

Dialogue: Does a Teacher (Educational Researcher, Counselor or Other Professional)'s Race, Gender, Class, Ethnicity and Ideology Belong in the Classroom?

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Kimberly A. Scott, Ron McLean and Alan Singer, Hofstra University;
Pedro Sierra, Bushwick High School and Heidi Kling

This dialogue was inspired by an article published in the Winter 2001/2002 issue of the newspaper *Rethinking Schools*. In the article "She's For Real," Tracy Wagner explained her decision to discuss that she was a lesbian with students in an eighth grade class while she was a student teacher. As part of a lesson on stereotyping, Wagner said to students, "Really? This is what gay and lesbian people look like? Because I'm gay, and I don't look like this."

Later in the article, Wagner reflects that "(t)hinking back, I have to admit that I told the students about my sexual orientation for my own emotional well being, to live up to my beliefs of what it meant to be a teacher." She also argues "that this disclosure resonated profoundly in our classroom. I could feel it in small ways, each and every day - the way students more eagerly shared their poetry; the way they chose the more private of two journal entries to read." The full text of the article is available at www.rethinkingschools.org/Archives/16_02/real162.htm.

Our dialogue uses Wagner's decision to divulge her sexual orientation as a starting point to discuss whether teachers and other professionals should allow their personal lives, ideas and concerns to enter their classrooms, professional practice and research.

In their book, *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990), Myles Horton and Paulo Freire discuss the question whether it is possible or desirable for teachers to be "neutral." Freire asks: "A biology teacher must know biology, but is it possible just to teach biology? What I want to know is whether it is possible to teach biology without discussing social conditions" (104). Horton believes: "There's no right I could claim that anybody else in the world can't claim, and I have to fight for their exercising that right just like I have to fight for my own. That doesn't mean I have to impose my ideas on people, but it means I have a responsibility to provide whatever light I can on the subject and share my ideas with people" (105). In a similar vein, historian Howard Zinn argues "objectivity is neither possible nor desirable. It's not possible because all history is subjective, all history represents a point of view. . . Objectivity is not desirable because if we want to have an effect on the world, we need to emphasize those things which will make students more active citizens and more moral people" (Miner, 1994: 150).

Perhaps professionals can never truly be neutral, but is it a goal we should aspire to achieve? Even if we can never divorce who we are from what we do, how much should we allow our selves to enter the lives of our students, our clients or our work?

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Ron McLean is an assistant professor in counselor education at Hofstra University, in the department of Counseling, Research, Special Education, and Rehabilitation. He graduated with his Ph.D. in Counselor Education from St. Louis University. Dr. McLean believes that appropriate self-disclosure is a useful skill for counselor educators. It encourages authentic teacher-student relationships, and it promotes opportunities for deeper trust and respect, especially when working with people from diverse backgrounds. His email address is cprrlm@hofstra.edu.

Alan Singer is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching in the Hofstra University School of Education and Allied Human Services and a former New York City high school teacher. His Ph.D. in History is from Rutgers University where he studied where he studied the development of class or transformative consciousness. He has been a political activist, working with educational and community groups for over thirty years. Dr. Singer is currently editor of *Social Science Docket*, a joint publication of the New York and New Jersey Councils for the Social Studies. His email address is catajs@hofstra.edu.

Teachers, by definition, are middle-class professionals. For many, this creates a barrier between them and students, especially in working-class and poor communities. Pedro Sierra is a social studies teacher and the dean of students in a troubled inner-city high school who draws on his life experience to impact on the lives of his students. Pedro's parents were originally from Puerto Rico. He grew up in the neighborhood near the school, but earned his high school diploma from an alternative educational program. He attended Hofstra University, a suburban college, where he earned his teacher education credentials and was exposed to a level of affluence and comfort he had never imagined. Even though Mr. Sierra worked hard to get out of the neighborhood, he decided to return to this community to teach, live and raise a family. In this essay he discusses his experiences growing up and his ideas about teaching. An edited version will appear in *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* by Alan Singer with Maureen Murphy, S. Maxwell Hines and the Hofstra New Teachers Network (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates). His email address is sierrabros1@yahoo.com.

Heidi Kling (Ph.D., Adelphi University), is a clinical psychologist who specializes in helping young women with eating disorders. Dr. Kling agreed to comment on the issues raised by this dialogue from her perspective as a therapist who is attuned to the tensions in people's lives and who assists them in resolving conflicts that can be incapacitating. Her email address is heidikling@nyc.rr.com. - Alan Singer

Bringing Ourselves into the Classroom through Multicultural Literature

by Jessica Trubek, Long Island University – Brooklyn Campus

During the Summer 2001 semester I taught a graduate course in Multicultural Education as part of a partnership between Long Island University/Brooklyn and the New York City Board of Education Office. There were twenty-five students in the class from a variety of education programs; many were already teachers. In this course we explored the questions: What does it mean to teach for diversity? How do we include all of our students in our classrooms? How do we create multicultural curriculum? What values and ideas guide a multicultural approach to curriculum?

As part of the course we read four books written for elementary and middle school students, *Jalani and the Lock* by Lorenzo Pace (2001), *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story* by Ken Mochizuki (1997), *Big Boy* by Toni Morrison with Slade Morrison (1999), and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* by Jacqueline Woodson (1995). We used the books to discuss how literature can immerse us in the complexities of diversity and how we can come to know ourselves and our students better through narratives.

In *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*, Melanin Sun, a fourteen year old African American boy living in Brooklyn, New York, struggles to come to terms with his mother E.C.'s romance with a white woman. As we read each of the books together, we shared our responses as a class. I told students my reactions to each book, but it was not until we read *Melanin Sun* that I came out to them as a lesbian. When I did this, I brought a part of myself to the classroom that I had never discussed before. Sharing my responses as a lesbian allowed me to bring a real life perspective to our conversations about the fictional lives of the characters.

