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Course Redesign to New Paradigms: Exploring Humanizing Racial Literacies with Pre-Service Teachers

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Cover Page Footnote

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Course Redesign to New Paradigms: Exploring Humanizing Racial Literacies with Pre-Service Teachers

BECKY BEUCHER, TISHA ORTEGA, GRANT SOUDER, KIMBERLY MARTIN-BOYD, AND KATY KILLIAN

Spring of 2020 marked the first year of remote learning caused by a global, deadly virus outbreak caused by the spread of covid-19. Concurrently, Spring of 2020 marked a moment of national attention to the Black Lives Matter movement (#BlackLivesMatter). And, white folx watching a viral cell phone video could no longer en masse ignore the rampant racism signaled by white male police officer, Derek Chauvin, publicly murdering, Black male, George Floyd. This double pandemic created a unique context for designing anti-racist teacher education coursework. Fall of 2020, the research team, which is composed of a university professor (Becky) and five education doctoral students (Tisha, Grant, Kimberly, and Katy) and an additional doctoral student, Kirsten, decided to re-design an undergraduate pre-service education course taught by Becky. This educator research team collectively values engaging pre-service teachers in community-based school partnerships that orient towards decentering whiteness and humanizing BIPOC (Black and Indigenous and People of Color) students. While acknowledging that BIPOC is not inclusive of all racialized people, we have elected to use the term given the prevalence of its use in current activist discourse. The purpose of the study discussed in this paper was to understand student generated outcomes following participating in this redesigned course.

Specifically, we sought to understand how pre-service teachers conceptualized and actualized *humanizing racial literacies* (Croom, 2020) in their curriculum design. We define humanizing racial literacies as decolonizing pedagogical approaches that center minoritized racial, ethnic, indigenous forms of communication and ways of knowing. Decentering whiteness requires that pre-service teachers understand the multidimensionality of text and literacy that expands beyond dominant literacies rooted in whiteness (Jackson, &

DeLaune, 2018). We used the following research questions to frame our study: *RQ1: How/does students' developing self-awareness related to personal biases and social, cultural positionings influence their pedagogical approaches? RQ2: How/does engagement with course collaboration and literacy lesson planning activities/assignments/texts inform student approaches to using HRL methods in pedagogical design?*

Becky has been teaching EDU 314 Secondary Literacy & Technology face-to-face and with school partnerships for several years at a large public University in the Midwestern part of the United States (Middle America University, MAU henceforth). Teaching over Zoom afforded the opportunity to include two different school partnerships across the United States, but had the drawback of having no face-to-face interactions. Through these partnerships, undergraduate pre-service teachers attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) partnered with two respective high school English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms attended by students of predominantly Black, African, African American, Hispanic, Latin American descent.

The racial make-up of the partnership schools was important for this study because the research team wanted undergraduate students to think about how to design standards aligned Secondary curriculum that centrally engaged BIPOC students' interests, values, concerns, and literacies. Additionally, Becky has longstanding partnerships with the teachers in these classrooms. Importantly, the teachers' pedagogy is culturally responsive and thus informed how undergraduate preservice teachers were observing sociopolitical pedagogical practices modeled.

Through this course, students working collaboratively designed a curriculum that, in one example, included content in support of Black Lives Matter (BLM). Gavin, a Biology Education major, reflected on his group's choice to include a

discussion using BLM affirming texts in a lesson on genetics and race.

all students were impacted in one way or another with the BLM [Black Lives Matter] movement....[my group] felt that within the lesson. It allowed students to really connect with what we were teaching as well as form opinions and thoughts on the matter

We center illustrative EDU 314 student voices like Gavin's, in our findings section. Partnership assignments included pre-service teacher students and high school students reading a book that centralized themes related to racism, homophobia, sexism, and settler colonialism. The data includes undergraduate student written reflections following each assignment and beginning and end of semester interviews with the education doctoral students.

We begin this paper with a discussion of the local university socio-political context for this teacher education course. This is important so that readers understand the context informing EDU 314 students' conception of humanizing racial literacies. We follow this section with a discussion of how we are framing literacy through humanizing heuristics that decenter whiteness and embrace the complexities of erased peoples', namely Black, Indigenous, and people of color's (BIPOC), knowledge. We discuss how these frameworks informed the research team's development of a reflective, consciousness-raising pedagogy which centered race and ethnicity. Finally, we explain our findings related to transforming a course that prepares secondary pre-service educators working in collaboration with English Language Arts (ELA) teachers to respond to realities of the past year as well as the challenges of creating equitable and accessible literacy-rich spaces for high school and undergraduate college students.

