

## **RACE AND GENDER IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS: How Does Being a White Female Inform Leadership Decisions in Creating a Culture of Excellence for Tomorrow's Teachers?**

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### **Introduction**

To create a culture of excellence in any organization, an effective leader must understand his or her leadership in all its dimensions. Education has been historically dominated by white women making it imperative that leaders in this field analyze their leadership in terms of gender and race. This becomes critical in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to the widening “gap” between white female teachers and their increasingly diverse student population (Gordon, 2005, p. 136; Sleeter, 2002, p. 94; Banks, 2005, p. 36). This growing disconnect created by a “demographic imperative” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 242) is a particular challenge to teacher preparation programs where the student population is continuing the pattern of a majority of white, female preservice teachers for tomorrow’s diverse classrooms (Cattani, 2002; Culp, 2009; Scott, 2003; Ukpokodu, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1997 and 2001 as cited in Pink, 2004, p. 45). Current classroom dynamics especially in urban areas are demanding a cadre of teachers capable of understanding multicultural and diversity issues (Culp, 2009; Futrell, 1999). Demographic shifts in K-12 classrooms call for culturally competent teachers skilled in building community and celebrating differences among students; however, current conditions reveal devastating consequences on our society (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2000; Drexler, 2007; Langelier, 2006).

### **Addressing Diversity**

To ensure the ability of both faculty and the students who will be teachers in the K-12 classrooms to establish pluralistic environments, white women leaders in Schools of Education must engage in a series of steps that require them to address diversity. The first step is a process of self-examination of their leadership in terms of their female gender and white race and how those factors affect their decision-making, especially those areas addressing diversity (Helms 2008; Langelier, 2006). The second focuses on increasing cultural awareness of faculty in the organization and the viewpoints that they hold (Gordon, 2005). The final step involves examining programmatic elements and the teacher candidates themselves vis à vis their level of multicultural inclusion (Scott 2003). Leaders in teacher preparation programs must go beyond self examination of their leadership in diversity issues to addressing faculty, program and students in order to realize a culture of excellence that will effect societal change.

### **Step One: Awareness of Self**

Step one is awareness of self through the lens of gender and race analyzing how this has informed leadership. According to modern leadership theory, leadership style can take many forms. Stephen Covey (1990) offers a synergistic framework for leaders to achieve both a public and a private victory through win-win, being proactive and seeking first to understand then to be understood. Marzano (2005)

highlights the difference between transformational and transactional leadership. Transactional leaders trade one thing for another in a quid pro quo relationship while transformational leadership characteristics include the “Four I’s” of individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Marzano, 2005, p. 14). Applied to education, Marzano asserts that the transformational model is preferred. McAtee (2006) found that leaders need transformational qualities to successfully manage the dynamic nature of higher education leadership. McAtee also found that while women are commonly trained in transformational leadership their male counterparts tend to demonstrate transactional qualities.

Research has shown that female leadership style is markedly different than conventional male management; in comparing the two styles many differences emerge (Cooks, 2007; Joasil, 2008). Male leaders tend to be more individualistic and assertive while women define themselves more in terms of relationships than power (Joasil, 2008; Cattani, 2002). Female leadership is less task-oriented than male leadership style and is more concerned with others in their organization. Female leadership style can be characterized as “follower-centered, collegial, and collaborative” (McAtee, 2008, p. 2) with a concern for promoting team members’ full potential. While male leadership is commonly viewed as the impetus of a reform effort, so too can women’s leadership be a “vital source of change” (Trigg, 2006, p. 26).

In explaining how gender informs leadership at the higher education level, Professor Iverson at Kent State University OH asserted, “We have mental conditioning that goes on throughout our lives. It’s deeper than a description and more subtle than a stereotype” Iverson argued that cultural norms influence women’s self-image and behavior and that women build *power with*, while men exercise *power over* (Cooks, 2007). This tendency can actually harm women’s leadership ability since a strong leader is still perceived as one who exerts *power over*. Nonetheless, women tend to be change agents, particularly on behalf of someone else such as “the disempowered or marginalized” (Cooks, 2007). In her study, Joasil (2008) found contrary evidence to this in that women are now moving away from that perception of women as nurturers and mothers caring for others (p. 99). Iverson and her colleagues recommend that women work strategically to maneuver pervasive cultural images of female leadership. They believe that understanding the culture will help women find effective ways to change it. This understanding is a critical component in the School of Education leader who is seeking to establish a culture of excellence and an organization that values cultural competence in faculty and in preservice teachers.

