

RADICAL LOVE IN TEACHER EDUCATION PRAXIS:

IMAGINING THE REAL THROUGH LISTENING TO DIVERSE STUDENT VOICES

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Through Freire's notion of praxis (1985, p.119), which gives centrality to critical self-reflection in teaching toward social justice, in this paper I reflect on recently collected narratives gleaned from working with pre-service teachers. These stories reveal the unexpected rewards of seeking to create a prevailing culture of listening and respect for students' unique perspectives. They also illustrate the challenges involved in maintaining my own inward consciousness of self and place while cultivating this kind of milieu in the classroom. Within this dynamic tension in which both teacher and students learn from each other, there are tremendous possibilities to accept, affirm and confirm emerging teacher identities with the kind of sensibilities that are critically awakened to injustice and empowered as "beings of praxis" (Freire, 1985, p.112) in their own right. The theoretical framework that I draw from for this work is based upon Martin Buber's notion of "imagining the real" (1992, p.66) which he describes as the inner capacity to imagine another's wishes, feelings, perceptions and lived experience that emerges out of "acceptance, affirmation and confirmation" (Buber & Eisenstadt, 1992, p. 66). This process involves the capacity to hear and understand (accept) students' diverse perspectives that are shaped by unique place and socio-cultural positioning. This in turn creates the space for (affirming) and calling into being the

unformed potential (confirming) in another. All of these features are implicit in Buber’s notion of education as dialogical.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION

The site for this study during the last eight years is within a pre-service education course called *Exploring Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Diversity in Educational Context*. The university where the course is delivered is located in the heart of the rural American South, a region that is generally characterized by traditionally conservative values when compared to metropolitan areas. The course is a live, face-to-face semester arrangement that meets twice weekly for 70 minutes. The class consists of undergraduate sophomore level college students. The average class size is 22 students. The demographics of students from 2007 to 2015 in these classes by gender and ethnicity is shown in the table below.

Enrollment of Pre-professional Block COE Students from August,

2007-December 2015-Georgia Southern University

Ethnicity	Female Headcount	Female % of Total	Male Headcount	Male % of Total	Total of Race	% of Total
American Indian/Alaska Native	7	0.25%	2	0.07%	9	0.32%
Asian	18	0.63%	4	0.14%	22	0.78%
Black or African American	392	13.81%	117	4.12%	509	17.94%
Hispanic (of any race)	48	1.69%	15	0.53%	63	2.22%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	0.07%	0	0.00%	2	0.07%
Two or More Races	40	1.41%	12	0.42%	52	1.83%
White	1,726	60.82%	393	13.85%	2,119	74.67%
Unknown	44	1.55%	18	0.63%	62	2.18%
TOTAL	2,277	80.23%	561	19.77%	2,838	100.00%

In this class I stress an “additive approach” (Valenzuela, 1999) to curriculum. This method draws on each student’s “funds of knowl-

edge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) as a starting point and lens for recognizing, affirming and valuing the cultural wealth (Martin, 2002) and diversity of every student. This includes ethnicity, religious or non-religious world views, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. The first assignment I give is a personal culture presentation wherein students are invited to share their personal story including their ethnic background, family and personal culture including food, music, family, holidays, activities, etc. This assignment serves as a “home base” for exploring and affirming diverse voices, points of view and approaches to learning. I always do this assignment along with the students because I believe that if I expect them to open up with their own stories, it is important for them to know something about my life. Students often tell me that it is quite rare for them to know much about the lives and background of their professors. Since the goal of the course is to openly welcome all voices and cultural backgrounds to the conversational curriculum, it would seem counterproductive and unequal for the professor’s background to be off limits.

One of the most important features in creating the context for listening to, for and with student voices is the initiation of a semester long process of gradually minimizing alienation with regard to individual students’ sense of place, class, ethnicity, personal beliefs or sexual orientation. For example, gay students should feel as much at home in our classes as straight students. Also students from rural settings should not feel belittled for being non-urban. Likewise, white students should not experience a sense of reproach for being white any more than students of color should feel pressure to negate their cultural heritage and ethnicity. This process of moving from alienation to empathy is ongoing and evolving for both students and teachers as we move together toward the goal of *becoming* multicultural people instead of just *doing* “diversity”.