Anti-Blackness, a Global Pandemic, and the Local Context

The double pandemic spanning across the 2020-21 academic year presented educators and students with obstacles that a socio-political literacy curriculum could only begin to deconstruct (Starks, 2021). In the local university context, Fall of 2019 #antiBlackMAU trended while a race and ethnicity focused Black student organization led the call for racial justice with school administration. Student organizers held sit-ins for storytelling and inspired a campus wide response with colleges and departments issuing statements of support, initiating new hiring of Black faculty and staff, and forging

conversations about long overdue shifts in policies towards racial advocacy. Yet, many students continued to observe that raising their concerns was not resulting in sufficient change.

The EDU 314 redesigned curriculum included opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences with power, positioning, and privilege; thus, the class created avenues for students to reflect on how socio-political power functioned in their lives as students who had raised their voices during these protests. Raven, a student of English Language Arts education in Becky's Spring 2021 class reflected on how she felt the school administration tokenized her as a student of color. While at times she was asked to speak, ultimately, she felt like her voice did not affect visible change.

I know one challenge that came up a few years ago when protests came up and a lot of discussions came up with black students being used as tokenism and I have noticed myself being used as tokenism. Sometimes it is cool to be noticed for who you are but other times we felt as if [MAU] wasn't protecting us. While there were protests and movements but at the end of the day nothing happened, once it died down nothing happened, so that was a challenge I saw against systems of power.

Aware of the shortcomings in her own curriculum, in the month leading up to the start of the Spring 2021 semester, Becky led this research team in resituating readings/videos and assignments in alignment with a humanizing pedagogical framework. The research team's intention informing the redesign was to create a curriculum that disrupts white supremacy and centers human dignity towards achieving humanizing ends.

The research team decided that the class should begin with students collaboratively setting norms grounded in empathy and humanizing pedagogy. One activity in the redesigned course included Becky using restorative circles to support students in naming their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliations and other significant identities. This practice mitigates making assumptions about people based on how one looks or presents and emboldens each individual to give voice to how they identify. Finally, this practice sets students up to interrogate how their identities position them to have particular biases that impact and shape how they view the world and plan their curriculum.

Riley, a physical education student, reflected on class conversations about bias and racial positioning: "The discussions we had about white privilege challenged my self-concept, and helped me address my privilege and think of

ways to use my privilege to help others in the future.” These early conversations helped set the stage for later assignments when Becky invited students to research non-dominant racial and ethnic groups’ histories, cultures, and knowledge systems. Students drew on this research when designing their course content materials. By the end of EDU 314, students like Sloan reflected on the impact that a culturally responsive approach had on shaping her pedagogical practices: “I know I have a better understanding about how teachers try to create lessons based on their students’ experiences, cultures and perspectives.” Sloan’s reflection illustrated how she was able to make connections within the class to apply humanizing racial literacies in her own teaching.

Decentering Whiteness in School Curriculum.

Decentering whiteness in school curriculum is long overdue. The student population in U.S. classrooms has become increasingly diverse, while the teacher population remains predominantly white and female (Husband, 2019). As teachers draw from Eurocentric (or white centered) knowledge systems to inform how their students make sense of themselves and their worlds, they inadvertently impose mismatched belief systems inclusive of identities and knowledge on their students (Foste & Irwin, 2020; Haddix, 2017). White supremacy in school curriculum undermines all students’ access to information and perpetuates violence against BIPOC students (Kirkland, 2021). Designing teacher education programming that interrogates intersecting social and political forms of institutionalized oppressions supports teachers in interrogating personal cultural and linguistic positionality and in challenging “colour-blind ideologies” (Haddix, 2008, p. 254). Through strategic text selection and critical pedagogical methods EDU 314 students were able to situate their curriculum design alongside considering how BIPOC are systemically oppressed. This work included interrogating of white supremacy through considering the implications of colonization for shaping dominant knowledge systems, and through concurrently researching the implications of broken treaties, police brutality and violence, capitalism and racism, and by researching non-dominant texts and storylines to include in their curriculum as content (Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020).

Situating and Framing Literacies

In EDU 314, and in this paper, we situate our understanding of literacies among humanizing racial literacies and multiliteracies theoretical frameworks.

