

Empathy, Teacher Dispositions, and Preparation for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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Abstract

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) offers elaborate empirical and theoretical conventions for becoming an effective teacher of diverse youth. Empathy has been found to improve classroom teachers' capacity to (re)act or respond to youth in ways that produce evidence of CRP. However, there are too few instructive models in teacher education that help connect teacher candidates' knowledge of students and communities to development of efficacious physical habits, tendencies, and trends in observable behavior or *teacher dispositions*. The application of empathy operationalized through perspective taking is one such model useful to preparing teacher candidates to make professional decisions that produce evidence of CRP. Engaging teacher candidates in *perspective taking*—adopting the social perspectives of others as an act and process of knowing—invites them to obtain (and reason with) new knowledge of students and the sociocultural context where she or he will teach. Recommendations for modeling and practicing perspective taking in teacher education are discussed.

Keywords

equity, diversity, multicultural education, teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge, empathy, dispositions

Introduction

In today's public schools, becoming an effective teacher—making professional decisions that lead to favorable student outcomes—requires that teacher candidates develop orientations toward instruction, and interpersonal interactions with youth, that produce evidence of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Such an orientation (sometimes described as dispositions—see Amos, 2011; Annamma, 2015; Talbert-Johnson, 2006) includes active commitments to social justice, anti-oppressive, and antiracist teaching (Villegas, 2007). Diez (2007) insists that cultivating such orientations requires both conceptualizing and modeling effective teaching for teacher candidates (p. 394). I propose that the application of empathy through perspective taking (a) sharpens teacher candidates' sense making about the orientations of practicing teachers whom others would characterize as culturally responsive; (b) provides a model teacher candidates might adopt (beginning in teacher education and continuing throughout their professional careers) to support their own ongoing acquisition of new forms of cultural knowledge; and (c) supports development of skills necessary to become effective classroom teachers of diverse youth. In other words, drawing explicit attention to empathy in teacher education has at least two functions. First, empathy acts as an instructional mechanism that teacher educators might use to help teacher candidates *notice* patterns in their own beliefs,

values, and attitudes about race and cultural difference. Second, once modeled, practiced, and discussed during their professional preparation to teach, the process of applying empathy to guide one's professional decision-making becomes a critical tool teacher candidates may employ to expand their first-person knowledge of students' culture.

I write this article with white teacher candidates in mind. All teacher candidates, however, benefit from understanding the application of empathy as a tool to bolster their preparation to demonstrate evidence of CRP in their future teaching. An important premise of this article is that teacher candidates need empathy to better understand students, families, and communities, especially if they are preparing to teach in racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse school settings (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). This is certainly the case for teacher candidates entering the contemporary public school marketplace.

I begin this article with a brief discussion of CRP. Then, I turn my attention to defining and describing empathy. The construct of empathy receives far too little attention in

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teacher education for its advantages to improving how teachers flexibly respond to and communicate with youth across racial and cultural difference. This gap in the literature persists despite increased admonition that teachers working with youth in multicultural schooling contexts develop empathy (Carter, 2009; Dolby, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Marx & Pray, 2011; McAllinden, 2012; Tettegah, 2007; Tettegah & Anderson, 2007), and empirical evidence of empathy's utility for improving the quality of teachers' cross-cultural or cross-racial classroom interactions (Arghode, Yalvac, & Liew, 2013; Cooper, 2010; Feshbach & Feshbach, 2011; Goroshit & Hen, 2016; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Peck, Maude, & Brotherson, 2015; Stevens, 1967; Warren, 2013, 2014b, 2015b; Warren & Lessner, 2014). Much of this article is then spent articulating the relationship between teachers' classroom (inter)actions, dispositions, and the application of empathy delivered through the act and process of perspective taking.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) combines the rich body of research known widely as "culturally responsive teaching," most popularly attributed to the work of Geneva Gay (2010, 2013) and the highly influential empirical research of Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1994, 1995, 2014) "culturally relevant pedagogy." CRP literature offers elaborate empirical and theoretical constructions useful for reducing "opportunity gaps" (Carter & Welner, 2013; Chambers, 2009; Milner, 2012) or barriers to high achievement for an increasingly diverse public school student population. Yet, helping teacher candidates conceptualize and translate themes of this research into practice is a persistent challenge in teacher education (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012; Young, 2010). The application of empathy is theorized to directly respond to this gap in one's professional teacher preparation (see Dolby, 2012; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Peck et al., 2015). Indeed, the foundation of CRP, and contemporary elaborations, include cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990; Monroe & Obidah, 2004), cultural congruence (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005), "cultural solidarity" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 81), cultural connectedness (Irizarry, 2007), and, most recently, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). CRP is used in this article as an umbrella term. It is meant to represent an expansive body of conventional knowledge that reveals important considerations for building upon, appreciating, and sustaining students' cultural difference in one's teaching practice.

This work is essential for helping educators to recognize a set of outcomes or evidence indicative of effective teaching, not standardizing a set of teacher behaviors. Table 1 is an overview of specific outcomes that can be classified as *evidence of CRP*. Also, included in the table is a brief statement

about the significance of empathy to guide professional practices that might lead to evidence of CRP.

I chose to use the language of culturally *responsive* pedagogy versus any one of the other iterations of this concept to emphasize the importance that teacher candidates learn to develop habits or tendencies to behave in ways that appropriately and accurately respond to the needs of diverse youth. Teachers cannot control how students show up. Teachers can control, however, their (professional and personal) response to how students show up. The comprehensive body of CRP scholarship cited above establishes the imperative that teachers must, indeed, account for students' culture in their teaching orientations, habits, and tendencies. On the contrary, scholars continue to argue the significant difficulty of teachers, especially those early in their careers, to appropriately translate CRP theory to practice (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012; Warren & Talley, 2017; Young, 2010). Because CRP praxis will look different depending on any number of human variables in the local schooling context, teacher education cannot fully prescribe a standardized set of personal characteristics or physical behaviors that *all* teacher candidates must demonstrate to prove they are culturally responsive. Teacher educators must curate teacher preparation experiences or approaches that enable teacher candidates to acquire first-person knowledge of the young people and families they will serve in whatever school and community setting they enter post-graduation. This is where the application of empathy is of greatest consequence.