I took a leap of faith by telling my students I was a lesbian. In the moments before I spoke, I was afraid of losing their respect. But to stay silent made me feel I was betraying myself as a teacher; I could not explain to them the depth of my reactions to the book unless I came out. I had taught this book in other classes, and I did not tell students I was a lesbian. This time I wanted to finally be fully present in my own classroom. I also came out because of one of my students' ability to be honest. The first day that we discussed the book, I broke the class into small groups to discuss their reactions. As I went around and listened to their conversations, I heard one student telling her group about her mother, who is a lesbian. I admired her courage, and I wanted to support her.

Often my students are particularly enamored with E.C. at the beginning of the book, before they find out she is a lesbian. They think of her as a "good" mother, a mother they wish they had, or a model for the type of parent they could be for their own children. But their view of her frequently changes after she comes out to Melanin. It was in the midst of a discussion of the context in which E.C. came out to Melanin that I decided to come out to my class. She spoke with him about her sexuality while they were driving on an expressway coming home from a day at the beach. When we discussed this scene, some of my students were upset that E.C. chose to tell Melanin she was a lesbian while she was driving. They could not understand why she picked such an inappropriate, potentially dangerous moment. Others were skeptical that a woman of 30 was just discovering her sexual orientation. They were angry at E.C.

As the students were criticizing and questioning E.C., I was thinking of my own experiences of coming out to the people closest to me, especially my mother. I told students I wanted to share my reactions with them, but that I had to tell them first I was a lesbian. Then I told them how scary it can be to come out to your family and friends, and that you do not necessarily plan the right time or place; you do it when you have the courage. In a way, there is no good time to come out. The risk of rejection puts you in an extremely vulnerable position. The relationship may never be the same again. In the moment that I came out to my mother, I realized the possibility of the loss of our connection. The act of coming out takes us out on a limb.

I had a lot of questions about revealing myself to my students. Right before I told them I was a lesbian, I thought about what I was risking. I was afraid they would not respect me as their teacher. Would they feel uncomfortable? Would they feel compelled to reveal themselves? Was I using my power as a professor to create a "confessional" imperative in the classroom? What pedagogical purpose would

my coming out serve? What was my role as a member of the group? Would my secret overshadow the students' responses? I felt I had to speak, to name the words closest to my heart, to trust my students' ability to take them in. Despite the considerable risks involved for me and for them, I spoke.

I believe my decision helped students to see the story from E.C.'s perspective, to step back from their judgment of her as a person and as a mother. It helped them to connect their stories with E.C. and Melanin's story. In a response paper, one student discussed her relationship with her lesbian mother. Other students wrote about their gay and lesbian friends and relatives or connected with Melanin's experience as a child in a single parent household. One student decided to come out as a lesbian in her paper.

Through the telling of our own stories in relationship to those of Melanin and E.C., the participants in this class came to know each other differently. We asked questions about how we navigate differences with those closest to us. We confronted fears and uncertainties about ourselves and about our ability to be teachers for all children and their families. The everyday, realistic nature of Jacqueline Woodson's story opened up the opportunity for me to name myself as a lesbian, and for my students to reveal some of what they knew and wanted to know about homosexuality.

We also came to know each other in ways we would not have if we had not read *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. By sharing our passions, discomfort, caring, and anger about homosexuality, motherhood, coming out, and interracial relationships, we participated in the continual process of coming to understand how we live in a diverse world and work towards creating a more just society.

As a teacher educator I want to engage future teachers in the critical task of coming to know and understand themselves and others who are unfamiliar to them. Acknowledging and looking closely at the human connections we make in our classrooms is a critical aspect of our attempt to address issues of difference with all of our students. Teachers need to examine how we interact across social differences. Talking about my sexuality with my students last summer was an integral component of my teaching about multicultural education. Being a lesbian is part of what shapes my understanding of the world, as does the fact that I am a white, Jewish, and an upper-middle class woman. If I want my students to openly discuss what social perspectives they bring to their lives and to their teaching, I must do the same. This interchange is vital in education because all teachers are limited by our ability to know the lives of students whose cultural, class, and racial backgrounds are different from theirs.

By coming out to my class, I was able to make connections to many students across culture, class, and race. Despite our differences, we discovered that a lot of us had connections to gay and lesbian people. Some students discussed the complexities of accepting gay and lesbian people and also remaining true to their religious and cultural backgrounds. Together we confronted the difficulties of living in various worlds, and wanting to be accepted in all of the places where we live, work, and study. I believe that as a result of my "coming out," all of us tried to honestly examine who we were, what we knew, and what we did not know about ourselves and others. For all of these reasons, I applaud the decision by Tracy Wagner to be open and fully human with her students.

Community Responsibility and Activism with Preschool Children

by Judith Y. Singer, Long Island University – Brooklyn Campus

“Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Budget cuts have got to go! Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Budget cuts have got to go!” Together with parents and teachers, a contingent of eighty preschool children march into City Hall Park, chanting. They wear signs which read: ‘We need day care.’ ‘We need teachers.’ ‘Save our schools.’ ‘Children need a future.’ As they join the rally against budget cuts in day care, adults in the crowd look at them and nod approvingly. Old friends smile, glad to see Banza back at another rally. Other groups of children are also here, some from Chinatown and others from the Lower East Side. Banza has the only group of children that has crossed the bridge from Brooklyn” (Singer, 1998).

Over the years, I have often been questioned, and frequently criticized, for involving young children in social activism. My critics argue that I am imposing adult concerns on the children. I join this dialogue as someone who believes that it is neither possible nor desirable for teachers to be neutral about questions of who they are and what kind of world they envision. We always influence our students. Even our silences give messages to children about what talk is acceptable in the classroom and what is not. Teachers and parents are powerful models for children in everything we say and do.

I am a white, Jewish woman who is a strong supporter of multicultural curriculum that encourages social activism, such as the incident described above. As an educator, I start from three premises. The first is that teachers always bring themselves into the classroom. The second is that curriculum by its nature imposes on teachers and students. The only issue is what and how it is imposed. The third premise is that teachers have a responsibility to constantly consider their obligations to the children they work with as they make curriculum choices.

An activist, multicultural curriculum brings people’s lives and concerns into the classroom, respects both teachers and students, and it gives teachers and children a sense of their capacity for reshaping the world. I always find it peculiar that the same powers that object to this approach to education are the ones that want to impose their values of patriotism and cultural assimilation in our schools.