Racial Literacies. Humanizing racial literacies in practice is a form of “dialogic consciousness-raising” (Paris, 2011). Such a pedagogy deconstructs and engages with institutional barriers created by giving privilege to one’s cultural norms. Centering humanizing racial literacies embraces the contributions and cultural strengths and values of hyperraced communities (Croom, 2020), or BIPOC folk, while removing whiteness as the point of normative reference in school curriculum. The assignments and assessments in EDU 314 required pre-service teachers to consider how they could decenter whiteness as a primary component to supporting the success of all learners. Students learned that as curriculum designers and text selectors, they have institutionally granted power to impact student learning experiences in a manner that can both embolden and harm their students.

As pre-service teachers talked with high school students and participated in learning activities, students like Megan, a Spanish education major, considered the content and literacy practices most relevant in the high school students’ lives. Along these lines, Megan reflected on how focusing on student culture when selecting texts enabled her to, “[focus] on a theme which targeted cultural group’s perspectives and recognized diversity.” Thus, she made choices for what to teach based on what her student partners were teaching her about themselves. This pedagogical shift included adopting an expanded notion of literacy as plural.

Multiliteracies. Drawing on the field multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), students in EDU 314 discuss how texts reflect discourses and contain multiple modes (audio, image, colors, words, font) and can include movement (e.g., movies, body gestures) and words (e.g., print alphabet). These conversations are intended to inform the students’ thinking regarding what constitutes literacy and literacy practices as well as who can be deemed literate. Students also learn about the historical evolution of dominant literacy practices alongside learning about the diversity of culturally informed literacy practices. Herein, they develop a perspective that dominant literacy practices are a consequence of hegemonic white supremacy. This awareness disrupts a common belief in

singular monocultural literacy practices.

Within the class structure, EDU 314 students discuss and explore the ways young people are expected to communicate in school and how adolescents use literacies, including social media, both within and outside of school. Students begin by exploring the literacies they use in their own lives, and consider the literacies used in the academic discipline in which they are preparing to teach. Becky explains to the students that familiarizing oneself with personal and academic literacies expands one's personal understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of literacies. Through in class activities, students begin to recognize the different forms of literacy, discourses, and digital tools that people use to communicate across social, cultural, and academic contexts.

For example, education student Brook reflected on this learning after talking with students in Dr. Holster's class over Google Hangouts about what kind of social media platforms they used.

After speaking with and working with students from the Mountain City School (MCS), it's clear that they are interested in social media and its integration into an academic setting. During my conversation with the students at MCS, I found that they've used social media as a way to take surveys, give feedback, and spread awareness about a topic in the school setting, but other than that, they have not done much work with activities rooted in the social media platforms they use.

Here, Brook recognized a disparity between how the students' out of school and in school literacy practices. In the following section, we discuss patterns and themes emerging among student discourse as they reflected on their work and learning in EDU 314.

Research Methods

Study Context. We are a diverse group of faculty who teach at the college and Secondary levels. Becky is an Assistant Professor of Secondary Literacy Education who identifies as cisgender, female, white, and Queer. The four doctoral student authors on this paper include: Grant, a high school orchestra teacher who identifies as a white cisgender male; Tisha, a high school Spanish teacher who identifies as white cisgender female; Kimberly, a middle school administrator who identifies as a white cisgender female; and Katy, an Assistant Director of Special Education who identifies as a white, cisgender female. This research team came together as members of a university

community with a shared interest in learning how to support undergraduate pre-service teachers in understanding how to design curriculum that speaks to BIPOC students' interests, thereby underscoring that they intelligent, powerful human beings, and that aligns to professional education guidelines, which unfortunately do not always go hand in hand.

Under non-pandemic circumstances, Becky would have driven the pre-service teachers to local partner schools and around the city surrounding the school. Here, undergraduate students would meet with community partners and discuss ways in which community members and leaders are working against and despite racial injustice. Historically, classes always collaboratively read a book, chosen by the high school teacher, that addressed injustices the local community and youth were organizing to counter. Becky intended to maintain the school partnership and collaborative book reading through the redesign. The research team decided to not burden community partners during this time as their times was in high demand by the communities they served.