Moreover it is much more difficult for students to recognize and appreciate another student’s sense of cultural place and identity without first appreciating their own. As we continually move toward this goal of minimalizing alienation, a key ingredient for releasing open dialogue emerges-- trust. Without trust, students are more likely to keep to themselves and approach the class out of the “just tell me what

is required to get a good grade” mentality. This statement from a student who was raised in a rural agricultural setting shows the potential of using an approach where the student is encouraged to discover and share his or her own culture and sense of place with the class.

After I had discovered who I really was in the terms of my heritage I was then able to really learn from our class discussions. It was apparent to me that I really did not have a deep understanding or appreciation of other cultures before this class. All I knew were basic facts. I had no idea how other cultures were treated and some of the abuses they encountered. This class has really opened my eyes to how naïve I was, and it has made me more aware of the prejudgments that I construct out of habit. (Bethany Durrence, Personal Communication, 12/03/15)

Trust can take time to develop, especially in higher education where students have experienced what Buber refers to as monologue wherein one “speaks with himself in strangely torturous and circuitous ways”(Buber & Smith,1947,p.22) without regard for what it might be like for the listener. I remember attending a few conference sessions on “diversity” where the experience felt monological even when “group” activities were included. There was often a prevailing sense of being chided and patronized at the same time. I am sure that each of you reading this have seen far too much of the “bully” monologue types who are not really open to other points of view even though he or she might claim to be an enlightened and progressive person. These scenarios are richly ironic when the topics are supposed to be about diversity. Buber calls this experience one of “imposing” points of view in contrast to an “unfolding” experience of unscripted dialogue (Buber, Friedman & Smith, 1965, p. 82). Buber defines a dialogical individual as one who “has in mind the other or others and turns to them with the intention of establishing a mutual relation between himself [herself] and them” (ibid.). Mutuality means all present are honored, accepted and treated with equal respect. Indeed the very heart of Buber’s thinking is centered in the distinction between treating others as objects (I-it) or persons (I-thou), (Buber & Kaufman, 1996).

Freire also believed that in real dialogue that all parties should be considered equal. This of course does not mean the teacher should not

lead or be in charge. Joe Kincheloe (2008) discussed this idea in one of his last conversations with Freire.

Critical teachers, therefore, must admit that they are in a position of authority and then demonstrate that authority [sic] in their actions in support of students. One of the actions involves the ability to conduct research/produce knowledge. The authority of the critical teacher is dialectical; as teachers relinquish the authority of truth providers, they assume the mature authority of facilitators of student inquiry and problem posing. In relation to such teacher authority, students gain their freedom--they gain the ability to become self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge. (p. 17)

This production of knowledge at its best will be evident in classroom dialogue and in written form through assigned topics. In fact most of the stories I cite in this article were given through assigned work that I approached as dialogical. I attempted in my assessment of student work to maintain a personal and conversational tone as much as is practically possible. Even the use of grading rubrics can objectify students as much as multiple choice grading tabulated by a machine.

Another dimension of cultivating an environment of acceptance and inclusion that I have used is very effective and is quite simple. I left enough room during classroom time to talk to students about their lives, their interests and the challenges they face outside the content area of my class. I try to arrange half of the scheduled time in class for students to work in small groups or on individual assignments. I use this time to help with the content if needed, but I have found that trust and acceptance increases through individual conversations about family, friendships, food, music, culture, television shows and movies and current events. More often than not, the students are more open to new ideas through the cultivation of acceptance and trust. Here are a few comments from recent *Student Evaluations of Instruction* forms for this class when they were asked what they liked best. “We could openly discuss our opinions without any ridicule or being harped on” (Anonymous, 2015). “Valuing everyone’s opinion” (anonymous, 2015). “He didn’t sugar coat the hard stuff.” (Anonymous, 2015) “He made us think” (Anonymous, 2015).

LISTENING TO/FOR DIVERSITY AND IMAGINATION

Listening to others with imagination to others opens us to the polyphonic aspect of meaning, rather than being limited to the narrow sounds of cliché or the kind of inward thoughts that cause knee-jerk reactions to what we hear. The prejudiced person is only in tune with the self. Listening to diversity “is a matter of attunement, an auditory rather than visual conception, in which the sound of music jazz specifically) being improvised is an apt example” (Pinar, 2004, p. 189). The praxis of listening for diversity can serve to tune the ear to participate, to resonate with the voice of others. This is no scripted endeavor, but as the jazz analogy implies, spontaneity is welcomed. In the shared dimensions of spontaneous dialogue, there is a fuller experience of knowing. The practice of this reality is central to moving beyond critical pedagogy as a mere method. Indeed Freire and Buber sound quite similar when Freire states that he engages “in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379). Listening for diversity, however, is much more than putting the chairs in the classroom in a circle and asking preformulated questions. In Freire’s view (1970), dialogue must be open-ended. This kind of listening calls for imagination in ways that enable us to reach beyond our own thoughts and patterns of thinking and into the experiences of others.