For over twenty-three years, I worked with adults and children in a privately sponsored, city-funded day care and after school center with an enrollment of approximately 150 children between the ages of two and twelve. Families and staff in the program are primarily Caribbean, African-American, and Latino. The program, which I renamed Banza in my doctoral dissertation (after a Haitian folktale about a goat and tiger who become friends in spite of their differences), is housed in an attractive building which boasts a skylight, indoor trees, and exposed pipes painted in a variety of bright colors. People who enter the program for the first time often comment on the welcoming, cheerful atmosphere. The building is unique and not what they expect to find in this low-income community.

Banza was founded by a community center with a history of involvement in interracial struggle for social change. Its founders explicitly set out to develop a program which provided young children with democratic experiences and which would help them to critically question the way the world was organized. The unusual attention in Banza’s curriculum to community responsibility, social justice, and racial and cultural diversity is rooted in these origins.

Banza’s curriculum has inevitably generated conflict with some teachers and parents, and among early childhood “experts” who monitor the program for government agencies. Social issues are rarely addressed in early childhood curriculum. A commitment to “developmentally appropriate” curriculum (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Koppel, 1997) has contributed to the idea that young children should be protected from the harsh realities of the world. Some psychologists warn of the potentially detrimental effects of “hurrying” children (Elkind, 1987).

On the other hand, there are early childhood educators who argue that concern for what is developmentally appropriate must be considered within the context of the kind of world we want to have and the kind of adults we would like children to become (Silin, 1995, Bloch, 1992). Some researchers point out that harsh realities, in the form of violence, drugs, and poverty, have already affected many children before they enter an early childhood classroom (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny and Pardo, 1992;

Silin, 1996). In this view, social action reflects developmentally appropriate practice by providing a constructive way of responding to these realities (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Commitment to community and speaking out are integral to the pedagogical practice at Banza, as well as part of the home values of its teachers and families. The teachers at Banza frequently discuss the way that being part of a broader community gave them direction as they were growing up and continued to sustain them as adults. They learned how to be part of a community from adult models and from older children, and this became an important element of their teaching. Their sense of community responsibility originated in family obligations. It was fostered in strong extended families, through active church membership, and by neighborhood or civic organizations. Because of this prior experience, teachers who came to work in Banza readily identified with the idea of building a multi-age community where young children would have models for appropriate behavior.

Some of the teachers describe family and community obligations to speak up for what was right and for each other. These teachers view participation by young children in social action, even if the children only have a limited understanding of what is involved, as an important part of their learning. When they participate in social action as part of their experience at Banza, children are encouraged to believe that they have a right to say how they think the world should be. Teachers and parents are also drawn to social action by the sense of empowerment they feel when they hear children and colleagues speak out for themselves and the group.

The question of whether to involve young children in discussion of serious issues and social activism has drawn greater attention since the attacks on the World Trade Center and on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Many of us who are parents or teachers became so fearful at first that we were unable to think about what to say to children about these events. What was our responsibility to the children? How could we help them feel safe? Did they need to know that terrible things were happening to children around the world? Did we want them to think it is terrible only when the bomb is in our own front yard? Did we want children to see themselves as citizens of the world, intent on putting a stop to wars for all children?

One lesson of the attacks on September 11 was that no one can expect to be secure in this world while children starve, bull-dozer flatten homes, and young men and women are denied dreams of a future. While reestablishing safety is no small matter in a world in which so many adults feel threatened, I believe that children need more than safety from us. They also need hope. They need to know that things can change, that war and hunger can end. They need our reassurance that war is always wrong, because in a war neither side is thinking about the children. They need to believe that they can make a difference in the world. If we do not help children articulate their desire for a better world now, how will they become adults who envision a better world?

As an educator and an activist, I believe we have a responsibility to create opportunities for children to talk about how war affects children and to reassure them that they have a right to live in a peaceful world. We have to help them learn that they have a right to speak out and hold adults accountable for making this a world in which children of all countries can live without fear. I also believe teachers can only do this effectively when we are willing to clearly bring ourselves and our own convictions into the classroom.

An Africana Feminist Begins a Scholarly Agenda in Inclusive Education

by Joya A. Carter, University of Georgia, Athens

As an Africana feminist (Benjamin, 1997) in the beginning stages of designing a scholarly agenda on inclusive education, I am constantly reflecting on my role as a teacher educator at a research one institution. The perspective of being an African American and female scholar at a majority White university has been discussed in the literature of Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990), Africana womanism (Weems, 1993), and African feminism (Steady, 1996). As an Africana feminist, I recognize that the intersectional analysis of race and gender modifies the way I think about scholarship and what it actually looks like for me.

My current research interest in inclusive education is shaped by my concerns for the inequalities of education provided to underrepresented groups according to race, culture, social class and ability and it cannot be separated from who I am as a person and a teacher. After four years of teaching special education in Georgia's public schools, and seeing the overrepresentation of students of color in special education programs, I began to challenge the social understandings of disability. I believe that what happened to my public school students had nothing to do with a perceived "dis/ability," but was rather a function of social constructions of ability. In essence, difference was being viewed as disability.

Because of this understanding, I decided to formally study and conduct research on the sociology of disability and I become involved as a university-based educator and school staff developer in issues of inclusive education. As a result of my work in inclusive education, and my perspective as an Africana feminist, I have concluded that all children, with or without supposed disabilities, including those with cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences, belong in general education classrooms within their neighborhood schools, with access and support to participate in learning opportunities alongside their same-age peers (Stainback & Stainback, 1996; Lipsky & Gardner, 1996; Sapon-Shevin, 1999; Biklen, 1992).

For the purposes of my research and writing, the definition of inclusive education is broader than placement options or delivery of services for students with disabilities. Inclusive education, stated nicely by Sands, Kozleski, & French (2000) "propounds the idea that inclusive school communities are both a process for and outcome for social justice, equity, and democracy within the educational system" (5). Inclusive education has wide-range social (and academic) implications for society. Inclusion challenges the political and moral hierarchy of human differences and changes how society constructs ideas of competency (Danforth & Rhodes, 1997).