Education practitioners and multicultural education researchers agree that empathy is important for achieving evidence of CRP in their interactions with youth and families of color (Dolby, 2012; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Warren, 2015a, 2015b). Empathy is something human beings engage in ordinarily (Decety & Lamm, 2006). Teachers' conceptions of empathy in the professional teaching context do not always align with their general understanding of the concept, but it is a capacity they possess nonetheless. Hence, I am not arguing for teacher educators or teacher candidates to do something completely new or foreign. I am attempting to draw attention to, or make explicit, the benefits of empathy as a mechanism for *knowing* young people, their families, and communities more robustly. Moreover, I am not advocating a more empathetic teacher workforce. The utility of empathy as a professional tool of the teaching profession is significant for acquiring knowledge teacher candidates will need to make professional decisions that lead to evidence of CRP. While empathy is a mechanism for obtaining new perspectives on culture that align more closely with the experiences, realities, and perceptions of diverse students and families, teacher dispositions are the site of candidates' professional development where the application of empathy may be rehearsed. Before turning to an in-depth, focused discussion of teacher dispositions, I will briefly define and describe the conception of empathy I will reference throughout this article.

Table 1. Evidence of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

Reference	Indicators	Statement about the Significance of Empathy
Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2014)	Academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness (as <i>further</i> understood and defined by actors in the local school context). This research suggests that evidence of CRP is best discerned through student outcomes, but these outcomes are very clearly tied to how teachers choose to act on their professional, moral, and political commitments.	A teacher candidate's preparation to work with diverse youth includes cultivating teacher dispositions that lead to <i>evidence of CRP</i> in their future teaching. The application of empathy through perspective taking links knowledge of diverse youth and families to teachers' professional decision-making. Teacher dispositions make that decision-making visible. Perspective Taking activities in the professional teaching context might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projection/Anchoring and Adjusting • Reflection • Emotional Regularity • Information Extraction • Written and Oral Communication • Understanding the Community Context • Organized, Structured Time for Student Expression • Prior Knowledge (see Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012; Warren, 2014b)
Gay (2010)	Majority of classroom learning experiences are directly relevant to, and reflective of, students' home lives and cultural experiences outside of school.	
Gay (2013); Parsons (2005); Valenzuela (1999); Rychly and Graves (2012); Tosolt (2008, 2010)	Students believe that teachers care for them. This is a student's perception that the teacher values her or his personhood leading the teacher to behave in ways that make the student feel visible, heard, valued, and an important member of the classroom community.	
T. C. Howard (2010); Paris and Alim (2014, 2017)	Students' perceptions that their ethnic or racial identity, cultural pride, and heritage are sustained and regularly affirmed in the schooling environment and through interactions with adult school stakeholders.	

Note. "Evidence of CRP" is used throughout the article to signify the indicators or outcomes of one's teaching effectiveness with youth of color and other culturally diverse youth. Hence, when I use the language of teacher or teaching "effectiveness" in the article, I am referring to the capacity of teacher candidates to demonstrate trends in observable behaviors or *dispositions* that more often yield evidence of CRP. CRP = culturally responsive pedagogy.

Defining Empathy

Scholarly discourse on empathy maintains that this construct is best understood as both emotional (empathic concern) and cognitive (perspective taking) in nature (Batson et al., 1991; Davis, 2004; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Wispé, 1986). Davis (1994) characterizes *perspective taking* as "the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life," while *empathic concern* is "the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others" (p. 57). Perspective taking is required to establish empathic concern. Thus, perspective taking is the anchoring dimension of the application of empathy in social interaction. Also, Davis (1994) confirms that the "true nature" of empathy is manifest in "the *reactions* of an observer to the experiences of a target" (p. 221). The process of empathizing begins with an *observer*—the individual who observes a condition and is tasked with making a decision about how to respond to the perceived needs of the individual under duress. The application of empathy ends when the *target*—the individual on the receiving end of an empathetic response—confirms that the observer's actions effectively alleviate their personal distress.

The application of empathy in the professional teaching context is an iterative process that includes the acquisition of knowledge, and the subsequent use of that knowledge to

guide one's professional decision-making (Warren, 2014b). Empathy is the piece of the student-teacher interaction puzzle that connects what a teacher knows or thinks about students and families to what he or she actually *does* when negotiating appropriate responses to students' needs, or when the teacher is arranging learning experiences for students. It is difficult to imagine acting in ways that produce evidence of CRP without some mechanism that broadens a teacher's sociocultural knowledge of students. The application of empathy *via* perspective taking is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. A focus on the concept of perspective taking appropriately operationalizes the application of empathy by teachers. This is the vehicle for adopting the cultural points of view of diverse youth and families that lead to new knowledge that informs a teacher's professional decision-making in practice. This knowledge may be best understood by attending to the pattern in one's observable behaviors or teaching orientation(s).

Cultivating Teacher Dispositions in Teacher Education

Teacher dispositions, although a messy construct, are generally understood as trends or frequencies in (clusters of) observable teacher behaviors (Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp,

2007; Katz & Raths, 1985; Nelsen, 2015). These scholars place emphasis on cumulative teacher actions or orientations, rather than discrete, anomalous behaviors. One of the earliest and most respected conceptions of teacher dispositions characterize them as “summaries of act frequencies” or “trends in behavior” (Katz & Raths, 1985, p. 301). Dispositions should not be assumed to be disconnected, isolated teacher moves. Rather, they represent (a) visible *patterns* in behavior demonstrated by teachers as they are interacting with individual students, (b) their priorities with (certain groups of) youth, and (c) the habits of mind that drive other aspects of their professional decision-making. Dispositions are further determined by the social, cultural, and political context where the teaching is happening (Diez, 2007; Katz & Raths, 1985). In other words, trends in teacher behaviors are beholden to dimensions of the learning environment unique to the local school setting. Variables might include, for instance, the proportion of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, rates of parent engagement, access to adequate pedagogical resources, a school’s instructional priorities, and the frequency of student-teacher racial mismatch.