Sidorkin (2002) offers further insight into the nature of listening to/with diversity by stating that relations cannot be described by one person’s perspective.

Relation in general is possible only in the presence of difference. Totally identical entities cannot relate to each other. Relations result from plurality, from some tension born of difference. (p. 98)

This difference is not something that needs to be overcome by a “fifty/fifty split.” Every voice needs to be heard, not lowered to the least common denominator. Sidorkin goes on to say that one of the greatest needs in schools is the cultivation of listening by focusing on the ability to “read” relationships, to reflect on these cases, to talk and write about relationships.

The key skill here is the ability to: reconstruct the other voice. A teacher must develop this ability to hear what has not been said, to formulate what his students are not able to articulate, to engage in a dialogue when the other party may not be willing or ready to engage. The ability to understand human relations relies heavily on the heightened ability to hear and respond without preconceived notions of truth. (p. 100)

This ability to read relationships will carry over into all content areas. In fact, our ability to process thoughts completely becomes more relevant, and potent, to the degree that we are in tune with the voice of others. This notion affects all aspects of pedagogy because language is central to both learning and communication. Imagination can provide insight into the ways language is *perceived or received* by others.

AFFIRMATION AND "IMAGINING THE REAL" THROUGH STORY

The use of personal stories opens the way to move beyond acceptance to affirmation by "making present" (Buber, 1966, p.66) the "other" through connective details. This notion gets at the heart of what Buber refers to as "imagining the real [as] the capacity to hold before one's soul a reality arising at this moment but not able to be directly experienced" (ibid.). Buber goes on to explain that this imagining must move beyond "vague sympathy" (ibid.) to specific details of a person's life that personally resonate with our own experiences. This approach is quite similar to Maxine Greene's (1995) notion of the creation of social imagination through the expression of personal and humanizing narratives of those that are considered "other" when she writes that, "I have learned the value of connective details. Without them, it is extraordinarily difficult to overcome abstraction in dealing with other people. A fearful oversimplification takes over in the blankness" (p. 95).

Much of the content of our class consists of stories because they have the power counteract prejudicial "reasoning" as they open the way for empathic connections that allow us to see and hear through another's eyes and ears. For example in her vital and innovative work in critical race testimony, Denise Taliaferro Baszile (2008) presents the

power of autobiographical voice through counter-storytelling—“not as an alternative extant of reasoning, but as epistemological and pedagogical intervention, working to reveal the socially constructed and contextually dependent nature of reasoning itself” (p.251). This kind of storytelling is vitally important when racist, elitist and homophobic attitudes actually defy reasoning and logic. Stories can activate the emotional areas to first feel then reason.

For example, stories of the lives of Muslim teachers, children raised by gay couples, stories of racial violence and hate crimes, historical narratives, and movies that give voice to the voiceless are all continually woven into my course content. In all of my classes students are encouraged to share and reflect upon personal narratives as a means of developing the kinds of connective details and narratives that Greene and Baszile are referring to in the above citations. Examples from students’ work that follow were provided with their permission.

In one example a student asked if he could share his personal situation with the class. He opened with “I have three dads.” Needless to say he had everyone’s undivided attention right away. He explained that he lives with his father and his father’s partner and that he really respects this man because of the interest he takes in his life and how well he communicates with him when compared with his biological father. He also stays with his mother and stepfather quite often, and they both are excellent parents as well. One reason this story had such an impact within the class context was that the student was very well liked by all in the class and has outstanding leadership qualities. Plus everyone in the class liked his girlfriend who attended class with him thus they were able to affirm him in his uniqueness even while accepting his “otherness”.