I have come to understand "representations of disability" to be socially constructed (Kliwer, 1995) instead of an observable fact. My scholarship focuses on the social meanings and understandings of ability within elementary inclusive education and attempts to "reveal hidden meanings, silences, contradictions, sites of power . . . dominant themes and forms of discourse" (Cannella, 1997, 16) related to the experiences of children.

On a professional and personal basis, I feel an urgent need, to provide teachers training in order advance the agenda of inclusion. My role as a teacher educator is to provide an in-depth understanding of the best practices and philosophies for facilitating inclusive schooling. Because of my experience as a public school teacher, my identity as an African American woman, a researcher and a professional educator, and my philosophical perspective as an Africana feminist, I continually ask teachers and teacher education students to address the following set of questions:

How do the signifiers of race, culture, and social class interact with dis/ability in the understanding and actions of public school personnel?

How can public school personnel, teachers and educational leaders implement full-inclusion practices?

How can opportunities for inclusive education be afforded in all classrooms?

Each student taking my courses is expected to become familiar with strategies for effective inclusive education, develop confidence in their own understandings, and become agents who promote inclusive schooling for all children.

A Researcher's Role as an African-American Woman

by Kimberly A. Scott, Hofstra University

Five years ago, I sat in a graduate school class and learned how to conduct “good” qualitative research. As a doctoral student, I quickly understood that my professors—and later my colleagues—would measure the value of my work based on my ability to respond to *a priori* notions of the field, establish rapport with participants, realize the potency of reflexivity, and not over-identify and “go native” (Adler & Adler, 1987; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1995). It is this last lesson that always intrigued me. What if you appear to be a “native” in the research setting? How much of one’s self should be shared with participants? These concerns are not simply academic and intellectual, but extensions of my identities as an African-American female conducting sociological research with and about African-American girls.

Central to qualitative research is establishing trust with participants. According to Janesick (2000), “(b)y establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of the study, the researcher is better able to capture the nuances and meanings of each participant’s life from the participant’s point of view. This also ensures that participants will be more willing to share everything, warts and all, with the researcher” (384). It is commonly believed that because I share the same race and gender categories as most of my participants I can more easily obtain the coveted commodity of trust. Indeed, a White male colleague recently marveled at my “insider” status and decided that I must not experience much resistance when working in settings where the majority of the individuals managing and receiving the instruction are African-American (Tidwell, 1982). Like many other (White) individuals, he seemed to forget the salience of gender, social class, skin-color, and sexual orientation which determine an individual’s positionality when interacting within and with a group and how these features cause intraracial distinctions among the most seemingly homogeneous populations. True, I may connect with the participants more easily than my White graduate assistants, but the associations with my participants rely on much more than race.

The time seems ripe to revisit Merton’s (1972) classic argument about insider-outsider status. Merton’s point continues to stand out: the impact a researcher’s multiplicitous self and group affiliations on developing rapport with their participants cannot be easily traced to one feature or another. What Context A may use to characterize the individual as an insider, in Context B there may be reversal resulting in the person occupying an outsider status.

I, as an African-American woman, am what Collins’ (1986; 2000) calls an “outsider-within.” Similar to the Black female domestic workers who remained outside the White mainstream culture they consistently observed, but came to understand and question the discrepancy between “the dominant group’s actions and ideologies” (Collins, 2000, 110), I maintain a similar marginal role within two communities. While allowed into the academic domain and understanding the methods of conducting qualitative research, my Blackness, research agenda that valorizes Black womanhood, and the combination of the two, places me on the periphery of many academic circles. Concomitantly, I often find myself playing the identical outsider role within the settings I observe. African-American women do not always recognize or appreciate the empathetic ties of consciousness and connectedness we share. Stated differently, I may enter a setting with apparently identical cultural baggage as my participants and informants, but as Banks’ (1998) points out, the audience may fail to perceive common ties or interest:

An individual scholar’s ideological commitment and knowledge claims cannot be predicted by his or her ethnic socialization because of the complex factors that influence knowledge production. Individuals socialized within cultural communities may endorse or oppose knowledge within their indigenous communities for a number of complex reasons (5).

One day, when I was denied access to study African-American girls in a predominantly Black school district, I received the following feedback from the audience: “We are not sure you are really Black enough to understand the race issue. The way you dress [I had on a pant-suit], talk [I used standard English], and looked [I had a moderate amount of makeup and my hair was in a ponytail] makes us wonder if you really know about racial issues.” The criticism troubled me for several reasons. That the audience used my physical appearance and speech patterns as barometers of Blackness is disturbing

enough. Most upsetting was that African-American female administrators were the sources of these comments.

Responding from idealist naivete, I defended the significance of documenting the lives of African-American girls. It made sense, in my mind, that these administrators would want to understand the girls' cultural happenings and capitalize on their knowledge for future instruction and curriculum changes. In retrospect, I missed West's (1993) point that within the framework of racial reasoning "claims to black authenticity are political and ethical *conceptions* of the relation of black interests, individuals, and communities..." (italics added, 26). Phenotype, sex, or research interest, no matter how seemingly authentic, does not always reflect interpretation of one's commitment to Blackness. Evocatively, the question resurfaces: How much of my Blackness need I reveal?

I do not believe that verbally professing or openly proving my Black femaleness would assist me in my research. Black femaleness holds different meanings depending upon the context and the interpreters' own consciousness informed by their interactions with the past and present settings' treatment of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age. Instead, I prefer to focus on demystifying the complex nuances that create and sometimes sustain Black female experiences in various contexts. It is precisely this point why I seek to understand young African-American girls on their own terms. To describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences and developing consciousness of Black girls in various contexts may provide more complete answers of what Black womanhood is becoming, than where my Black femaleness has been.

My consciousness has been shaped by my status in a race and gender oppressed group. Resistance to the hegemonic dominant forces provides boundaries for my research agenda committed to sociological studies of African-American girls. I stand on the shoulders of Black feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Joyce James, Kimberle Crenshaw, Barbara Guy-Sheftall, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Michelle Wallace; researchers like Linda Grant, Marjorie Goodwin, Signithia Fordham, Paula Giddings, and Joyce Ladner whose work on African-American girls expanded my knowledge base and that of the social sciences. These scholars' voices do not seek validation from the dominant group. Instead of reinforcing the cultural imperialist system that establishes standards for "good research", these mavericks challenge what is known as truth with alternative knowledge, methods, and epistemologies.