Villegas (2007) further defines dispositions as, “tendencies [that] individuals [will] act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs” (p. 373). “Tendency” is indicative of a “pattern of behavior” that likely predicts a teacher’s future actions. Beliefs stand out as especially important in her or his articulation of dispositions for its implications for a teacher’s tendencies to effectively respond to culturally diverse youth, consistently. Martin Haberman (1991) asserts that beliefs (i.e., what we think) and attitudes (i.e., what we feel) work synergistically to produce the values teachers are very likely to act upon. Thus, when considered in tandem, this triad shapes how teachers *choose* to complete various professional tasks, as further determined by their own moral commitments (Englehart et al., 2012; Schoffner, Sedberry, Alsup, & Johnson, 2014). For instance, the tendency of a teacher to ask about a student’s day, conduct “family business” (Warren & Lessner, 2014), or the teacher’s refusal to raise her or his voice when disciplining a student might each be considered a different teacher disposition. This trend in behavior is guided by the teacher’s own beliefs about the efficacy of the practice to humanize students. Moreover, the teacher’s attitudes about the importance of acknowledging individual students alongside her or his beliefs and personal values may lead the teacher to act in ways he or she thinks will establish the desired classroom climate.

Understanding dispositions requires a focus on a pattern of physical actions, not on the attributes or characteristics of those actions. Multiple people can take the same action, but the action may look, feel, or be experienced very differently by youth and families. The efficacy of specific trends in behavior may depend on a number of variables including the social context of that interaction and/or the social interaction

preference/style of the teacher with her or his students. My concern in this article is centered on the mechanism(s) teacher candidates have available to them in teacher education that they may utilize to increase her or his sensitivity to cultivate dispositions that lead to greater teaching effectiveness with culturally diverse youth. This sensitivity is representative of an acute knowledge of students’ culture; knowledge intended to help teacher candidates develop the necessary teaching orientations or dispositions that will lead them to make professional decisions that produce evidence of the CRP described in Table 1. As previously mentioned, teacher dispositions are considerably impacted by the substance of the teacher’s content and pedagogical knowledge, as well as knowledge of students and the sociocultural context where she or he is teaching (Diez, 2007; T. C. Howard & Milner, 2014). Without a mechanism for understanding culture from first-person perspectives of diverse students and families, teachers are left to reproduce and center norms of whiteness and other hegemonic cultural ways of being reinforced during their teacher preparation (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012; Sleeter, 2001, 2004). The application of empathy is presented here as one such mechanism.

Teacher Dispositions, Empathy, and CRP

Villegas and Lucas (2002b) insist that culturally responsive teachers have affirming “views” of race and cultural difference, are socioculturally conscious, “understand” how learners construct knowledge, and “know” about the lives of youth (p. 20). “View,” “understand,” and “know” are each a framework of interpretation necessary to enact CRP. One might think of them as the “cultural filters” that Gay (2013) mentions in her work. Teachers in Ladson-Billings’s (1994) *Dreamkeepers* were effective, in part, because they had affirming views of racial difference, understood the pathways to learning for the Black youth they taught, and these teachers maintained a robust knowledge of students and the local community context where they were teaching. Far less explicit in this work is an understanding of the specific lens or “cultural filter” they employ to ensure that what they knew and understood about their work aligned with the expectations and perspectives of the youth and families they served. Several scholars (Carter, 2009; G. Howard, 2006; T. C. Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010; Peck et al., 2015) have argued that effective teachers likely utilize empathy in their work, even if these teachers do not name empathy as a factor of their teaching.

Simply playing a popular song during a lesson is not evidence of a teacher’s cultural responsiveness. Teaching *through* students’ cultural filters implies that these cultural perspectives guide a teacher’s pedagogical orientations, or for the sake of this article, their dispositions. These cultural filters are the intellectual and ideological frames necessary to scaffold *how* teachers navigate classroom interactions with individual students, choose lesson examples, decorate the

classroom, deliver instruction, plan cultural excursions, and negotiate any number of other professional decisions. The “how” in this equation are trends in observable behaviors and tendencies or dispositions. They provide the observable unit(s) of analysis from which to notice or discern how well teachers adequately (and flexibly) *respond* or *react* to various student needs. The application of empathy is put forward as a tool to better align teachers’ responses and reactions to the needs of culturally diverse youth. Trends in a teacher’s observable behaviors demonstrate some evidence of their beliefs, attitudes, and values toward cultural difference, the students she or he is teaching, and these students’ home communities. It is difficult to reach any definitive conclusions about the quality of one’s teaching without observation of their trends in behavior. Again, I am not talking about specific, isolated behaviors during one classroom observation, but rather, I am referencing teaching orientations or tendencies, established over time during their interactions with diverse youth, useful for predicting future actions. This is what makes a focus on dispositions as a site of preparation for CRP increasingly important.

Indeed, the field recognizes the importance of preparing teacher candidates to cultivate dispositions necessary for preparing them to teach in increasingly diverse public schools (Amos, 2011; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2011; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Villegas, 2007). The application of empathy expands teacher candidates’ knowledge of students, families, and communities such that there are necessary shifts in their beliefs, attitudes, and values determining their teaching dispositions. These shifts may begin in teacher education, but professional development will be necessary over the course of their professional careers. This argument is rooted in empirical research recognizing empathy as beneficial to improving how teachers communicate and respond across racial and cultural difference (Barr, 2011; Black & Phillips, 1982; Cooper, 2010; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Marx & Pray, 2011; McAlinden, 2012; Peck et al., 2015; Warren, 2013, 2014b). Figure 1 is a conceptual framework of the application of empathy through perspective taking as the mechanism that mediates a teacher’s acquisition of new knowledge about students’ values, lived realities, and the sociocultural context where she or he is teaching.