One of the documentaries that I show in class produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2010) is *Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case that Made History*. This story is especially effective when reaching students who were raised in the religiously conservative traditions like many of the students in these classes. At the center of this case study is Jamie Nabozny. When he was in junior high and high school in northern Wisconsin he would hear homophobic remarks and have things thrown at him in the halls almost every day. The tipping

point for him occurred when he suffered internal bleeding and had to have abdominal surgery after being attacked in the restroom. The students are not only touched by the stark reality of homophobic bullying, but also that Nabozny stands up to the system and wins a lawsuit against the school board that kept excusing the problem by saying that “boys will be boys” and stating that it was the victim’s fault for “acting so gay”. My students also saw that in spite of all that Jamie went through, he has an outstanding sense of humor and is a dynamic communicator; as a result, they were able to move more fully in the direction of acceptance and affirmation themselves when they realized that Jamie’s story resonated with each student’s common humanity. In fact, I witnessed that this story’s reach goes right through religious orthodoxy and opened many of the students to listen, perhaps for the first time, to diversity of sexual orientation.

Another effective set of Islamophobic counter stories I share with my students comes from my own experience as a “cultural events coordinator” for a group of high school English teachers mostly from Islamic countries who were here for one semester to participate in the International Leaders in Education Program (ILEP). This wonderful group of educators are all deeply devoted to teaching and are unusually curious about everything from farming in southeast Georgia to music from American movies and especially family life. All of them possessed a wonderful sense of humor and were constantly engaged with witty repartee with each other and with all of the host team. In my supportive role of the program, I took all seventeen teachers to events such as their weekly trips for shopping and to the local Mosque and to places such as the Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change in Atlanta which is about a 3 1/2 hour drive from campus. There is one story from that visit that has a powerful impact on my students. There is a documentary that is shown at the King Center about MLK’s life, death and legacy that ILEP participants were all excited about seeing in one section of the center that is set up in theatre fashion. I could not see their faces during the showing of this video because the lights were dimmed. But when the lights came back on, it was clear that most of them had been crying during it. They were

all deeply moved by it. Many asked for copies of the video to show to their students back in their home countries.

Finally I want to discuss another story. This one is about Claudia (used with permission) the daughter of undocumented parents from Mexico. One day in class during a controversial discussion on illegal immigration she addressed the class and described her hard working parents and what it was like to grow up in a family where everyone including the children worked in the farm fields of South Georgia together during certain times of the year. Claudia was always diligent at work and in school and was even elected Homecoming Queen in a small South Georgia town while in high school. Needless to say, her counter story had a tremendous impact on the class and certainly enabled each of us to affirm her in her difference. One student in particular wrote about this later at the end of the semester. He was raised in a strongly conservative household, making his story all the more potent. Here he describes a dramatic change in his thinking about undocumented workers.

What I view as the turning point was when a female student in class opened up about the Mexican coyotes. I had never heard this term before, and in all honesty I just assumed that people who crossed the border merely had to walk across a fence when a guard's back was turned and they were in. It was seeing the raw human struggle that changed me. All of a sudden, the term illegal alien was no longer some abstract concept attached to a subhuman, taco-eating fiend, it was someone's mother. It was a she, and that started a change in me. (Nick Adams, personal communication, December 12, 2010)

When we apply Buber's concept of "personally making present" (Buber & Eisenstadt, 1992, p. 66), to this narrative, it describes the changes in my student who clearly identified his own profoundly racist beliefs when he labeled Claudia as "subhuman taco eating fiend". This story gives us an opportunity to view acceptance and affirmation as less static concepts when they are positioned in concert with Freire's notion of the role of dialogue in humanization (Freire, 1970). When Nick stated that he saw Claudia in her "raw human struggle" she was no longer an objectified product of his racist viewpoint. Claudia

was “accepted” as a real person and fully “affirmed” and humanized as Nick imagined himself in the story of her family experiences without physically going through the nightmarish experience of human trafficking first hand.

LISTENING IN ORDER TO CONFIRM

Affirmation and confirmation call for the operation of distinct capacities. Affirming opens the possibility and spirit of dialogue, out of acceptance and mutual trust. Buber’s notion of confirmation involves a fuller dimension of “imagining the real” which becomes a clearer concept in a more up to date educational context by connecting it to Nel Noddings’ appropriation of Buber’s concept of confirmation. Noddings describes Buber’s notion of confirmation as “the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others” (Gordon, Benner, Noddings, 1996, p. 164). When we confirm another, we name the emerging identity of a more aware and informed self in some fashion. This requires an ability to look past external aspects of a student’s persona and realistically call attention to evolving features of understanding, ability and character. The opposite of confirmation is what the artist/scientist Bob Miller calls “hardening of the categories” (In Cole, 2003, p. 180) of the kind that result in knee jerk listening and corresponding reactions that can be grossly counterproductive, especially when the teacher is supposed to be a model of nurturing respect and openness to the voices of others. Here is an example of confirmation that I expressed to a student who chose to interview a victim of homophobic bullying in school and rejection by his father. From what I could see in this student before and after this interview assignment there certainly was a noticeable shift in her view that I could name and confirm.