## Gender and Racial Identity Development

Leaders must go deeper in the self examination process by considering all aspects of societal cultural images and how those inform their leadership style. Part of that cultural image is a woman’s racial identity which cannot be separated from her femaleness (Parks, 2006). Parks (2006) found evidence that white women’s identity development is linked yet incongruent with her racial identity development (see appendix). Gender has minority status and historical oppression in the workplace, however white women enjoy a position of privilege. White female leaders’ awareness of both their gender and racial identity development is key to accurate self assessment and understanding of leadership decisions. Contrasting paths of development is a likely source of high stress in white female leaders who must come to accept both dimensions of themselves in the context of a racial oppressor and simultaneous member of an oppressed group (Parks, 1996; Helms, 2008).

Since race is inseparable from gender in a leadership model, determining one’s place on the continuum of white racial identity development is a prerequisite to understanding leadership actions and

interactions (Helms, 2008). Moving from an ethnocentric to worldview, the goal for leaders is to move toward the stage or level of “autonomy” and hold a nonracist, positive white schema (Helms p. 83). In this autonomy stage, the leader truly values diversity and makes decisions based on an authentic desire to eliminate oppression. Also, a leader who is aware of her progression through the stages of racial identity development will more readily identify with others in her organization. It is likely that leader would be better able to construct professional development experiences that are individualized according to need.

When a leader reaches the autonomy stage, a factor influencing decisions is the desire to “*unlearn racism in teaching and teacher education*” (Cochran-Smith, 2000, p. 158). Cochran-Smith (2000) argued for viewing teacher education as racial text in order to undo the “blind vision” of our teacher preparation programs. Owen (2009) revealed how white men too in higher education have “particular blind spots about the fact of and the ways in which the U.S. social system is shaped by social structures of race and gender” (p. 198). Ponterotto (2006) cited research suggesting that racism is so entrenched in society that individuals cannot see it. He defined “colorblind” as “ignorance, denial and distortion of reality” (p. 39). Gordon (2005) asserted colorblindness provides a way for individuals to absolve themselves of racism. Cochran-Smith (2000) related how her role in a teacher education program as arbiter of diversity issues was called into question due to her position as a white female educator. Cochran-Smith revealed her unwitting complicity in continuing the cycle of privilege and oppression even as she worked to address racial equity issues in her program. This realization made her rethink curricular and field experience opportunities that she had organized blinded by the impact her whiteness was having. Rosenberg (1997 as cited in Cochran-Smith, 2000) addressed “the presence of an absence” (p. 168) or the figurative presence of racism typical in many small New England Teacher Preparation programs. This evokes a societal mandate that calls for a leader to be attuned to her racial identity in order to address these hidden messages particularly if she heads a predominantly white institution such as those found in the northeast. Indeed, given the historical and current critical state of classrooms and society, a leader’s cultural competence and the cause for social justice are “inextricably linked” (Arredondo, 2003, p. 282).

### Seeing Past the Blind Spot

Yet, can a white leader ever see fully past her blind spot in order to create the institutional change needed for systemic cultural competence? McIntosh (2005) unpacked her invisible knapsack seeing her white privilege for the first time. Dovidio et al (2002) addressed unintentional bias, or aversive racism, of which many white leaders are unaware. Gordon (2005) argued that “white professors all too often fail to see their own blindness” (p. 150). The implication for leadership is that white privilege cannot always be overcome and therefore leaders should collaborate across racial lines in order to achieve the highest level of effectiveness and excellence for the organization. Further, the leader needs to assess the organization’s level of cultural development: monocultural, nondiscriminating or multicultural in order to account for any blind spots (Owen, 2009). The concern for social justice can be forwarded by racially privileged leaders in higher education (Owen, 2009). Owen (2009) looked beyond the simplified definition of diversity as *difference* to one of diversity of *equity*. In this model, the focus is on the differences that diverse people, ideas and ways of knowing have positive social consequences for the organization.

The end result of the self-awareness process is to become a more culturally competent leader with the capacity to understand and validate individual’s ideas and ways of doing things. This capacity comes also with the knowledge and skills to create a pluralistic environment conducive to excellence on the

part of all stakeholders. The introspective process should heighten examination of all leadership decisions. Once that has been achieved it is incumbent upon leadership to move faculty and students toward the same level of proficiency so that the cycle of racism and oppression is stopped in Schools of Education, K-12 classrooms and ultimately society.