Operationalizing the Application of Empathy Through Perspective Taking

Perspective taking has been found to help teachers (re)act differently to young people, and others in need, in ways that lead to more favorable (student) outcomes (Arghode, Yalvac, & Liew, 2013; Barr, 2011; Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012; Tettegah, 2007; Tettegah & Anderson, 2007). Referring to Figure 1 above, the application of empathy is a larger process that is centered on perspective taking. Perspective taking leads to new knowledge that teachers later leverage to

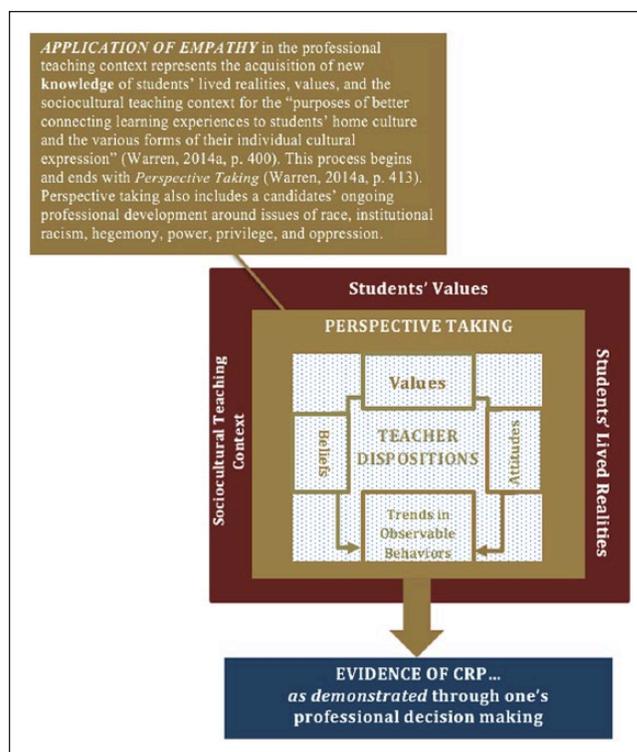


Figure 1. Empathy, dispositions, and evidence of CRP: A conceptual framework.

Note. CRP = culturally responsive pedagogy.

negotiate professional decisions that facilitate their teaching effectiveness. Gehlbach (2004) considers “social” perspective taking as a professional ability, and the motivation to employ that ability. Perspective taking is intended to broaden what one knows about how best to respond to students’ needs, and what decisions to make that will adequately meet those needs.

Education researchers emphasize the utility of perspective taking for helping teachers identify and employ various classroom strategies intended to raise the quality of student-teacher interactions, improve school culture, and bolster students’ academic and social outcomes (Barr, 2011; Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012; Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Wang, 2012; Warren, 2014b; Warren & Lessner, 2014). The capacity to engage in perspective taking enables teachers to actively acquire acute person-level knowledge of students (e.g., aspirations, values, affinities, beliefs, language, lived racialized experiences, etc.), build on relevant prior knowledge, and acquire a broader knowledge of the sociocultural context where he or she is teaching. In sum, perspective taking as an *act of knowing* represents more pragmatic attempts made by teachers to acquire new knowledge (i.e., discrete strategies and professional approaches enacted to develop or acquire a new understanding of youth and families), while perspective taking as a *process of knowing* denotes the intellectual exercise teachers engage in to negotiate *how* best to respond to

the new knowledge that they have acquired (i.e., intellectual mode of understanding).

Perspective Taking as a Process of Knowing

There are two primary dimensions of perspective taking (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997). From a social psychological standpoint, an interaction is initiated when an observer encounters a target in a precarious situation requiring the observer's intervention. *Imagine self* (IS) is when an observer responds to a target's situation or condition based on personal experience/preference, or a vision/construction of the observer's own self in the target's shoes. On the contrary, *imagine other* (IO) is when an observer responds to a target's situation based on knowledge of the target's personal experience/preference in the moment, if the target were in a position to respond to their own circumstance. In other words, the IS dimension of perspective taking is attempting to (re)act as "yourself" in someone else's situation. On the contrary, the IO dimension of perspective taking is attempting to react as the "someone" in someone else's situation. This dimension of perspective taking, thus, leads the observer to respond in a way the target would respond to her or his circumstance if this individual had the power or wherewithal to respond in her or his own favor.

Perspective taking as a process of knowing is influenced by prior experiential knowledge of factors shaping the observation condition, previous interaction(s) with the target, and/or exposure to texts, worlds, or spaces that in some way shape how the target is experiencing a circumstance (Decety & Lamm, 2006). Chambers and Davis (2012) found that perspective taking is often related to the "ease with which the observer can imagine themselves in the target's position" (p. 172). Consequently, too frequently, an observer will apply empathy to interactions with a target by imagining how they would act if they were the target (e.g., IS dimension of perspective taking), versus responding or reacting in the way that the target would *if* the target had the power/resources/skill to act on his or her own behalf (e.g., IO dimension of perspective taking). The IO form of perspective taking is most akin to authentic empathy and altruism (Batson, 2009; Batson et al., 1991).

Consider a White teacher who teaches at the high school he or she attended, for example. The teacher enacting an IS version of perspective taking might initially respond or react to a student of color's circumstance (e.g., poor academic performance in an advanced placement [AP] math course) with advice based primarily on the teacher's own prior experience taking that course when he or she was in high school. The teacher might insist that much of the blame for the student's poor performance should be placed on the student with reference to what the student has or has not done to achieve a more favorable academic outcome. Such a response does not consider the structural, cultural, ideological, or institutional barriers that this student may be encountering. Similar to

Jones and Nisbett's (1971) actor-observer thesis and Warren's (2014a) "perspective divergence" concept, the teacher in this scenario may identify internal variables such as the student's motivation and aptitude for math to explain the student's academic underachievement. On the contrary, the student may ascribe her or his poor academic performance to external variables outside of their control, such as the warmth of the teacher and access to the necessary academic supports and resources.