Articulating the words of "I'm a Black Woman" hold no more valor than stating, "I'm a researcher." The use of such a refrain objectifies the Black experience and trivializes the multiple forms of oppression I confront. I understand hooks (1984) when she explained the peculiar position of Black women, "our marginality gives us and makes use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter hegemony" (145). Why concentrate on fitting into and professing congruence with categories constructed by the disempowering system I am challenging? A single line of distinction imprisons me within the dominant culture's matrix of oppression and dilutes my lived experiences. Collins (2000) puts it best,

Oppression is not simply understood in the mind—it is felt in the body in myriad ways. Moreover, because oppression is constantly changing, different aspects of an individual U.S. Black woman's self-definitions intermingle and become more salient: Her gender may be more prominent when she becomes a mother, her race when she searches for housing, her social class when she applies for credit, her sexual orientation when she is walking with her lover, and her citizenship status when she applies for a job. In all of these contexts, her position in relation to and within intersecting oppressions shifts. (274-275)

I am advocating for researchers, particularly female researchers of color, to engage in liberatory self-expression using more complicated terminology and nuances of experiences. Words alone can neither solidify nor weaken the connection with my participants. Moreover, if I am committed to the ideals of self-definition, shared knowledge, collective consciousness, and experiences that recognize I am any and all things, I will not play to any one Black female role. Entering the settings in which I enjoy doing research does not entail making superficial connections along socially constructed categories of race, gender, or social class. I cannot measure my success on how much the girls tell me, "warts and all." Rather, success comes from the love we develop through intersubjectivity. The girls seem to understand and have the ability to collaboratively create female-centered spaces even within the most patriarchal

environments. I am invited into these protected areas not because of what I do or say. As one six-year old participant explained to me, “It’s just, like, you. We like it.”

Children have always maintained a much keener sense of reality than adults perceive. They tend to see ideas and people holistically, at least until we teach them otherwise. Adults may call it an individual’s aura while others may describe it as one’s esprit, but I prefer to borrow the terms from my participant and accept the fact that I am simply presenting Me, neither concealing nor flagrantly exhibiting my mind, body, and soul. Whether this admission limits my objectivity does not occupy my thoughts. Each interaction with my participants inspires me to believe in the future of Black femaleness and their life force, and deepens my resolve to listen to their multiple voices. Even when none of my selves are accepted into a context and I remain an outsider during same-race-gender associations, I remember Audre Lorde’s (1984) words and am obliged to be responsible to my self, my participants, and creating spaces of the familiar:

“When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms and we conform to the needs of structure that is not based on human need, let alone and individual’s. But when we begin to live from within outward . . . then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense” (58).

Personal Disclosure in Counseling and in the Classroom

by Ron McLean, Hofstra University

It was on a Valentine's Day. I went to my graduate class in educational counseling early in order to prepare before students arrived. About twenty minutes later, they begin to trickle in. One young woman, as she was finding a seat, said to me, "Dr. McLean, since it is Valentine's Day, wouldn't you like to go home early and be with your wife?"

For a split second I had to think about how I should respond. It was a rather innocent question, though there are shades of bias in the assumption that I am a married heterosexual. Why not just say something like, "that sounds like a great idea"? It would be easier for me for her to think I was married to a woman, instead of having to explain my true situation. Intense feelings of anxiety, shame and anger rushed through my consciousness at the thought of my entertaining the idea of "passing." But the question still remained, how should I respond?

This situation, and others like it, have caused me to think more deeply about the decision by Tracy Wagner and question whether a Counselor Educator's race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ideology belong in the classroom. I take the position that teachers do and should bring all of these value-laden identities into the classroom. However, I caution that we should express our personal aspects with reflective and discriminating judgment. In this brief discussion I will argue that both building authentic relationships between students and teachers, and promoting respect across diverse back grounds are justifications for the use of self-disclosure in the educational process, especially as it relates to counselor education.

In many counselor education programs and training centers appropriate disclosure is viewed as a useful skill for helping clients. Appropriate disclosure suggests that the counselor uses certain personal information to cultivate the student or client's stabilization, normalization, or growth. It implies that good judgment is always exercised when sharing personal information, and avoided when it is clear that the disclosure is serving the counselor's needs more than the student or client.

As a counselor educator, I share the view that we all have multiple salient identities that construct our worldviews and meaning-making in the larger community. Our race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class background and other social characteristics help define who we are as people and professionals and inform how and what we teach. Since it is not possible to separate these salient factors from our professional identities, it is imperative that counselors share their experiences.

In addition, appropriate disclosure can help the counselor educator and the student establish an authentic working relationship. For example, in one class I teach, a portion of the semester is devoted to diversity and multicultural issues in counseling practice. This teaching segment attempts to demonstrate how issues of racism, homophobia, and other forms of cultural oppression can interfere with the therapeutic process because individuals are embedded in cultural bias. One semester, it became evident that students were comfortable discussing concepts related to prejudice and bias on an abstract level, but were powerfully uncomfortable applying these concepts to themselves, their families, and so forth.

Realizing that if we stayed at an abstract level, self-exploration and awareness would be limited, I decide to use self-disclosure about my own upbringing to deepen the discussion. I shared some of the prejudices I learned as a child growing up African-American, southern, working class, and deeply religious, and living in a cultural context of racial oppression. As a young child I learned that White people were dangerous, violent and to be avoided. This attitude became crystallized in my mind when the KKK visited our home one night, shot out the front windows and burned a cross in the yard.

This type of personal disclosure proved to be an effective strategy for encouraging students to move beyond their cognitions into the area of experience. The tone in the room changed and students became willing to take risks. They began to recall messages that they had learned about racial and ethnic groups that were different from their own. Minority students described the experience of cultural oppression. One Black student expressed his anger at being watched in department stores and a deep fear of police brutality. Gradually, students shared prejudicial messages that were transmitted to them primarily by their

families. I believe that this dialogue enriched all of us and that tremendous insights were gained as we learned more about the diversity of human experience.