### **Role of Faculty**

Focusing on faculty in the School of Education is the next phase of leadership analysis through the lens of gender and race. Faculty play a key role in creating an organization that embraces a pluralistic perspective. Leaders need to guide faculty through their own self examination process, especially since they are typically not racially conscious (Gordon, 2005). A leader must ask faculty to assess their pedagogy and students' achievement by measuring professors' level of culturally responsive teaching, proposed by Gay (2002), which is defined as using the cultural experiences and viewpoints of ethnically diverse students as a tool to teach them more effectively (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Gay called for nothing short of a "curriculum transformation process" (p. 108) in our teacher preparation programs. A leader informed by her racial identity development needs to be skilled to lead the cultural shift in the organization toward embedding the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. Gay advocated for cultural scaffolding in order to increase student performance (p. 109). Nieto (2009) asserted that when teachers adopted "new ways of working with English language learners, the results ranged from improved student math skills to increased advocacy on the part of students as demonstrated by, among other activities, writing petitions to reclaim recess" (p. 11). Preservice teachers need to have cultural learning infused into their program so that they carry pluralistic attitudes and behaviors into the K-12 classroom. Scott (2003) asserted that most students who are white in teacher preparation programs function at a low level of ethnic identity formation and therefore it takes concerted and explicit effort on the part of faculty to change that. Gay (2002) argued that culturally responsive teaching can increase the academic achievement and performance of diverse students in the Kindergarten through college level thus serving as a model for teacher candidates.

Faculty are central to constructing a context in which students feel as though they belong (Langelier, 2006). Leaders must expand faculty members' awareness and make explicit their role in creating a pluralistic environment amenable to diversity. Langelier (2006) argued that acquiring multicultural awareness is attainable through educational interventions. A leader's role is to craft those trainings so that faculty are gently moved along the continuum to a broader worldview. Langelier (1996) provided the framework for faculty to make this progression based on the American Counseling Association's Multicultural competencies of "awareness, knowledge and skills" (p. 5). Stevens (2008) argued for the AIM (All-Inclusive Multiculturalism) approach to organizational change; in this way leaders build on faculty's strengths and cultivate a climate of respect and pluralism (p. 119). A leader in a School of Education would use the most effective approach based on her faculty's self-assessment and awareness of diversity issues.

Regardless of the action plan, white female leaders must seek to diversify their faculty composition and hire faculty of color and other minority statuses as well. A caveat for leaders is to resist hiring a faculty member of color to "single-handedly heighten students' awareness of diversity issues and prepare them for a multicultural world (Scott, 2003, p. 212). Scott asserted that often faculty hired for this reason are trapped in a "black box" where they are assigned only courses dealing with diversity and not research interests they may have. This "hyperprivileging" of faculty of color as the spokesperson for

diversity issues allow the majority of professors in the organization who are white to continue to not address racial issues (Scott, 2003).

### Focus on Students

A focus on students and programmatic offerings is the third step in a white female leader's analysis of her leadership and decision making relevant to creating a pluralistic culture of excellence. Leaders addressing the demographic gap existent in K-12 classrooms should recruit more diverse teacher candidates. A white female leader of a school of education needs to ensure that the cultural shift she is leading encompasses all teacher candidates. If the leader and faculty undergo a process of awareness of diversity issues it follows that students are also brought through the racial identity development process. Pink (2004) argued that changing student thinking is possible through multicultural courses. A supporter of culturally responsive teaching, Pink offered a Social justice framework for teaching a course on multiculturalism. Pink posited that students in teacher preparation programs can develop "communicative competence which he defined as the ability to 'read' the culture to understand the language game in such a way that the individual can 'see' the origins of their taken-for-granted" (p. 48).

Ukpokodu (2004) argued strongly that a multicultural course is not sufficient and that teacher candidates require authentic experiential encounters with diverse students. Ukpokodu cited numerous studies revealing that white preservice students have "negative and racialized dispositions toward diverse students" (p. 19). She argued that not only are single multicultural courses not sufficient nor lasting, the typical multicultural courses tend to generalize and reinforce misconceptions. Authentic field experiences that situate students in a culturally diverse environment would eliminate those preconceived notions and stereotypes they didn't even know they had (Ukpokodu, 2004, p. 20). Through this immersion, students are forced out of their comfort zones and tend to develop empathy. Evidence that their preconceived "web of beliefs" is disrupted, Ukpokodu cited students' reflections such as "I recognized that my previous images and perceptions of the race of my cultural partner were inaccurate" and "Differences can be understood and more importantly one discovers that constant similarities exist across all cultural boundaries, misconceptions can be broken down and the truth can be let to stand on its own" (p. 20). By living so closely with ethnically diverse students, teacher candidates had a "truly transformative experience" (p. 20).

