Cultivating Racial and Linguistic Diversity in Literacy Teacher Education

Teachers Like Me

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Chapter 1

Being The "Only One"
The Importance of Teacher Diversityfor Literacy and English Education

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BEING THE "ONLY ONE"

The Importance of Teacher Diversity for Literacy and English Education

"How can I teach reading when I can't even pronounce the words right?" It was Angela's question that illuminated my interest in exploring this issue—the experiences of racially and linguistically marginalized students in teacher preparation programs. Angela was a student in an undergraduate literacy methods class I instructed, and she expressed this concern to me after a session on phonics instruction. She identified strongly and proudly as a bilingual Spanish and English speaker of Costa Rican and Guatemalan heritage. Yet she was embarrassed to ask her question in front of her classmates, who were predominantly White, English-monolingual females. She was worried about whether she could teach reading when she was not fully confident in her own use and pronunciation of the English language. She shared that she felt that her accent might serve as an obstacle in her ability to effectively foster the literacy development of her future students. In asking her question, she articulated for me many of the insecurities that I too had felt and experienced as a preservice teacher in a predominantly White, English-monolingual teacher education program. As a speaker of African American Language[1] (see Green, 2002; Smitherman, 1977, 1999, 2006), I questioned my ability to teach English language arts to students when I was "non-native" to its standard. My family members would often tease me whenever they heard a "What she BE talkin' 'bout?" or "I ain't got no money" coming out of my mouth, and they would question, "How you gon' teach English talkin' like that?" Becoming a teacher, I internalized the understanding that I was to make deliberate language choices and decisions based on specific time-place constructs. In other words, African American Language (AAL) was relegated to my home and social contexts, and an academic English, or what was deemed a more "standard" form of English, was required in my role as a secondary English teacher. In order to be an effective educator, I thought I needed to mark clear lines between these

different worlds. I internalized a belief that speaking African American Language somehow diminished my intellectual and teaching ability as well as my authority as an English teacher.

Angela and I both experienced tensions between our racial and linguistic identities and our understandings of what it meant to become, represent, and interact as teachers as a result of our participation in a mainstream teacher education context. Our shared experiences suggested that other Black and Latina preservice teachers might also feel such tensions. Consequently, I wondered about other Black and Latina students in this predominantly female, White, English–monolingual literacy methods classes as they prepared to become teachers. In particular, I began to critically consider the impact of one's racial and linguistic background on one's construction of a teacher identity and visions of what constitutes a teacher.

Stories like mine and like Angela's were not in isolation. That same year, I met Natasha and Latoya; both identified as Black women who were also speakers of AAL. Both were women of color pursuing teacher education in a predominantly White institution. Natasha was also a student in that undergraduate literacy methods course with Angela. From my earliest impressions, Natasha exhibited a strong sense of self. She exuded a high level of confidence, and she made it clear to me, and others, that her life was driven by purpose. Natasha was very involved in student organizations on campus and worked as a resident assistant. Natasha was from a middle-class African American family. Both of her parents were college-educated, working professionals. Her mother worked as an elementary school teacher, and her father was the director of a non-profit youth organization. Natasha often talked about the importance of education in her family and in her community. I stayed in touch with Natasha throughout her college experience, maintaining communication with her even while she completed a semester "abroad" at a historically Black college in the southern region of the United States. Natasha decided to participate in this academic exchange because she wanted to have a different experience from the one she was having at her home institution. Natasha was a human development major. She completed her student teaching semester in a second grade classroom and planned to teach at the elementary level.

Natasha introduced me to Latoya. They were both resident assistants at the university. Both of Latoya's parents were alumni of the university and now university employees, providing her with a tuition remission benefit. Latoya began her undergraduate career undecided on a major. Her mother told her to pursue a major that she would really enjoy. She shared that she liked working with kids and also wanted to do some type of community and social activism. She eventually decided on education. Latoya was a secondary education and history major. She completed her student teaching semester in both a 9th grade history class and in a 10th grade sheltered English immersion classroom. She planned to teach at the high school level. Both Natasha and Latoya demonstrated and articulated to me a critical consciousness of what it meant to be Black women who had proud

affiliations to African American Language in a space where they were often the "only one." Like Natasha, Latoya, and Angela, I too navigated the terrains of a predominantly White, traditional teacher education program where I was constantly questioning the weight of my own experiences in comparison to the majority of students around me. And as a Black woman who proudly speaks African American Language, I was able to engage with these women in particular ways because of our shared cultural and linguistic heritages.