Appropriate disclosure can be useful in building trust and respect across diverse backgrounds. While there is general agreement that they are essential to developing the counselor-client relationship, trust and respect are equally important in the teacher-student relationship, especially when there are significant cultural differences. Recently, my students and I were discussing examples of institutionalized oppression against individuals who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. During the course of this discussion I disclosed my sexual orientation as a gay man and shared a personal experience of institutionalized oppression. I noticed that one young man was having a difficult time with the discussion in general, and he retorted, "I am having a hard time with this issue. I would be uncomfortable dealing with this issue as a school counselor." Sensing that this student was becoming increasingly defensive, I permitted him to share his feelings and thoughts about the issue. I felt that as a teacher and as a gay man it was important to model acceptance and build trust by listening respectfully to his views, though I fervently opposed some of them. As a result, this student (presumably a heterosexual man) and I had several conversations beyond the classroom. He was experiencing cognitive dissonance between his beliefs and the conflicting information discussed in class. I tried to remain respectful and supportive as he grappled with the issue of sexual orientation and my personal disclosure. I believe that by showing him deep respect as person/student/client, I helped him to lower his defenses and allowed a level of trust and genuineness to develop between us. Later in our conversations, this student arrived at a turning point. He expressed, "I know I have a lot of work to do on this issue if I'm going to be a good counselor!" I admiringly agreed.

In conclusion, I believe that appropriate self-disclosure is a useful skill for counselor educators. It encourages authentic teacher-student relationships, and it promotes opportunities for deeper trust and respect, especially when working with people from diverse backgrounds. In addition, authenticity as an individual and the ability to trust and be respectful of another are hallmarks of an effective counselor.

A Political Activist In The High School Classroom

Alan Singer, Hofstra University

I am a political activist and a teacher. These two facets of my life are at the core of my professional existence and they are inseparable. As a middle school and high school teacher from 1973-1993, as a University-based teacher educator since 1990, I remain committed to many of the goals I struggled for as a young revolutionary in college in the 1960s and as a community organizer in the 1970s. In 1978, students from my economics classes testified at New York City Budget hearings. In 1981, students from my participation in government classes organized 5,000 people to demonstrate in front of New York City Hall in opposition to educational budget cuts. In 1989, I was the faculty advisor to students who rented a bus and traveled to Washington, DC for a pro-choice rally. In 1991, another group of students lobbied for condom availability in New York City high schools. In each case, while these students were in my classes, the activities were sponsored by an independent "Forum Club" that was chartered by the school's student government. Students enrolled in my classes were not required to participate and membership in the club did not mean adhering to a specific point of view. For example, one semester the club sponsored discussions on reproductive choice with a representative of the National Organization for Women and with a member of Birth Right, a group that campaigns against abortion rights.

I believe that neutrality is neither possible nor desirable. Yet despite my history and ideology, my opposition to discrimination and stereotyping of any form, and my support for the right of gays and lesbians to lead open lives, I believe Tracy Wagner was mistaken when she discussed her sexuality in the way she did with her middle school students. I think she eludes to the problem herself when she states that "I told the students about my sexual orientation for my own emotional well being. . ." As a teacher, and as an activist, I believe being a professional means we must constantly ask ourselves, are we doing what we are doing because of our needs or the needs of our students. Unless we are convinced that our involvement is based on their needs, we should not be involved.

Based on this principle, I have discussed my experience as a Civil Rights and anti-war activist in high school classes. I also invite speakers and provide documents that offer alternative views. I have worn the AIDS ribbon in class and used it as a starting point for discussion of gay rights. I have examined the existence of homosexuality through history with high school students and argued with them about "what is normal?" But I would not discuss drug experimentation in the 1960s or my own sexuality. I have been involved with many things in my life, most of which are personal and none of their business.

My primary goal as an educator is to empower young people so that they can become active citizens and agents for democratic social change. I recognize that the most effective way to empower students is to encourage them to think about issues and to help them learn how to collect, organize, analyze, and present information and their own ideas. If I can encourage them to think and act, the habit of thinking and acting will stay with them long after I am just a dim memory. However, if they only agreed with an idea because I presented it and they wanted to identify with me, they will just agree with someone else's idea the next year.

I usually do not discuss my point of view on issues in class when we first begin to discuss them, even when students ask me directly. My job is to provide them with material to analyze and to ask questions that help them uncover deeper meaning and rethink their assumptions. I do not want to shut down their examination of an issue by providing them with the "truth." On the other hand, I feel I should respect student interest in my views. If students keep asking what I think, I do one of three things: I turn the question back to them, "You have known me for a while, what do you think I think?"; I wait until the end of the lesson and offer my views as a comment on their discussion; or on rarer occasions, I organize a separate lesson with additional documents where I present my case. However, if I do this, I also help students critique my ideas.

As a high school teacher, I was accused of brainwashing students and using them to promote my own political agenda. I challenged colleagues to produce a single student I had successfully brainwashed. I also reminded them that while faculty advisor to the "pro-choice" student group, I helped bring an anti-abortion activist to school to participate in a student forum. When I involved students in political

discourse and introduced them to political action, the goal was to get them to evaluate ideas based on criteria and evidence, not to join me.

I consider myself both a “transformative” and a “democratic” educator. I believe my ideas about teaching are consistent with radical notions of education developed by contemporary thinkers like Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene, and Henry Giroux, and progressive ideas championed by John Dewey and his students. Paulo Freire argues that the role of the transformative educator is to help students pose and explore the problems that impact on their lives so they can develop “critical consciousness” about the nature of their society and their position in it (Freire, 1970). Henry Giroux calls on transformative educators to allow students to explore their lived experiences, locate themselves culturally, dissect their personal beliefs and the dominant ideology of their society, and confront established power relationships (Giroux, 1992).

I am a democratic educator in the traditions of Maxine Greene (1988) and John Dewey (1916; 1938/1963). I share Greene’s beliefs that democratic education must be based on acceptance of the plurality of human understanding, experience, and ideas, and that freedom represents a process of continuous individual and collective struggle to create more humane societies; it is neither a commodity that can be hoarded by a limited number of individuals nor a right institutionalized by governments and enjoyed by passive citizens. I share Dewey’s understanding that the primary classroom responsibility of the teacher is to create democratic learning experiences for students and his commitment to educating an “articulate public” capable of fighting to extend human freedom.