The IS form of perspective taking does not account for the impact of the social context, culturally incongruent or assaultive instructional delivery formats, cultural differences in learning preferences, or the lived (outside of school) reality of the student in question. This form of perspective taking does not account for students' own cultural perspectives, and, therefore, significantly reduces the likelihood that the teacher will (re)act in ways that produce evidence of CRP. Moreover, the IS version of perspective taking is selfish and egocentric. This is not expedient for reversing the student's future academic performance because such a response fails to comprehend the root of the problem from the student's actual first-person point of view.

Alternatively, the IO form of perspective taking acknowledges the range of external social and cultural variables that may be determining the student's academic performance. The teacher engaged in the IO form of perspective taking more often first looks at her or his own failures in the initial response to the academic interaction with the student, and the role of the institution for contributing to the student's academic vulnerability. This teacher also aims to discern a response route that will yield the most favorable (future) outcome for the student, without further blaming the student or creating additional barriers to her or his capacity to be academically successful. The teacher does what is necessary, based on knowledge of the ecology of variables mediating the way students of color may be experiencing school, regardless of the "personal or professional adaptations" required for such actions (Warren, 2013, p. 195). Furthermore, the teacher applying empathy through an IO form of perspective taking is likely willing to inconvenience her or himself to try multiple options in hopes of adequately responding to the student's dilemma. The teacher will utilize what she or he thinks they know to drive how they will choose to act in this circumstance. What they come to learn about a student through trial and error is the most important aspect of distinguishing what works for improving this individual student's academic performance—versus other students in the class who may share this student's race, gender, or socioeconomic class identity.

Teacher candidates come to the teacher preparation classroom with their own subjective points of view, prejudices, biases, and personal experiences, all of which inform their professional decision-making or orientations to teaching in spaces where he or she may (or may not) one day be the racial minority. The application of empathy through the practice of perspective taking helps them to critically observe

subtle propensities to act in ways that undermine their earnest good intentions to improve learning outcomes for culturally diverse youth. Reasoning with that knowledge via the IO dimension of perspective taking increases the likelihood teacher candidates will develop the orientations necessary to produce evidence of CRP in their future teaching.

Likewise, candidates preparing to enact CRP must rehearse differentiating their own thoughts, perspectives, and feelings about a situation from that of their (potential) students, when they are choosing how to respond. Consider Korthagen's (2004) "holistic" approach to teacher education. He contends, and I agree, that there is no single route that ensures candidates become "good teachers." Much of their capacity to become a "good" teacher is wrapped up in the teacher candidate's capacity to acquire accurate knowledge of students, and the local sociocultural context where he or she is teaching, and then to respond appropriately to students' needs based on that knowledge. Teacher education might not provide candidates all the pertinent knowledge they need (e.g., knowledge of institutional racism, interlocking forms of oppression, issues of power and privilege across academic content areas, etc.), but teacher educators can model use of mechanisms such as perspective taking to engage teacher candidates in processes that broaden their professional understandings.

Perspective Taking as an Act of Knowing

There are numerous strategies for engaging in perspective taking as an act of knowing. Gehlbach and Brinkworth (2012) found that perspective taking strategies either helped their participants "make inferences from available information" or "solicit more information" altogether (p. 10). Perspective taking as an act of knowing is simply about information gathering that can be used to drive subsequent professional decision-making (Warren, 2014b). If teachers are motivated to use perspective taking as a means to get to know their students (Gehlbach et al., 2012), this act of knowing translates pragmatically into any number of routine instructional or interactional habits that allow teachers to enter the life worlds of their students (see the right side of Table 1). Some strategies include a teacher's critical reflection on the background knowledge of students based on prior interactions with individuals who share the racial or ethnic background of students or *information extraction*—making time to ask students what they are thinking or how they are feeling (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012). Information extraction showed up in a practice Warren and Lessner (2014) refer to as "family business." Correspondingly, perspective taking also happens most readily through written and oral communication in the form of student journaling, for example, organized classroom meetings similar to "morning meetings" or advisories, and entrenched understanding of the community context where one is teaching.

Each act of knowing, which might otherwise be described as an act of perspective taking, requires that the

teacher strategically maneuver new information gained about students. Deliberation of student feedback is another form of perspective taking (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012; Warren, 2014b, p. 413). This act of knowing blends the cognitive and affective processes characteristic of the multidimensionality of empathy's expression to guide a teacher's physical response. It is in a young person's response to decisions a teacher makes, and a teacher's subsequent actions based on knowledge of students' feedback, that one can discern observable patterns in a teacher's behaviors with individual students or groups of students. Moreover, the act of perspective taking promotes a "pedagogy of listening" (Low & Sonntag, 2013), which includes gaining access to youths' "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). For instance, engaging in the physical act of home visits could be invaluable to developing teacher candidates' dispositions. After spending several hours sitting with families in the places where the proportion of power and authority is in the family's favor, teacher candidates are very likely to have a different, or much better informed, viewpoint of family values, students' lived realities, and the sociocultural context where students are receiving substantial racial socialization. Subsequently, such an activity will very likely change the way teacher candidates *see* their work, and, thusly, potentially change the way they *do* their work.