It is clear that _____ trusts you or he wouldn’t have given you the answers to the questions that you so wonderfully framed for him as an individual. It is sad that his father cannot accept him for who he is but I love the fact that he channels his feelings of rejection into creativity..... Most of all I am glad you got to know _____ better through this work. Personal story surrounds prejudice with love and takes it apart, one detail at a time. (Lake, 2015), np.)

There are many opportunities to offer confirmation to students through commenting on their writing or their participation in class or simply naming how their work is distinctive, outstanding and original. This goes a long way toward opening them to be more awakened and aware of their emerging multicultural self and more attune to the voices of others. It is important to note here before returning to several more student narratives that confirmation should never be used in an unrealistic or blanket fashion. When we confirm others, we do so with specific examples of how what we see is truly there to be developed. False hope that sets students up for failure can be just as devastating as reinforcing objectification through stereotypes.

STUDENT RESPONSE SAMPLES

In this section I share some of these emerging voices from the students in whom the capacity to “imagine the real” showed encouraging results. At the end of the current semester, for the first time I asked the students to respond in writing to the following open ended question:

The ability to understand human relations relies heavily on the heightened ability to hear and respond without preconceived notions of truth. As we come to a close of our diversity course do you think that you are more open to listen to others that are different from you? If so, please describe in one or two paragraphs how you have changed.

In almost all of these instances, I was encouraged to see how far they had come in 14 weeks. A small minority of the students used this opportunity to show resistance to change. I was glad that they felt free to be true to their own hearts. That is still much better than pretending to change for the sake of getting a “better” grade. While this was obviously not the ideal result, it is still important that they felt able to be heard as they revealed how they felt about changing in relation to participation in the course. I have chosen the students below not only for their poignant responses but because they have self-identified at one point or another in the semester as coming from strongly conservative families. These vignettes are used with permission of the students. It should be mentioned how keenly I am aware that student writing is influenced by grading. Yet, as you read these responses I think you will

agree that they express sincere changes in attitudes and in some cases in actions as well. I left the quotes as they were written as an attempt to preserve student voices.

I have become a better person because of this class and I have you to thank of that. The people that I've opened up to have been the complete opposite of everything I have ever did in my life. This was the first time (EVER in my life) that I have had Caucasian friends and have been so open to learn more about people..... Getting out of my shyness is something that I have and still is struggling with but by being in the diversity class has made that better. (Jeanca Carey, Personal Communication, 12/03/15).

The one way that I was very challenged during this course were with classmates that I felt weren't as open minded as myself. I felt myself getting frustrated with bigoted comments or false rationale-whether it was comments about poor people taking advantage of welfare or Christians that "just didn't feel that homosexuality was right or moral." I wanted to be combative, but I've realized that acceptance is not simply for those in the minority, but for those that have prejudices you disagree with. I've remembered that if I'm going to be in rural Georgia for a while, that I will run into plenty of right winged Republican conservatives, and that I must extend the same amount of acceptance to them as I do to anyone else. And that has humbled me. (Brienne Suggs, Personal Communication, 12/03/15).

I came in with an open, or more of an "empty" mind. I was going to go with the flow and learn about diverse cultures and take the final. Then I would move on to the next phase of the education program. That definitely was not the case. First of all, we learned about more than diverse cultures and races. We covered topics from disabilities and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. I did not expect to be covering the latter whatsoever. We approached the elephants in the room without beating around the bush which I formerly found intriguing yet terrifying. Approaching those hot topics without slowing down has made me more likely to come forward with my beliefs. Being more transparent about what I believe has made me want to

become more well-read on today's issues. This also makes me want to listen to people that are diverse from myself. A thirst for learning and celebrating diversity makes a better student which will lead to becoming an outstanding teacher. I want to be that outstanding teacher, and this class has given me the tools to do just that and much more. (Lindsay Chute, Personal Communication, 12/03/15).

One thing this class has definitely done for me is to think more deeply about the things people tell me. I need to stop looking at the surface of things and dive into their true meanings. (Julianne Kendrick, Personal Communication, 12/03/15).