Thomas Jefferson (Singer, 1997: 72) believed that, in a democratic society, freedom and republican government rest on two basic principles: “the diffusion of knowledge among the people” and the idea that “a little rebellion now and then is a good thing.” Jefferson supported the right to rebel because he recognized that the world was constantly changing. The crucial question was not whether it would change, but the direction of change. Education was essential so that ordinary citizens could participate in this process, defending and enhancing their liberties.

I wrote earlier that I believe Tracy Wagner was mistaken when she discussed her sexuality the way she did with her middle school students. But I do not believe she was wrong to enter their lives or that they were damaged in any way. It was a judgment call on her part and it should have been based on their needs. I am just not convinced that in this case it was.

I Want to Give Back to the Community

by Pedro Sierra, Bushwick High School, Brooklyn, New York

I decided to become a teacher because teachers helped me change my life. They taught me to image a brighter future. Life was hard for me growing up. Today I would say that I had a dysfunctional family. My mother was a drug addict and an alcoholic and in 1988 she was infected with HIV. As children, our life was a cycle of seeing our mother abused by our father and then by every step-father we ever had. This abuse had a powerful impact on me. When you see the abuse of women at home, in the movies and listen to it on the radio, you think this is what a relationship with a woman is like. When I was in high school, I used to abuse my girl friends as well. It was only when I was in college that I realized that this was wrong. I decided that the cycle of violence would end with me.

Basically, my brother and I were on our own since I was fourteen and he was thirteen. We were living day-to-day. My first year in high school, I went to classes and did what I had to do. But then I stopped. The pressure of life was too much. My brother and I lived together in a furnished room that was not much more than a rat hole. Whether it was selling drugs, selling guns, robbing people's homes, numbers, I did whatever I had to do to survive. I was living on the edge, hanging out drinking, doing a lot of crazy stuff I should not have been doing. I almost lost my life a few times. I had no self-esteem, no discipline, no motivation. My whole mentality was that I never would live to reach twenty-one anyway.

I finally ended up at an outreach center where teachers gave me the "tough love" I needed, not only to graduate from high school, but to go to college and do something better with myself. It is not a coincidence that I teach social studies. The two teachers who had the greatest influence on me were social studies teachers. Neither one of them were from my people. One was an African American male and the other was a Jewish woman. I am Puerto Rican.

The African American male teacher was able to reach me because he had been the way I was when he was younger. This connection was our starting point. It is also the starting point I use with my own students. The Jewish woman won me over because she respected us. We were on a first-name basis. These teachers worked hard to earn our respect and we responded to them. They motivated us by making connections with our lives. They helped me see that what I was doing was wrong, but more importantly, that I could do other things; that I could make things right. I spent six years in high school but because of these teachers I finally graduated.

One of the seeds they planted in my head was to give back to my community. When I was in college, teachers also stressed this as a fundamental philosophy of life. I spent years tearing down my community. Now I dedicate the rest of my life to making it a better place. It is my calling. This is why I am here.

This community is where I feel comfortable. This is where I grew up. I can walk anywhere. I know the students and I know their parents. If I leave here to go somewhere else, I can make more money or have a nicer house, but it will not help the people I leave behind. So I choose to remain. I know I cannot make a difference for everyone. But if I can grab a few students and guide them toward a better path, I can alleviate some of the pain in the neighborhood.

I tell my students, "you are street smart. You can take off those baggy pants and turn them into slacks and turn those Timberland boots into shoes. You can take off your hood and put on a shirt and tie and learn to talk standard English instead of talking slang. You can use your those survival skills in the work place. There are a lot of people who have privileges growing up, so they never learn what you know. They cannot deal with the stress of life the way that you do. You deal with life and death situations on a daily basis. Sometimes you have to make a quick decisions to survive. But you have to decide what you want out of life. You can make a better life for yourself and other people if you make a decision to work hard to achieve your goals."

When I was growing up, a lot of wrongs were done to me and my classmates by teachers. I still see teachers who are doing wrong by students. But I always remember the teachers who did right by us. For me, becoming a teacher was a moral and a political choice. I have to be here to help students and my colleagues if the world is going to change. I want to see a world where every one has an opportunity to achieve what our country promises. I do not accept a world were rewards are based on your skin color,

ethnicity, economic background or the school you attended. Everyone has a right to be judged as an individual and as a human being. My teachers in the outreach program compared our lives to rockets. We could use them for destruction or to carry people to a higher place. I want to carry people to that higher place.

In college, I read two books that had a profound impact on me. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas. Both were written by men who spent time in prison but made something out of their lives. Piri Thomas says that even though he was locked up in jail, he was not incarcerated because he learned to read and it freed his mind and his life. I feel the same way about my life. Because of my education, I have become free.

When I returned to the neighborhood after college, I found old friends still selling drugs. I realize I am no better as a human being than these friends. I was simply fortunate to have a chance to get away. This is important knowledge. It means that if I can change the circumstances for my students, I can change their lives and change the world.

Being a big brother, almost like a parent to my three brothers, helped me realize how to be a teacher. A lot of my students do not have someone there for them as they grow up, so I try to be that someone in their lives, their spiritual mother and father. I tell my students, "I love you to death like you are my little brother. I will help you. I will go all out for you. But if you do something that is wrong, I will have to burn you." Students understand that when I say this I care about and respect them. They want adults to set limits. This approach to teaching worked for me when I was in the outreach program. The average student here is not half as bad as I thought I was when I was their age, so it will work for them. This is my basic belief.

To be a successful teacher, I had to learn many things. I had become more disciplined in my approach to work and ideas. The discipline that got me through high school and college was not good enough. I also had to learn to be patient. I had to become a good listener and hear what my students were saying. In my education classes, I was taught to "think outside the box" in order to come up with creative solutions to problems. Now I had to learn to "listen outside the box," so I was not blinded by my assumptions about a student.