The act and process of knowing facilitated by perspective taking is incomplete without using that knowledge in some way to (re)orient one's professional decision-making. The application of empathy as described in Figure 1 centers on the acquisition of new knowledge or expanding existing knowledge. This is necessary to better position teachers to make decisions in practice that facilitate students' academic success, sociopolitical awareness, and cultural competence. It is pointless to consider preparing teacher candidates to demonstrate evidence of CRP in their future teaching without providing them a mechanism to challenge (or at least confront) what they believe they know about race and culture, their attitudes about cultural diversity, and the values they espouse with reference to education (in)equity. I am not putting empathy, or perspective taking, more specifically, forward as some sort of magic bullet. On the contrary, evidence of its application in the practice of teachers identified to be effective with youth of color (Warren, 2013; Warren & Lessner, 2014) suggests that the application of empathy holds tremendous possibility for preparing teachers for CRP. Before moving to my final recommendations, it is apropos to foreground what might be some potential threats to the application of empathy in the professional teaching context.

Cautions for the Application of Empathy

The IS form of perspective taking underscores the "risks of empathy" in multicultural education (Boler, 1997), especially for those aiming to demonstrate evidence of CRP (Ullman & Hecsh, 2011). Risks include the lowering of

expectations for youth of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). These risks are also reinforced by the potential failure of an observer or “reader” (Boler, 1997) to be attentive to the ways that hegemonic power structures, White supremacy, and the range of other oppressive social hierarchies mediate the marginalization that the application of empathy is supposed to alleviate. Teacher educators have to work to ensure candidates are aware of the ways that one’s privilege shows up in their (future) professional decision-making. This is important for avoiding the tendency for cultural immersion experiences during a candidate’s professional preparation, for example, to become voyeuristic in nature. Prolonged, authentic interactions with community stakeholders strategically guided by faculty who have a *demonstrated* commitment to antiracist community partnership are key to avoid the aforementioned pitfalls. Moreover, the IS mode of perspective taking may also perpetuate *false empathy* (Delgado, 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). False empathy is thinking of one’s self as more empathetic than can actually be confirmed by the intended beneficiary of empathy’s application (Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). It undermines the observer’s efforts to reduce the target’s distress, and likely reproduces the circumstances that created the target’s oppression in the first place. Teacher candidates must be reminded of the hidden legacy of racism on schooling, and the ways that their good intentions to be empathetic can easily translate into false empathy.

Recommendations

I have attempted to show both how and why the application of empathy—as understood through the act and process of knowing facilitated by perspective taking—is an important aspect of teacher candidates’ professional preparation to demonstrate evidence of CRP, as described in Table 1. Empathy connects the personhood of teacher candidates, which includes their worldview and beliefs, values, and attitudes regarding race and cultural difference, for example, to the humanity and lived realities of diverse students and families. I argue that preparing for culturally responsive pedagogy means giving much more attention to cultivating the appropriate dispositions. Dispositions are the site of teacher candidates’ professional development where empathy might be of greatest support for enabling their teaching effectiveness with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students. While the application of empathy is a broader process that encompasses both affective and intellectual dimensions to its expression in social interactions, I have focused on the merits of perspective taking explicitly. I did this to name a specific mechanism to be modeled for teacher candidates, that they might later adopt in their future teaching practice to support acquisition of first-person knowledge of students’ culture (or “cultural filters”; see Gay, 2013). This is knowledge needed to adequately develop teaching tendencies, described throughout this article as dispositions, that assist them in realizing the vision of CRP in their future teaching practice.

In this section, I make recommendations for how to engage teacher candidates in perspective taking as they participate in three specific teacher education experiences. Keeping in mind that teacher education is a time to help candidates imagine and practice effective teaching (Diez, 2007), and that it is only the beginning of a career-long pursuit to becoming an effective teacher of culturally diverse youth (McAllister & Irvine, 2000), my recommendations are intended to be transferable. That is, these teacher preparation experiences—all of which are already present in many teacher education programs—are discussed in a way intended to support teacher educators’ abilities to explicitly model perspective taking for teacher candidates and invite their participation. By doing so, teacher candidates are better positioned to adopt these same practices, and continue using them once they enter the field as an inservice teacher. The discussion of these recommendations center on helping teacher candidates acquire new “views,” “know[ledge],” and “understanding” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) of racial and cultural difference. This is increasingly important considering that (a) U.S. public schools are becoming more and more multicultural, (b) teacher education programs are overwhelmingly White and female, and (c) teacher education programs tend to center whiteness and White cultural norms (Sleeter, 2001). Each of the experiences I mention in this section build on and complement the others. They are not written in a particular order. Instead, they should be understood as ongoing and iterative over the life of a candidate’s teacher preparation.

- a. Field Experiences
- b. Critical Classroom Discourse
- c. Engaging with Literature that Centers Race and Equity *Across* the Teacher Education Curriculum

Finally, each of these teacher preparation experiences should be paired with a candidate’s critical self-reflection. Every class meeting, regardless of the subject content area, is an opportunity for *reflective teaching*. Zeichner and Liston (1996) argue that teachers must not only think critically about the act of teaching (i.e., lesson plans, assessments, etc.), but they must also scrutinize the “goals and values that guide his or her work,” and the “[social, political, historical] context in which he or she teaches” (p. 1). It is not enough to simply reflect on the mechanics of instruction from an *ahistorical*, *apolitical*, or *acultural* point of view. Teacher educators must be deliberate about carving out ample space for candidates to explore and reconcile existing incongruities between the *practice of effective teaching* (i.e., making evidence-based pedagogical decisions, using knowledge of the sociocultural context to negotiate humanizing student-teacher interactions, and establishing learning environments that minimize opportunity gaps¹) and their own personal beliefs, skills, values, and habits. Asking candidates to journal, participate in one-on-one conferences with the course

instructor, or complete surveys and interviews that enable them to make connections between the three aforementioned teacher preparation experiences and their own conceptions of race—cultivated over their lifetime—are useful reflection exercises. Teacher reflection is an essential aspect of the perspective taking process when participating in field experiences, critical classroom discourse, as well as when candidates are invited to engage with literature that centers race and justice (vs. diversity and inclusion).