### Programmatic Infusion

For sustained and systemic cultural change however, diversity issues need to be discussed at a programmatic level (Gordon, 2005). In addition to offering multicultural courses and providing field experience with ethnic populations, leaders need to ensure that there is an infusion of multicultural concern throughout the curriculum. By providing students with pervasive and ample opportunities for critical reflection and self examination of race and diversity issues they will more accurately know "who they are and who they might become" (Glass, 2000, p. 287 in Scott, 2003, p. 221). Culturally responsive teaching methods need to be institutionalized (Gay, 2002). In his research, Culp (2009) attested to the efficacy of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive pedagogy helps students acquire knowledge on teaching diverse students. Preservice teachers need to learn how to be a "cultural broker who thoroughly understands different cultural systems, is able to interpret cultural symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, and knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures that facilitate the instructional process" (Gay, 1993, as cited in



Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 243-244). Preservice students need to “transform” their thinking. Scott (2003) reminded us that too often the “culturally ignorant pre-service teacher becomes a culturally insensitive in-service teacher who equates diversity with deficiency” (p. 212). Ponterotto (2006) offered a reliable instrument to measure teachers’ cultural competence that a leader could implement which is the Teacher Multicultural Attitude Scale (TMAS) (p. 253-254). It is essential that preservice candidates become K-12 teachers who have the skills and knowledge to work to eliminate prejudice (Ponterotto, 2006). Just as their School of Education program’s curriculum included multiple modes of addressing diversity issues, candidates who successfully enter the teaching profession have the task before them to reduce racism and prejudice in their classrooms and create a pluralistic environment where all students can achieve.

## Discussion

Women with a privileged social identity (white) who take a leadership role in Schools of Education have a complex task before them. While on the one hand they relate to the issues of the oppressed they are at the same time at risk of being blinded by their white privilege. Their success in creating a culture of excellence is dependent upon their awareness of gender and racial identity models as applied to themselves and the faculty and students in their organization. An effective leader is a culturally competent leader who questions her deeply embedded assumptions about multicultural equity in teacher preparation. The steps in creating a culture of excellence, centered on valuing pluralism, propels a leader to a series of action steps based on awareness, knowledge and skills which reshapes the faculty, program and culture of the education division. Indeed, the individual leader is transformed by the process of understanding white privilege. White women leaders in the field of education are called to initiate the complex series of questions informing their leadership decisions that ultimately have societal consequences. The time is now for the change process to begin in schools of education to right the balance and fix the gap between white female educators and their diverse student population of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Appendix

Table 1: Racial and Womanist Identity Development

Black Racial Identity	White Racial Identity	Womanist Identity
<i>Preencounter</i> : Idealization of Whites and Whiteness. Denigration of Blacks and Black culture.	<i>Contact</i> : Naive denial of racism in current society. Acceptance of White values as "normal." Claims to be "color-blind."	<i>Preencounter (Womanist I)</i> : Acceptance of traditional sex roles; denial of societal bias.
<i>Encounter</i> : Rejection of White culture. Beginning of search for Black identity. Confusion and intense affect mark this transitional stage.	<i>Disintegration</i> : Internal conflict caused by recognition of societal racism. Overidentification with or patronizing attitude toward Blacks.	<i>Encounter (Womanist II)</i> : Questioning and confusion about gender roles. Tentative exploration of solutions to role conflicts.
<i>Immersion-Emersion</i> : Withdrawal into Black world. Idealization of Blackness. Embracing of stereotypical image of Blackness. Denigration of Whiteness.	<i>Reintegration</i> : Withdrawal into White culture. Denigration of Blacks. Belief in White cultural superiority.	<i>Immersion-Emersion (Womanist III)</i> : Externally based feminist stance. Hostility toward men; idealization of women. Intense relationships with other women.
<i>Internalization</i> : Internally defined positive Black identity. Transcendence of racism. Acceptance of positive aspects of White culture.	<i>Pseudo-Independence</i> : Intellectual, but not emotional, acceptance of Blacks. Discomfort with close personal interaction with Blacks.	<i>Internalization (Womanist IV)</i> : Internally defined and integrated female identity without undue reliance on either traditional roles or feminist viewpoint.
	<i>Autonomy</i> : Internally defined nonracist White identity. Openness to an interest in other cultures. Capacity for the interest in close relationships with Blacks as well as with Whites.	

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