhibiting a desire to expand their cultural critical consciousness.

Who was your most influential teacher? The underlying purpose of the *Socio-Cultural Perspectives* class is to stimulate thinking about diversity in the context of education. Thus, a large portion of the quilt examines students' perspectives regarding education. The square that asks about an influential teacher, not only fosters fond

memories of favorite teachers, but also initiates conversation about what good teaching is and how it should/can address students' culturally relevant concerns. One student steered the conversation in this direction when she shared that her most influential teacher challenged her, held high expectations for her, but most importantly, protected her from a "racist" school environment in which she was one of four African American students in a predominately White population, and by treating her as an "equal and an individual who could learn absolutely anything" (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. *PowerPoint image of most influential teacher.*

At that time, it was explained that her statements demonstrated some major tenants of culturally relevant pedagogy. Here, once again, was a demonstration of the theme of willingness, and more importantly, the opportunity to transition students' from an increased cultural critical consciousness to an awareness and understanding of the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Although the descriptions of both assignments, identity boxes and culture quilts, differ, the lived experience of these pedagogical tools becomes strangely similar when we examine their influence in the development of our classrooms' community and climate and our student's increased cultural critical consciousness. The first influential factor in both projects emerged through showing students what they had in common. An additionally important factor emerged as the projects helped students begin to recognize and respect their differences. To complete the trifecta, when students asked questions,

discussed, then reflected, in writing, about what they discovered, the circle of influence concluded, but only for that moment. The continued influence of both projects led to a group understanding based on our students' *differentialities*, rippled throughout the rest of our classroom experiences, and, at times, extended beyond the classroom as well.

Discussion: Differentialities

As humans, we all have phenotypical differences and commonalities, such as skin, hair color and type, body shape, eye color, height, etc. We also have commonalities and differences that are not always as apparent, such as learning styles, religion, family structures, beliefs, and educational goals. In the findings depicted above, our students begin to see that all of these things regularly cross cultural boundaries, each with its own unique heritage. This illustrates that our ever-expanding global community is both expanding and shrinking as cultures clash, overlap, and integrate (Congdon, Stewart, & White, 2001). Although not all of our students demonstrated significant changes, a majority (75%) of them did. Something happened to those students through the use of the identity boxes and culture quilts; something that enabled our classes to move beyond their differences and commonalities into recognition of the inherent humanity in each of us; we define this as "differentialities."

Nieto (2009) attests that "in our society, one is either American or foreign" and that "the designation of American is generally reserved for those who are White and English speaking. Others, even if here for many generations, are still seen as quite separate" (p. 60). Often these perspectives are so ingrained in the fabric of our being that we pay little or no attention to the educational ramifications of thinking that cultural others are less than. In helping preservice teachers recognize the influence of, and differentialities beyond, race/ethnicity, social class, language, family, and prior experiences in academic achievement and education as a whole, the culturally relevant pedagogy of the culture quilt and identity box increase cultural critical consciousness and engage the possibilities and complexities of K-12 teacher education. The proof of this statement lies in the words of our students, many of whom shared reflections similar to the following:

> I was surprised that we were asked to complete this exercise but now it makes complete sense to me. As educators of consequent generations, teachers have a responsibility to impart knowledge to a diverse array of students from all kinds if backgrounds; rich, poor, those from good homes, . . . those who are from different cultures, etc. It is crucial for teachers to be aware of their own identities and how this identity impacts how they educate their students and the kind of education that they give.

The use of these projects also serves as a way of setting ground rules regarding class communication. The respect and deference students pay one another when listening to intimate life details morphs into an understanding that, no matter the difficulty of our future conversations about race, culture, and difference, everyone's opinion will be heard, valued, and respected. As students listen to one another's sociocultural perspectives, they

receive deeper understanding of the cultural self and other and, in turn, become better able to transfer those understandings to a K-12 teaching experience.
The use of tools such as the identity box and culture quilt are often unexpected by a majority of our students who perceive college as a place to take notes and listen to lectures. As students have responded in their reflections, "Decorating quilts [or boxes]? I thought this was college!" While they are initially shocked to find themselves participating in the making of crafts, they later express surprise at how quickly the projects grow special to them and become true manifestations of their sociocultural selves.

Final Thoughts

Although we believe in the effectiveness of the pedagogical tools presented here, we acknowledge that all students will not be ready to become fully culturally conscious by the end of our classes. As humans, we are not always aware of the self - who we are and how our lived experiences will influence our choices. There are many reasons for our resistance to real knowledge of self and other: fear, clinging to privilege, lack of exposure to cultural "others," etc. However, these tools are a way of bringing critical cultural consciousness to the forefront. Over many years, these arts-based projects have continued to be a key part of our praxis because they allow students to think, dialogue, and share in ways they have never been challenged to before.

Aiding preservice teachers in an examination of the cultural self seems to increase their willingness to engage with sociocultural "others." Through the use of tools like the identity box and culture quilt, usually, at least 75% of our students take the challenge to become more open to having discussions about issues of diversity and other associated topics. This increased knowledge of self and other is imperative because, whether negative or positive, our students will enter the classroom with preconceived notions of race and culture and can only teach what they know.

References

Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (2006). Arts based educational research. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 93-107). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Chase, S.E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches and voices. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S .Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Christenson, L. (2000). *Reading writing and rising up*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools Ltd.

Congdon, K., Stewart, M., & White, J. H. (2001). Mapping identity for curriculum work. In Y. Gaudelius & P. Speirs (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in art education* (pp. 108-118). New York: Prentice Hall.

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Erickson, E. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

Freedman, K. (2009). *Teaching visual culture: Understanding art inside and outside of school* [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://sitihayatimohdyusoff.blogspot.com/2009/08/teaching-visual-culture.html

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory into Practice,* 42(3), pp. 181-187.

Howard, T. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory into Practice,* 42(3), pp. 195 – 202.

Irvine, J. J. (1990). *Black students and school failure.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Irvine, J., & Armento, B. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades.* Boston: McGraw Hill.

Irizarry, J. G. (2007). Ethnic and urban intersections in the classroom: Latino students, hybrid identities, and culturally responsive pedagogy. *Multicultural Perspectives,* 9(3), pp. 21-28.

Kumagai, A. K., & Lypson, M. L. (2009). Beyond cultural competence: Critical consciousness, social justice, and multicultural education. *Academic Medicine,* 84(6), pp. 782-787.

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1997). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. *The Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, pp. 3-39.

Ladson-Billings. (1994). T*he dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Manning, P.K., & Cullum-Swan, B. (1994). Narrative, context and semiotic analysis. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 463-477). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nieto, S. (2009). Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education. In C. Kridel (Ed.). *Classic edition sources: Education* (4th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

Villegas, A., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach.* New York: State University of New York.

Young, E. (2010). Challenges to conceptualizing and actualizing culturally relevant pedagogy: How viable is the theory in classroom practice? *Journal of Teacher Education,* 61(3), pp. 248-260.