With the move to online learning, Becky was able to open up the collaborations to include one longstanding school partner, River City High School (RCS), taught by Ms. Genevieve Arias. RCS is close enough for Becky's class to drive to. And, Becky forged a new school partnership with a school partner in a different state, Mountain City High School (MCS). The partnership English class was taught by Dr. Dani Holster, whom Becky had collaborated with in the past on a separate project. Students attending the third section of EDU 314 did not partner with a school due to disruptions that the pending partner school community suffered as a result of wildfires and the pandemic. However, this section of EDU 314 was included in the study because the pre-service teachers still designed lessons for the rural school in a different state that serves Native American, Hmong, Black, African American, Hispanic, Latino, and white students that the class had originally intended to work with.

The respective school partnerships that did occur involved students collaboratively reading and discussing high impact literature written by authors of color (*Dear Martin* by Nic Stone and *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz). The teachers selected these texts because they center racism, colonialism, machismo, and police profiling. Specifically, Dr. Holster selected *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* to teach in her Honors Latinx American Literature class. She selected this text because of its in-depth coverage of important historical events impacting the

Dominican Republic, due to its sophisticated use of language, and because its genre, magical realism, is a genre popular in Latin American literature. Ms. Arias selected *Dear Martin*, by Nic Stone, because it engages topics of police brutality familiar to her majority Black students, appeared as a New York Times best seller indicating its impact, and because the centers the voice and teachings of African American leader, Martin Luther King Junior.

A coursework and partnership activities occurred online. This online format created new obstacles to navigate. Pre-service teachers and high school students often lamented zoom/online learning fatigue. The schedules at the two high schools changed frequently as students and teachers were forced to oscillate between online, hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, and face-to-face learning formats across the semester. The class schedules changed at both high schools mid-semester, and both schools struggled with student attendance and assignment completion, and most students kept their cameras off during the entirety of online learning.

Due to these challenges, EDU 314 students who were partnered with the students at RCS were never able to collaborate directly; yet, they read *Dear Martin*, researched the school community on social media and drew from what Genevieve shared with Becky about her students. College students paired with students in Dani's class were able to meet for four 15-minute time slots and two Flipgrid video exchanges. During this time, students introduced themselves, discussed themes related to *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, shared the kinds of social media they used, and high school students were able to experience and debrief a mini lesson taught by a collaborative team of pre-service teachers.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

EDU 314 serves to raise undergraduate students' consciousness and enable them to recognize personal biases and frames of reference while also recognizing high school students' consciousness and experiences with these topics. These practices were supported through strategic community building that fostered engagement, normalized and invited discussions about race and intersectionality, and worked to minimize resistance (Flynn, Worden, Rolon Dow, 2018).

The five class assignments that were used for data collection for this study were: pre/post interview, My Literacies Literacy Log, an Adolescent Literacy Assignment reflection, a Culturally Responsive Text Set reflection, (which built off

the Adolescent Literacy Assignment), and an end of semester class reflection. Members of the research team interviewed undergraduate students at the beginning and the end of the semester in regards to their viewpoints and knowledge of racial literacies. Throughout, students were asked to reflect on what they learned from the course, the challenges and/or successes they may have experienced throughout the course, and on their explicit learning related to anti-racist, anti-bias, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Data Analysis

The following research questions helped guide our understanding for how students grew as humans and as practitioners over the course of the semester in EDU 314.

RQ1. How/does students' developing self-awareness related to personal biases and social, cultural positionings influence their pedagogical approaches?

RQ2: How/does engagement with course collaboration and literacy lesson planning activities/assignments/texts inform student approaches to using HRL methods in pedagogical design?

We used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Rogers, 2004) as our primary analytical framework for interpreting student discourse emergent across the data sources. We began by reading across the data sources to familiarize ourselves with student discourse. Next, we analyzed qualitative data using the constant comparative method and cycles of open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Following three rounds of coding during which we met as a research team to discuss our emergent findings. We operationalized the following themes which were reflected across the data sources. Themes included: culturally responsive care centered pedagogy; restorative practices pedagogy and equitable teaching practices; consciousness raising; power structures and pedagogy; challenges with digital technology integration; student identity and humanizing practices; and, deficit perspectives.

Our findings illustrate that pre-service teachers encountered obstacles or tensions between what they believed constituted best practices for content area instruction and how they were learning to re-imagine secondary literacy education in EDU 314. As students grappled with these paradigm shifts, many noted how Becky integrated humanizing practices enabling students to envision and try out new pedagogical approaches. Ultimately, the pre-service teachers' reflections

illustrate how humanizing pedagogical practices gave rise to them engaging humanizing racial literacies in their own pedagogical design. In our findings section, we offer an assortment of student voices that reflect the general discursive frames for obstacles faced and shifts in thinking that we understand as having led to transformative thinking and practices among many pre-service teachers in EDU 314.