I learned that when a student is having a problem in school it does not mean they are the one who is wrong. It could be that their teacher is having a bad day and caused the problem. Maybe other trouble in their life is taking them over. I have known a lot of students in this school since they were younger. I hung out with their aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters; their mothers and my mother hung out together. The students see me in the neighborhood, at the stores and in the street. On weekends, my brother and I run a football league. All of these things help to build our relationship so they will listen to me and I can help them image a brighter future also.

Some of them call me Mr. Sierra but many call me Petey. I am comfortable with that. They respect me because they know I respect them. They know I will not tolerate disrespect. I am very cool with kids, giving them a "high-five" as we pass in the hall, but they always remember that I am their teacher and also a big brother. I am an authority figure and I am an equal. When they see Sierra they do not run, they come to me to talk, because they know they will get a fair deal. They can always tell me what they have on their minds. I never say to students, "This is my classroom and you should respect me." I always say, "This is our classroom and we should not disrespect each other."

I decided to become a dean because a dean has a little bit more power to help students. I can jump into a situation and talk to a student, defuse it before it requires calling a parent or the police. I can prevent problems before they start and I can work with many more students. I believe I can change the entire student body and the entire community.

I often discuss my life experiences with my students. I draw parallels between what I went through and their lives. They are no different from me. I tell them they can be successful and have a job and a family. Sometimes I counsel them in my role as dean. They are angry; but when we talk they see they have choices. Sometimes what happened in my youth and to them comes up in class when we study current events. We discuss everything. Many of my students are trying to survive the same things I did so my life gives them hope. They always want to know what made me change and how I did it.

A good teacher must have two things. You have to be compassionate and have passion. When I come into the school building I never say to myself, “Oh my God, I have to go to work.” I love coming into this building. I love being a teacher. Hopefully, I will not leave here until the day that I retire.

Final Comments

by Heidi Kling, Clinical Psychologist, New York, New York

The issue of whether or how much of a therapist’s thoughts, feelings and personal experiences should be shared in the therapeutic relationship has long been debated in the fields of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. The notion of the therapist’s neutrality begins with Freud, who declared that the analyst should be a “blank screen” to allow the patient to freely explore and project his or her inner experience onto the analyst; self-disclosure, indeed any undue expression of the therapist’s personality was seen as interference which could derail and undermine the treatment.

Many contemporary theorists have challenged the ideal of therapeutic neutrality as simply not possible, and many question whether or not it is desirable. Some argue that therapists “betray” clues about themselves continually, whether it be in the décor of their office, the way in which they dress, what they respond to in the client’s presentation and what they do not, and that clients are curious and perceptive and arriving at conclusions whether the therapist discloses personal information or not. This of course does not mean therapists must confirm or disconfirm a client’s impressions about them; it simply means there is no such thing as pure neutrality. The degree to which we might go beyond these inevitable revelations about our personalities to openly express feelings or share information about ourselves remains a subject of debate.

Like a teacher, the influence of a therapist on her client is a powerful one. In the intimate setting of a therapy session in which a client shares intensely personal material, that can be difficult and might be experienced as shameful, the therapist has a special responsibility to create a safe and bounded space; her responses to the client are part of what creates this safety. As such, therapists tend to be very careful about how much of themselves they reveal in their interactions with patients, guided by the same principle that many of the writers above alluded to: what is in the best interest of the client or student, that it is important to be clear about why we are bringing personal information or reactions into the classroom or therapy session, and to have some sense of what the impact of this disclosure will be. Of course, what is in the client’s best interest can be argued in many different ways.

Those of us trained in a more interpersonal/relational psychotherapeutic model see the therapeutic relationship as a key instrument in the process of change and growth, and the connectedness and openness between client and therapist as facilitating that process. This can occur in many different ways; responding openly and directly to a client’s communications with an empathic response or a response that challenges them to be more honest with themselves, for example, is the easiest and perhaps most natural form of revealing self-experience as a therapist. But what about when a patient has been attacking or hurtful? Do we adhere to an objective, impersonal stance (which is easy to hide behind when moments of conflict arise in sessions) or use our experience to let the client know how they have just come across and attempt to deal with what happened in that moment? The theory here is that the way in which clients deal with strong feelings in the therapy session reflect how they manage their reactions in their every day lives and that is important for them to be aware of their impact on others.

For me, this is one of the richest ways in which a therapist’s self-disclosure can lead to change; I find that clients are often interested in my experience and are surprised to learn that they can affect me. In this case, the power of the therapeutic relationship can help clients develop a deeper awareness of themselves and the meaningfulness of their behavior in their relationships in general.

The matter of sharing personal information with clients is a different category, and in general, I do not do this unless it is clear to me that it will help the client cope with some very difficult event in their lives, or I am offering fairly benign information that I think will give the client perspective that they are having trouble attaining by just a general discussion (for example, I shared with a young woman who was plummeting to very low levels of self-worth because of difficulty she was have in a sewing class that I

barely passed chemistry in college; modeling that it is okay not to be good at everything and still be a worthy and successful person). Of course, once you reveal anything personal, it can lead to feelings other than satisfaction; you might suddenly seem vulnerable when they needed you not to be. This can also be discussed, and helps clients learn that it is okay not to be strong all the time.

For clients to know that I too have struggled can be very powerful; it can provide them with hope and a feeling that they are less alone and not so awful for having problems or difficulties. There is always the risk of burdening clients with such information and there are things/details I will not share because of this. Much depends on the personality of the individual client and the relationship I have developed with them. Whether or not to reveal one's sexual orientation in a therapeutic setting would depend on a variety of factors. I do not see it as my job as a therapist to influence how a client thinks about any one group of people in society. Rather, if I noted a lot of rage and prejudice directed at a particular group or groups, I would try to understand what is happening psychologically that explains why there is so much hate and anger or scapegoating going on. Perhaps the client is afraid of his or her own difference or vulnerability to being victimized and their stereotyping or prejudice is a defense against these feelings. On the other had, I am Jewish, and if a client was repeatedly anti-Semitic, I would have to consider whether they were attempting to interact with me through their anti-Semitic remarks. This is a case in which I would have to be very careful that I was not simply reacting based on my own anger or discomfort.

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