Our stories anchor the content of this book. It is through these individual yet collective stories that I examine and question how students of color experience teacher education and "becoming teachers" when their racial and linguistic identities are marginalized, undermined, and silenced in the process. On the deepest level, this resolve stems from my own experiences as a student of color learning mainstream American English while simultaneously maintaining strong affiliations to my home and familial language. I do not have memories of teachers correcting my use of African American Language because somehow I knew how to protect it from their red pens. In school, I learned mainstream American English, and I excelled in all of my English language arts lessons, earning high marks on sentence diagramming exercises and perfect scores on spelling and vocabulary tests. But I also went to school to play hand games and jump rope with my friends on the playground, where we'd sing, "Li'l Sally Walker was walkin' down the street. She didn't know what to do soooo she jumped in fron' of me. She say gon girl, gon girl, shake yo' thang to me!" I could (and knew how to) negotiate use of my linguistic repertoire within and immediately outside the walls of school; both AAL and mainstream American English had a valid, legitimized place in my life.

My awareness of these linguistic negotiations did not happen until I was a teacher education student in a predominantly White, English-monolingual English teacher preparation program. Becoming a teacher of English meant that I would be responsible for ensuring my students were fluent in written and oral forms of mainstream American English. How could I teach English when I was non-native to mainstream American English? Mainstream American English, or academic English, is not my home language. I learned to be proficient in "standard" language varieties, but now, could I teach them successfully and effectively? Moreover, did I have a right to? I entered into the teaching profession constantly worrying that somehow I would be "found out" and discovered to be a fake—someone who did not possess an outward ease with her ability to communicate using mainstream American English in writing and in oral forms. Now I would be responsible for the English language learning of others.

Fast-forward several years to my work as an English and literacy teacher educator of color in a similar predominantly White, English-monolingual teacher education context. Each year, I make the following announcement to students in my English methods class during our first session together: "I am my language. I am a speaker of African American Language. I am a proud speaker of African American Language." As an African American female teacher educator who identifies as a

speaker of a language variety viewed as inferior to mainstream American English, or academic English,[2] I let my predominantly White, English–monolingual pre-service teachers know, immediately, that I take a stance toward linguistic diversity and for representation of multiple voices and languages inside and outside the English language arts classroom. I explain that a "standard" English is arbitrarily determined by societal norms, prejudices, attitudes, and expectations and often decided upon by the social group(s) in power. I say that it is our job to value and validate the home languages our students bring into school, while adding to their linguistic repertoires. I declare that I am not in the business of "fixing" or "correcting" students' languages but that I support them in learning to translate across languages and contexts and that it is my hope that by the end of our time together, they too will see how misguided and detrimental a monolingual, monocultural approach to English language learning can be for all students.

As a teacher educator who works with both preservice and inservice teachers, I consider it my responsibility to address the tacit ideologies that persist around linguistic and cultural differences teachers bring to the classroom experience and to help them to be confident, effective teachers for all students. Teaching is more than just methods and strategies; it is also very much about the mind-set one brings to the profession. It is about the preconceived ideas an individual holds about his or her students, their families, and their communities. I consider it my duty to remind teachers that our task must be to support the academic achievement of all students while simultaneously capitalizing on and validating their cultural and linguistic identities. No longer can we—teachers and teacher educators, specifically—devalue or ignore students' multiple identities. In fact, we have already lost too many students to cultural and linguistic terrorism (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999), where our words and practices have insisted that students repudiate who they are in order to become successful in schools and in other mainstream, or dominant, contexts. In the process, we not only devalue the language of much of the population, but we reinforce the notion that the language of the dominant few sits at the top of the hierarchy of what counts as linguistically relevant.