Struggling through Old Paradigms

Throughout EDU 314, Becky challenged students to learn and integrate digital technology applications into their lesson plan materials while imagining how they might design lessons that invite adolescent youth into the digital discourse around consequential topics on social media. Undergraduate students had the option to work in groups, so many of these discussions about obstacles occurred within those small groups. Notable obstacles rose to the surface related to challenges in learning new applications; tensions with shifting between disciplinary discourses to a multiliteracies framework and struggles to view adolescents as capable of designing materials using social media applications to engage discussions around consequential social justice topics.

To begin, some students reported that it was hard to learn the new technology. Students explained that there were so many different platforms available that they felt overwhelmed. However, others expressed that despite challenges in learning a new technology, they appreciated the learning process. For example, on using VoiceThread, Sloan commented, “I also think that troubleshooting and learning how to use Voice challenged my thinking and encouraged me to teach myself and figure things out for myself because that was something I had never worked with before.” Thus, despite being an initial obstacle, Sloan’s comment captures a point Becky often emphasized; learning happens in the process of figuring out how to use the technology.

For many students, EDU 314 is their first class explicitly focused on literacy. Thus, for some students even conceptualizing literacy as a component of their discipline demands a paradigm shift. In reflecting on the Adolescent Literacy Assignment, Ryker, a Math education student, shared that the assignment “challenged my thinking the most due to not really having any experience with material outside of mathematics. Being in the math program never really required me to create literacy activities.” We observed similar comments notably among students of physical education and

in other STEM fields.

Third, EDU 314 maintained a constant focus on equity, power, positioning, and critical literacies, concepts which students grappled with and applied in a variety of ways. In this learning context, some began reflecting on issues of equity and access with regard to integrating digital technologies into curriculum design. Raven shared:

One thing that challenged me is how to give students all these assignments with various technologies when it’s not socially just to assume that all students will have the resources/access/capabilities/adult supervision and guidance to properly make use of these resources. I was surprised that I hadn’t been able to see these systems of power as clearly before.

In this comment, the researchers recognize a third, and perhaps most significant obstacle that several students experienced related to recognizing adolescents’ capacities for engaging consequential topics with digital technologies. For instance, Grace, a Spanish pre-service teacher, explained her groups’ struggle to understand how memes could be used to teach on the topic of immigration. She reflected how she and her colleagues, “were unsure of how that would translate into a constructive meme context. Next, we were entrusting the work of thoughtful meme-making to children—that just didn’t seem like it had prospects for doing socially-just work.” In this regard, some students reported that it seemed difficult or even inappropriate to use certain types of social media with social justice topics.

These comments reflect a notable barrier to pre-service teachers realizing humanizing racial literacies in their pedagogical practice which is an insufficient awareness about the embeddedness of privilege and Eurocentric values, histories, languages informing their pedagogical choices (Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2020). Teachers must understand how personal racial vantage points inform how they see the world and examine systems of power and oppression if they are to shift their pedagogical practices (Freire, 1993; Haddix, 2017). Students’ challenges to imagining the possibilities for realizing racial literacies with digital technologies were tied up in their preconceived notions about what constitutes literacy and who gets to shape consequential discourse.

In the next section, we discuss the shifts in thinking that we observed students making as they grappled with these obstacles and learned with and from multiculturally diverse high school students, many of whom were active social media users and social justice activists.

Transformative Practices

Course assignments, along with conducting their own research with the high school students in mind aided undergraduate students in deconstructing their own biases and beliefs about culture, literacy and technology.

My Literacies Literacy Log Assignment. EDU 314 begins with the My Literacies Literacy Log, which is an invitation for students to examine the literacies they use across three of their own discourse communities, or the ways in which they practice and exercise literacies within and across contexts and in relation to value systems.

Julia recalled that this assignment supported her in reflecting back on her own literacy upbringing. She shared,

The My Literacies, Literacy log [helped] me truly reflect on not only how I would teach but how I have been taught by teachers in the past. Before this assignment I had not truly known what it was to define literacy or how it affected students' ability to learn.

Her reflection shows how the assignment expanded her awareness of the intersection between how one engages with and understands the world and subsequently learns.