Field Experiences

Field experiences buttress classroom learning to support disposition development for work with culturally diverse youth in substantive ways (Bercaw, Summers, Colby, & Payne, 2012; Johnson, 2002; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). The significance of field experiences as perspective taking lie in the arrangement of these experiences to inaugurate shifts in a teacher's beliefs, values, and attitudes about race and cultural difference. To do this requires providing candidates field experiences where they are the racial minority, where they are stripped of authority and invited into the social worlds of individuals from cultural communities different from their own. Ball State University's "Schools Within the Context of Community" program is an example of the type of field-based experience that allows teacher candidates to participate in perspective taking. It is an entrenched immersion in the school community (Zygmunt & Clark, 2016). Similar to the practicing classroom teachers in the McAllister and Irvine (2002) study, families invite preservice teachers to participate in various local community activities, which include attending church/places of worship, family gatherings, and other community events. Proponents of community-based field experiences demonstrate the importance of becoming embedded in a school community as a necessary first step to becoming effective teachers for youth from that community (Green, 2015; Horsford & Sampson, 2014; Murrell, 2001, 2002). Substantive engagement with(in) the local school community cannot be understated.

Participating in field experiences is perspective taking as an act of knowing, but the ongoing reflection on one's own beliefs, values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills before, during, and after participation represents perspective taking as a process of knowing. Faculty must prepare candidates to enter these spaces as curious and humble learners, and not consumers of culture there to reappropriate or refashion cultural knowledge. They do this by challenging teacher candidates to surrender the notion that they are chief knowledge producers in interactions with youth and families. Rather, teacher educators should help candidates to embrace alternative ways of thinking and seeing the world by pointing out lingering contradictions and conflicts between what they think they know, and what this experience may be revealing to them (about themselves). In other words, a philosophical assumption of work with diverse youth and families should

be that knowledge is reflexive, and that youth and families have as much knowledge to share as they have to receive.

The next step is ongoing collaboration with other teacher candidates, instructors, and practitioners in local schools to further facilitate perspective taking as a process of knowing. This collaboration allows for the practice of co-constructing new knowledge *with* youth and families, rather than just about them. Moreover, this collaboration primes candidates for the development of beliefs that assist them in learning to be vulnerable and deferential when interacting with diverse youth and families (Diez, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a). This humility includes recognizing and refusing to assert privilege associated with their own academic pedigree, race, or class identities. Last, discrepancies between classroom learning about dispositions and practice are most crystallized in the field as candidates see their mentor/cooperating teachers (and other school community stakeholders) in action. Then, candidates need time to *practice* working with students in this community with whom they may initially have little cultural overlap. By doing so, teacher educators and others involved in the candidate's professional preparation to teach are invited to support the candidate in noticing her or his orientation to teaching diverse students.

Critical Classroom Discourse

Field experiences must be complemented by frequent opportunities for critical dialogue with faculty and peers. Attention to dispositions—those observed in the field or elsewhere and the candidate's own behavioral tendencies when working with youth and families—offers the empirical data points that teacher candidates need to do the introspective work of *noticing* their own beliefs, skills, attitudes, values, and habits. Trends in observable teacher behaviors provide the examples necessary to anchor direct conversations about the conditions that produce (or inhibit) evidence of CRP. For example, these dialogues are essential for making explicit reference to how practicing teachers connect their knowledge of students to professional decisions that demonstrate enactment of CRP. Moreover, cross-cultural and cross-racial dialogues are especially important for helping candidates practice perspective taking (Kohli, 2009, 2012; Sleeter, 2004). Candidates must explicate how their own personal experience and individual points of view improve or impede their teaching effectiveness with students who may be different from them, despite whatever good intentions might have informed their professional decision-making (Sheets, 2007).

The dialogue itself is perspective taking as an act of knowing, while hearing from and thoughtfully engaging with dissimilar viewpoints represents perspective taking as a process of knowing. Milner (2003) insists that teacher candidates explicitly engage in "race reflections." These are classroom discourses that enable candidates to dialogue about the semiotics of race for shaping their future practice. He advances a tool for reflective race dialogues that helps to

Table 2. Research by Content Area That Index Themes of Race and Equity.

Math education	Language, literacy, and English education	Science education	Social studies and history education
Danny Martin (2000, 2013)	Django Paris (2011)	Angela Calabrese Barton (2001)	Tyrone Howard (2001)
Ebony McGee (2013)	Valerie Kinloch (2010)	Eileen Parsons (2008)	LaGarrett King (2016)
Gholson, Bullock, and Alexander (2012)	Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (2013, 2015)	Jomo Mutegi (2011)	Ashley N. Woodson (2015a, 2015b)
Dominguez (2016)		Mary Atwater (2012)	

Note. This is not an exhaustive list in each content area, but these lists represent impactful, contemporary scholarship in core content areas.

disrupt the “whiteness of good intentions” (Warren, 2015a, p. 595). Cultivating dispositions that produce evidence of CRP is likely not done without explicit reference to the interactions of race with the range of other oppressive social identity hierarchies (e.g., class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability). More specifically, candidates need to engage in explicit discourse centered on the teaching orientations or dispositions that marginalize certain identities and simultaneously privilege other social identities. Discomfort is a central aspect of these discussions, so teacher educators should not avoid it. Instances of divisiveness, hate, injustice, and exclusion have steadily been on the rise in the United States despite many decades of social movements aimed at achieving justice for the most marginalized of U.S. citizens. These discussions must acknowledge the persistence of racial injustice, for example, and its relevance to determining the type of teacher behaviors most advantageous for realizing evidence of CRP in the way one chooses to respond or react to diverse youth and families.