Here in this space, I remain concerned with the numerous encounters with students of color who, like me, retreat from pursuing literacy or English teaching because they feel their racial and/or linguistic background makes them inadequate to be effective teachers. Fears of inadequacy and insufficiency are significant to critique in larger narratives about the preparation and ambivalences of many teachers of color. The limited presence of teachers of color is well documented, and many education scholars have examined reasons why fewer students of color enter into or retreat from teaching and teacher education (see Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Dillard, 1994; Guyton, Saxton, & Wesche, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004). On a more local level, I regularly see evidence of the dominance of White teachers in school districts that surround me. For example, I received an email announcement celebrating 31 teachers, one for each day of the month for our city school district. When I looked at the calendar

of profiled faces, I did not see a single teacher of color. I did not see the same racial and ethnic diversities represented in these teacher profiles as I generally do in the district's media representations of their student population—representations that highlight, predominantly, students of color. This not only saddens me, but it is deeply problematic. In addition, the academic expectations for students, particularly students of color, in districts such as these are notoriously low. I am the mother of a school-age African American boy who should attend this school district, but instead, I chose alternative options for him, including homeschooling, because of the systemic academic failure that has persisted in this district for years without any signs of deliberate actions toward real change. My commitment as an English and literacy teacher educator is to work toward preparing teachers who can be a part of that change. Yet I am preparing mostly White, monolingual teachers. I firmly believe that part of the change has to include diversifying the teacher force and cultivating teachers who bring rich racial, cultural, and linguistic histories to the field of teaching.

Teaching for Diversity in Literacy and English Education

The majority of teachers in classrooms today are White, middle class, female, and English monolingual. The majority of students in teacher preparation programs are White, middle class, female, and English monolingual. This is not breaking news. While racial and linguistic differences between teachers and students are not newly reported phenomena, the effects of these differences on the educational outcomes for today's P–12 student population are of grave concern. As Sleeter and Milner (2011) argue, "who teachers are in terms of their cultural, gendered, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic background is an important issue because research suggests that an overwhelming white teaching force cannot meet the needs of increasingly diverse P-12 students" (p. 81). One of the most serious implications of the racial and linguistic divide among prospective teachers and today's P–12 student population is that many White, middle-class preservice teachers understand linguistic diversity as a deficit (Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006) and view racial and linguistic differences as other people's issues. Research studies that examine the attitudes of White preservice teachers toward these differences report that many prospective teachers view children who come from racial and linguistic backgrounds different than their own as "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995) and subsequently less capable in their motivation and ability to learn (Gomez, Black, & Allen, 2007). Though attitudes toward linguistic diversity are socially constructed, and notions of language superiority are arbitrarily determined (Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006; Wolfram & Christian, 1989), prejudice against and limited understandings about the value of linguistic pluralism pervade the schooling process and impact learning outcomes for students. Further, the language of schooling serves as a means for evaluating and differentiating students (Schleppegrell, 2004). It is a means for separating the haves from the have-nots,

the "pulled-out" from the included, the sheltered from the general education, the advanced placement from the remedial, the college-admit from the high school dropout. Because educational research on student achievement and closing the achievement gap categorizes data on the basis of race and language, White, English-monolingual students are positioned as normative indicators of school performance (Hilliard III, 2003). In this way, any racial or linguistic difference that deviates from this assumed norm is viewed as "deficient" and treated as a viable explanation for the academic failure of students of color and students who speak languages and dialects other than mainstream American English. In other words, being different than White, English-monolingual students is an indicator for and an explanation of academic failure.