Becoming more socially aware as to what is wrong with the world and how we treat our fellow humans has also helped me to grow in my faith. I became scared that the bible and my new-found opinions would not mix, based on the judgmental churches I grew up in, but became more open to the concept of God's love for every person he created and his celebration of diversity rather than simply a list of do-wrongs. This class has helped me understand even more about the cultures I strive so hard to celebrate, giving me even more opportunity to love on and try to understand all types of people! (Hunter Copelan, Personal Communication, 12/03/15)

I do believe I am more open to listening to others with differences from me. More specifically, I have moved from basic tolerance to actual appreciation of how differences make our world an interesting place to live. Honestly, many of the differences and various forms of discrimination we have discussed in this class challenged me to consider my behavior. I know there are some differences, such as disabilities, sexuality, and certain religious beliefs that caused me particular discomfort. I realized that in many of these examples, it was not a problem with the people or their individuality, but rather with my original mindset of difference creating division between people. My attitude was essentially that if someone was particularly different from me, the disagreement would lead to some form of problems between us at some point, whether respect was shown or not. This class

led me to appreciate that differences create a beginning point for understanding other people around me, and that understanding differences leads to better understanding of similarities as well. I understand better now that differences between people don't have to lead to conflict, but instead can lead to education and appreciation of a new way to see the world. Ultimately, I changed my viewpoint from difference creating division to difference being the springboard for connection. (Caitlin Smith, personal Communication, 12/03/15)

DISCUSSION AND PERSONAL CONCLUSION

For the last nine years of teaching this class, stories such as these are encouraging reminders that we can make a difference in the way that that future educators listen and respond to diverse student voices. Yet not all of the students express positive change in this direction. My hope for the students that have resisted the content of the course openly for much of the semester is that when they enter public life completely after graduation, they are positively affected by the diverse environments in which they find themselves when they see the needs and potential in those that they are called on to teach. Also, I am keenly aware that the fruit of lasting change takes much longer than one semester to mature. Yet as I look back on my own life and consider the impact that teachers, friends and mentors have had on me through their acceptance, affirmation and confirmation of my past, present and future self, it strengthens my hope for what is possible as they begin their own journey of teaching the next generation. There have been so many people that have modeled this kind of listening and openness with me, who have truly surprised me by calling forth a more aware, more open and confident self as they saw it emerging before I could see it solidly formed on my own.

For future educators, Buber's notion of "imagining the real" and receiving and giving the kind of acceptance, affirmation and confirmation as I have applied them here, are at the very least, as important as knowledge of the content area. Yet they tend to be given much lower priority in the current climate of "benchmarks" "common core" and the endless proliferation overly specified lesson plans and rubrics. At

the same time, the field of education is the ideal place to take the richly theoretical ideas of our intellectual antecedents such as Buber, Freire and Greene and see them brought to new life when applied to specific contexts of unique human stories that are told to and by teachers and students.

I am completing this article on the last day of 2015, a year that has been marked by a sharp increase of ethnic and racial violence, xenophobia and the vehement clash of conflicting ideologies across the world. It appears that there is a lot less listening across differences and much more rejection, jumping to false conclusions and believing the worst about others than there is acceptance, affirmation and confirmation. Yet beyond this, we have become desensitized to a worst kind of dehumanization that not only tolerates, but in fact craves, the spectacle of destruction of human life. The kind of listening that I have written about in this article offers an antidote to this type of social sickness. Of course this “listening across differences approach” to multicultural education is ultimately not where we as critical pedagogy practitioners would like to see teachers emerge in their self development and movement and transformative changes all too often seem to be progressing at glacial speed. That does not mean that movement is any less important or will ultimately be any less significant. Here I think of Freire’s wisdom that “in the struggle for change we must be neither solely impatient but (as noted) patiently impatient” (1997, p.64) as we continue to dialogue with the goal of transformation.

Yet in the face of all this negativity, I am reminded of an incident I heard about many years ago that took place on the Amazon River. A man and his family were traveling in a small boat down the river in a heavily wooded area. In the middle of their trip, the boat’s small motor and power supply broke down. While the man was trying to start the motor, the boat was drifting dangerously closer toward tree stumps in the water that could capsize the boat or crack the hull. Another man on the side of the river heard the struggle of someone trying to start the motor and he lit one small match and held it up. The family was then able to use the oars to propel them toward the tiny light, which seemed much brighter than just a tiny little match in the prevailing darkness. They made it safely to camp that night. We cannot afford to think that

our light is too small to make a difference. There is simply too much at stake to give into fear and cynicism at this juncture of history and educators have always taken the lead bringing about positive change.

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