Adolescent Literacy Assignment. The Adolescent Literacy Assignment was the first major planning assignment and required students to create, rationalize and teach an assignment centered in Adolescent Literacies using some form of social media used by adolescents. This assignment leveraged students' developing awareness of an expansive view of literacy by inviting them to design an activity that centered students' discourse communities and literacies, inclusive of their social media literacy practices. ELA pre-service teacher, Wyler, discussed how this assignment facilitated a shift in his thinking about text selection and disciplinary texts. He shared, "The adolescent literacy assignment also helped me to think about old ideas in new ways (i.e., picking a target text first then picking the other texts). I learned that the target text does not have to be canonical." And, Brook's reflection reiterated this shift in thinking about literacy as she contemplated the role social media should play in school curriculum.

In a world that becomes more digitized every day, we know the importance of students' abilities to traverse the online world. Whichever stance people hold on the credibility of Twitter, millions use the platform every day. Many use it to get information, make friends, and be creative, so students need to have the literacy skills of

navigating an online space, such as Twitter.

Brook expressed awareness that personal opinion is superseded by the prolific use of Twitter and demonstrated a call to action for educators to foster youth's intentional engagement in this digital discourse to prepare them to shape digital discourse.

Culturally Responsive Text Set Assignment. Furthermore, these pedagogical paradigm shifts occurred in part, through the decentering, or the unnamings of curriculum (the generalization of racial experience) that often occurs with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in practice (Kirkland, 2021). The Culturally Responsive Text Set, built on the Adolescent Literacy Assignment, required students to select a varied set of multimodal texts, centered in culturally relevant themes, which they would use in a unit that they might teach around a disciplinary, standards-based topic. Students had the option to relate this text to a pressing issue or modern social movement that youth are currently assuming leadership roles in (e.g., BLM, climate change).

In reflecting on the research she did for her Culturally Responsive Text Set, Britt shared that, "The culturally responsive text set challenged and centered my thinking about diverse perspectives and cultures because I had to do extensive searching on articles or different texts that I could use to represent students of diverse backgrounds." Furthermore, Felix's comments on the same assignment reiterates several of the students' acknowledgement that realizing humanizing literacies through culturally responsive practices must involve creating space for students to build community through sharing themselves with their peers. Felix reflectively wrote the words shared below.

This relates to the theme of identity by enforcing the idea that your identity is your own. This activity will build connections in the classroom and allow students to acknowledge other student's identities and prove they can respect their peers even if their identity is different from yours. If I am a culturally responsive educator, my students will be culturally responsive learners.

Here, Felix connected the concepts raised at the start of the course about bias and identity to the implications for himself as an educator and the impact that his choices ultimately have on his students. He shows an awareness that humanizing racial literacy practices necessitates creating space in school curriculum for students to come to know one another in order to be in community. Ultimately, the researchers found that students' humanizing racial literacies

were fueled by a growing awareness that student learning depended on centering student culture, discourse, texts, and values in the school curriculum. Moreover, their reflections began to show their burgeoning understanding that building community while centering student discourse must take precedence in the pedagogical processes.

Implications

In the lead up to the implementation of EDU 314, the United States had faced a year unlike any other. The global pandemic, a polarizing election, a national spotlight on BlackLivesMatter, the capitol insurrection, and climate crisis related catastrophes, among others, led to civil unrest, human caused suffering, cultural fissures, and a deepening distrust of news sources as well as authority figures and elected officials. Technology platforms and social media, in particular, were at the center of this wariness and skepticism.

Prior to these events, many students had already expressed disparaging views on social media as places for either toxic discourse or for baby pictures and cat videos. As demonstrated by students in EDU 314, opportunities to unpack their biases and beliefs about culture and technology gave rise to reconsidering digital tools as viable and consequential literacy spaces. In this context, the challenges presented in redesigning a course that enabled deep and critical engagement with racial and other intersecting injustices through collaborations with high school students currently suffering the consequences of these injustices were extended by limitations set by zero face to face interactions. These challenges invited students into new mindsets that emphasized the stretching of empathic boundaries and the widening definition of what constitutes valid literacies and valued discourse communities.

Understanding and deconstructing the self, coupled with a developing consciousness of how structural inequities are embedded within school practices, teacher education candidates became researchers and reflective practitioners who learned how to design curriculum with critical consciousness towards realizing humanizing ends for BIPOC youth. Ultimately, we found that centering pedagogy in student and community discourse and humanizing practices enabled many pre-service teachers to name and contend with perceived obstacles. We believe that these experiences are imperative to support the lifelong work of equity minded educators to realize and engage humanizing racial literacy as an enduring pedagogical practice.

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