Historically, students of color and speakers of nonstandard forms of English and other languages are framed and conceptualized in dominant paradigms of inferiority, cultural deprivation, and diversity (Haddix, 2009). In educational research and practice, there remains an underlying ideology that all students need to assimilate to become fluent and frequent speakers of a standard form of English in order to succeed in society. Such ideology suggests that assimilation happens at the expense of the student's home language and culture being devalued, erased, and eradicated. Further, the current context of standardized and standards-based educational reform presents a dissonant relationship with pluralist views of language use and linguistically rich classrooms (see Genishi & Dyson, 2009). The more school reform moves in a direction toward greater standardization, the less room there is to value the cultural and linguistic plurality that millions of children bring to their schooling experiences on a daily basis.

It is also important to note that the interplay of these ideologies is most often at play in the context of urban schools where the cultural and linguistic gap between teachers and administrators and the students and families they serve is steadily widening. Educational researchers continue to question how to best address the educational needs of an increasingly linguistic and culturally diverse student population (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006). This concern is magnified by the growing majority of culturally and linguistically diverse students who are placed at risk of educational failure. It is further magnified by the dominant view that languages and dialects other than mainstream American English are the main obstacles of educational achievement. Linguists, educationists, and researchers across academic disciplines have worked to explain the disproportionate failure among linguistic minorities in schools, arguing against a conclusion that students' home language is the culprit (see Perry & Delpit, 1998; Zentella, 2005).

Deficit treatment of differences in students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the classroom shows that negative, uninformed attitudes toward these differences by teachers can be counterproductive and can even harm student performance (Baker-Bell, 2013; Schleppegrell, 2004; Wynne, 2002). Teachers' attitudes and ambivalence toward different languages and dialects can impact curricular initiatives and school policies that have proven to support these students (see Brisk,

Burgos, & Hamerla, 2004). Their attitudes can either support or block marginal-
ized students' access to literacy. In a review of scholarship on preparing teachers
for teaching in racially and linguistically diverse classrooms, Godley et al. (2006)
offer multiple reasons why educational researchers and teacher educators should
prioritize preparing teachers to develop more appropriate responses to linguistic
diversity. One of the reasons highlighted by Godley et al. includes the notion that
dominant pedagogical responses to nonstandard dialects and languages are damag-
ing and counterproductive. When teachers view languages other than mainstream
American English as having lower status, this view underscores the legitimacy of
a range of languages and the idea that languages are defined politically, not scien-
tifically, and that standard languages are "dialects with an army and a navy."[3] This
is why it is imperative that transformation of teachers' attitudes about language
diversity is central to preservice teacher education. Classroom talk between teach-
ers and students is the major medium of instruction, and the power of these inter-
actions is in the hands of teachers. More time, effort, and attention must be given
to raising teachers' awareness about their assumptions and worldviews of language
diversity. Reconceptualizing the goals of teacher learning in ways that are parallel
with critical multicultural teacher education can yield positive results for students
whose linguistic and ethnic identities hold lesser status in our society. But, again,
a critical multicultural teacher education framework has as its priority the edu-
cational needs and interests of mostly White, English-monolingual, middle-class
preservice teachers. Undoubtedly, there remains an important need to emphasize
the roles played by critical multicultural teacher educators, especially in teacher
education programs and, for our purposes here, for literacy teacher preparation
programs. Such an emphasis can reveal how Whiteness and its ideologies are per-
vasive in the training of literacy and English teachers. It can also reveal the need
for increased literacy research and practices that are grounded in preservice teach-
ers' negotiations of multicultural and social justice discourses as they relate to the
literacy needs of racially and linguistically diverse classrooms.

When the Teacher Is Like Me

Two different perspectives on how to address the cultural and linguistic gap
between teachers and students dominate educational research. The first sug-
gests that the gap can be remedied by developing the attitudes and multicultural
knowledge of predominantly White, female preservice teachers. The majority of
literature on preservice teacher education in the context of the United States
focuses on the need to prepare an increasingly White, female, middle-class, and
English-monolingual teaching force to effectively teach a growing culturally and
linguistically diverse student population (Godley et al., 2006; Godley & Escher,
2012; Gomez, 1993, 1996; Haddix, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). This is par-
ticularly important in lieu of current conversations about how to best prepare
highly qualified teachers (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009). In an article about teacher

quality in English teacher education, Gere and Berebitsky cite culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000) as an area of research that deserves further attention and exploration to enrich understandings of teacher quality and its relationship to student achievement. This perspective posits:

> Teachers with culturally responsive dispositions maintain high expectations for academic achievement for all students; foster cultural competence among their students and themselves; and facilitate the development of a sociopolitical consciousness among students by using educational practices that are validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009, p. 253)

Many possibilities can result from an emphasis on valuing the multiplicity of cultural, racial, and linguistic perspectives that all teachers bring to the teaching and learning experience. However, because what is currently understood about the preparation of teachers for diversity is based on the needs and concerns of White preservice teachers, this perspective reinscribes the notion that a particular type of teacher identity leads the agenda for multicultural teacher education. Furthermore, this argument insinuates that what may or may not work for White, monolingual, female preservice teachers is universal (Montecinos, 2004). The overwhelming presence of Whiteness within teacher education programs can be silencing for non–White preservice teachers (Sleeter, 2001).

The second, less prominent perspective on how to address the gap between teachers and students includes recruiting teachers from racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse communities into the teaching profession. The focus on bridging the cultural mismatch inversely negates the fact that some preservice teachers share linguistic and cultural norms with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. Another kind of mismatch occurs once preservice teachers from non–dominant linguistic and cultural groups find themselves in the midst of teacher education programs that position them, and members of their primary discourse groups, as "other." This is an important issue to consider in lieu of research studies that document the positive educational outcomes that are produced in classrooms taught by teachers whose cultural and linguistic background is similar to that of their students (see, for example, Bohn, 2003; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Grace, 2004; Henry, 1996; Lee, 1993; Martínez, 2010; Rymes & Anderson, 2004). While current discussions in educational research literature are replete with examples that highlight a widening distance between the cultural and linguistic experiences of incoming teachers and that of their students and the harmful consequences of this distance, there is little emphasis on the low minority student participation in teacher education, those preservice teachers who often share linguistic and cultural norms with today's students and who bring multiple cultural and linguistic identities to bear on the processes of teaching and learning to teach

in traditional teacher education programs. There have been studies reporting that assignment to an own-race or same-race teacher significantly increases math and literacy achievement for Black and White students (Dee, 2004; Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan, & Rosenthal, 2013). It has been argued that reasons to aggressively recruit students of color into teaching are based on hypothesized role-model effects as well as the assumed racial bias of nonteachers of color and the impact on the educational experiences of students. In their study of one Black male math teacher's use of "speeches" in his algebra classroom, Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan, and Rosenthal (2013) found that while the teacher was working in the context of high stakes accountability demands, he drew on Black rhetorical traditions of "giving speeches" to offer advice to his students based on their behavior and his ability to relate to them as a young Black person who had similar experiences. His speeches were less about the algebraic content assessed on the end-of-course exam and more about supporting students' development of positive life skills. The authors conclude that the case of this one teacher illustrates a different knowledge base from which the teacher operates that allows him to be effective with students in an urban setting because he draws on cultural and familial experiences to address students' behaviors that might be detrimental to their academic success in mathematics. Studies that examine classrooms taught by teachers whose cultural and language background is similar to that of their students describe how when teachers have an insider's understanding of cultural meanings, they do not have to figure out the verbal and nonverbal messages their students may be sending (Nieto, 2000). More specifically, shared cultural background or shared norms about how to use language can positively influence classroom interactions between teachers and students (see Bohn, 2003; Grace, 2004; Rymes & Anderson, 2004). Nieto (1999) posits that "students and teachers from the same background are often on the same wave-length simply because they have an insider's understanding of cultural meanings and therefore they do not have to figure out the verbal and nonverbal messages they are sending" (p. 145).