Literature that Centers Race and Equity Across the Teacher Education Curriculum

Exposure to texts written about racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse people by scholars of color and indigenous scholars represent an urgent curricular consideration in teacher education. Scholars agree that access to critical theoretical frameworks and language should not be limited to one course in a teacher preparation program (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b), but rather this learning should cut across all courses in a teacher preparation program. This is an important example of perspective taking as an act of knowing. Instead of spending an exorbitant amount of time attempting to determine the root causes of rotten attitudes and perspectives about race, teacher preparation should help teacher candidates to recognize, identify, and examine specific examples of oppressive schooling structures, the result of racial hierarchies (Sleeter, 2004). Faculty must make the counterstories, testimonies, and histories of oppressed people accessible to teacher candidates in every course, such that these future teachers have space to wrestle with their own beliefs and attitudes about racial inequality, and then to make some decisions about how they need to adjust moving forward. This is

perspective taking as a process of knowing. Introduction to this type of literature across all content areas, such as those examples provided in Table 2, nurtures intellectual points of view that prepare candidates to *actively* see racism.

To that end, one difficulty that emerges tends to be the lack of expertise about issues of race and culture amongst the faculty teaching content area methods courses. This lack of expertise can in many cases underscore a teacher educator’s reluctance to broach topics of race in her or his course(s). A starting point includes the teacher educator’s own learning from colleagues in her or his subject area. Reading other important texts that offer counternarratives on the education of people of color and indigenous people in the United States *with* teacher candidates is perspective taking both as an act and process of knowing as well. Works such as Adams’s (1995) *Education for Extinction*, Anderson’s (1988) *Education of Blacks in the South*, Delpit’s (1995) *Other People’s Children*, and Valenzuela’s (1999) *Subtractive Schooling*, among many others, should be considered essential reading in teacher education. Exposure to these works provides candidates important perspectives and knowledge about working with youth of color that, with time, promise to influence the beliefs, values, and attitudes that determine their teaching dispositions. Undoubtedly, this practice may lead candidates to over-generalize about youth, families, and communities of color. On the contrary, doing this work allows teacher educators to strategically work with candidates to contemplate how and why this literature was written, and why this literature is relevant to expanding their capacity to cultivate dispositions necessary to enact CRP. These readings help to make candidates (and their instructors) more critical of the meanings ascribed to race, White supremacy, anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and anti-indigeneity in their future teaching practice.

Conclusion

Our current teacher education practices fail to make explicit mention of the substantial possibilities of empathy for strengthening a candidate’s capacity to act in ways that will produce evidence of CRP in their future teaching. This is due, in part, to the dearth of empirical research in the field of education that emphasizes how teachers might apply empathy—or engage in

the act and process of knowing vis-à-vis perspective taking—to guide their observable teacher behaviors, tendencies, or orientations to teaching (i.e., teaching dispositions). Several noted scholars in multicultural education make peripheral mentions to empathy in discussions of how to more effectively communicate with, and respond to, diverse youth across racial and cultural difference (G. Howard, 2006; T. C. Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010). Others have done some theorizing about the relevance of empathy to teaching more generally, and offered considerations for its application in practice (Arghode et al., 2013; Carter, 2009; Cooper, 2010; Marx & Pray, 2011; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Tettegah & Anderson, 2007). Still, this literature does not go far enough for explicating how empathy might be introduced in teacher education with the explicit aim of improving teacher candidate's development of dispositions that will strengthen the likelihood they will be(come) effective teachers of culturally diverse youth.

While I've written this article with White preservice teachers in mind, the application of empathy for preparing to demonstrate CRP in one's practice is applicable to all teacher candidates. I am less convinced one can truly *become* culturally responsive. A more appropriate aim in teacher education may be helping teacher candidates learn to identify pedagogical approaches necessary to meaningfully account for, extend, and sustain students' culture. Hence, my focus in this article is about preparation to demonstrate evidence of CRP. I concede that the task(s) associated with sufficiently maneuvering the many social variables *in the local schooling context* that mediate CRP is enormous, almost "herculean" (Young, 2010). My broader contention is that teacher educators should focus much less on cultural responsiveness as an identity marker to be achieved, and foreground preparing teacher candidates to cultivate teaching orientations and habits centered on *responding flexibly* to diverse students moment-by-moment. The aim here is that teacher candidates develop dispositions that more often produce favorable student outcomes with culturally diverse youth (e.g., students who agree that their teacher cares about them, demonstrate evidence of high academic achievement, are culturally competent, and sociopolitically aware). Preparation for CRP is impeded if there is not a mechanism teacher candidates rely on to acquire and activate culturally congruent forms of knowledge imperative for guiding their interactions with diverse youth. The application of empathy through perspective taking is put forward here as one such mechanism.

To be clear, none of what I have discussed in this article is possible without the firm commitment of teacher education programs to acknowledge, and then work to actively decenter, whiteness. In other words, empathy is not and should not be used as an exercise of learning to "feel" for or with youth of color. This can too easily devolve into a "parking lot of emotionality" (Patel, 2016, p. 83) and White fragility. When empathy becomes central to teachers' preparation for CRP, candidates quickly learn that there is no such thing as "best practices" or that one size fits all (Sleeter & Cornleth, 2011).

At minimum, candidates should leave their teacher preparation program acknowledging that race and racism matter to their future teaching effectiveness (Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). Teacher candidates should also learn not to make what they do *about them*. Every child needs something different, which puts demands on the teacher to make the necessary pedagogic adjustments, and *not* the other way around.

Teacher education can prepare candidates with any number of specific dispositions, but that does not mean that each candidate will be effective in the diverse teaching contexts where they may find their first jobs (Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010; Sheets, 2007). My call is for teacher educators to assist teacher candidates in recognizing and acknowledging their own subjective social location in reference to youth and communities through perspective taking, both as a process and act of knowing. This, in turn, helps candidates to acquire the cultural points of view that influence the beliefs, values, and attitudes that underscore trends in their observable behavior. Not only is the application of empathy about acquiring knowledge of youth, but it facilitates a knowledge of self. Although understudied and undertheorized in teacher education, I am confident the application of empathy is an important way forward.

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Note

1. Opportunity gaps are any factors of a learning environment that pose threats to students' capacity to perform at their optimal achievement level (Carter & Welner, 2013). See chapter 1 of Warren (2017) for explicit discussion of classroom-level and institutional-level opportunity gaps.

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