Diminishing Presence of Teachers of Color

The diminishing presence of racially and linguistically diverse student identities and participation in teacher education programs remains an important issue (see Ladson-Billings, 2005). Within the larger context of studies on preservice teacher education, there exists a significant body of research that looks at the experiences of preservice teachers of color, including research on Black preservice teachers (e.g., Cook, 2013; Kornfeld, 1999; McGee, 2014; Meacham, 2000; Petchauer, 2014; Zitlow & DeCoker, 1994), Latina/o preservice teachers (e.g., Arce, 2004; Burant, 1999; Clark & Flores, 2001; Galindo, 1996; Guerrero, 2003; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Jones, Young, & Rodríguez, 1999; Rodríguez & Reis, 2012; Tellez, 1999), and Asian preservice teachers (e.g., Nguyen, 2008; Pailliotet, 1997; Sheets & Chew, 2002). A prevailing theme is that preservice teachers of color

are faced with dueling opposites—university culture versus home culture—and encounter marginalization from the ruling center (e.g., teacher education university classes, practicum school placement) and the established margin (e.g., home culture, social peers). They are neither in the center nor on the margins, and at all times, they are asked to show their "identity papers" (Minh-ha, 2006). Overemphasis on the sameness of the majority teacher population in studies on preservice teacher education disallows possibilities that can occur when teachers confront opposites, or dichotomous constructions of divided selves, to develop hybrid identities and performances.

In a recent report commissioned by the National Education Association, Dilworth and Coleman (2014) observe that a conversation about the need to diversify the teacher force is barely audible among educational stakeholders, and they call for a reignited focus on creating a teacher workforce that is both reflective of and responsive to our nation's racial, ethnic, and linguistically diverse student learning needs. Several educational researchers (see Guyton, Saxton, & Wesche, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2005; King, 1993; Shaw, 1996; Su, 1997) explore reasons why fewer people of color choose to teach, including increased opportunities and accessibility to more lucrative professions or the stringent licensure and certification requirements for teaching. In a study of minority teachers' attitudes toward their teacher preparation experiences, Delpit (1995) reports that teachers of color point to many challenges faced by being marginalized learners in teacher education programs. Few studies, Ladson-Billings (2005) points out, address the fact that the low K–12 academic performance of students of color limits their post-secondary education opportunities. Ladson-Billings writes, "If high school completion continues to be a barrier for students of color, it is unlikely that we should expect to see more students of color in college or university preparing for teacher certification" (p. 230). Further, "schools, departments, and colleges of education lack a diverse group of teacher education students because they are located on campuses that have to contend with a small number of students of color because of the pipeline issue" (p. 230).

Though research suggests that preservice teachers of color tend to bring richer experiences and perspectives to teaching in culturally diverse contexts, the overwhelming presence of Whiteness within teacher education programs can be silencing for culturally and linguistically diverse preservice teachers (Sleeter, 2001). Chinese American participants in Sheets and Chew's (2002) study reported that, in their experiences in teacher education program, White students dominated the courses, and that any reference to the cultural knowledge they embodied was suggested for implementation in bilingual classes, but not the mainstream classes (Sheets & Chew, 2002). As a result, Chinese American teachers internalized expectations to teach in linguistically segregated classrooms as a part of their construction of teacher identity despite feelings that they possessed neither a deep knowledge of Chinese culture or Cantonese language "nor a conceptualization of Chinese American pedagogical cultural knowledge" (Sheets & Chew, 2002, p. 139).

In response to the predominance of White students in teacher education, Sleeter (2001) points out that a number of institutions have created alternative programs, such as cohort groups for students of color to receive academic and emotional support they lack in mainstream programs (see Root, Rudawski, Taylor, & Rochon, 2003; Waldschmidt, 2002). In the report of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) panel on research and teacher education, Hollins and Guzman (2005) conclude from their synthesis of the research on the experiences of preservice teachers of color that experiences and retention of candidates of color can be increased by placement in cohorts or programs where they might feel that their cultural and experiential knowledge is valued. However, this type of solution is viewed as preparing preservice teachers of color "on the side" and is problematic for programs that purport to prepare teachers to work with all students (Montecinos, 2004). For example, in a study of attrition of Hmong students in teacher education programs, Root, Rudawski, Taylor, and Rochon (2003) describe two Title VII Bilingual Education Career Ladder Programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, for Hmong paraprofessionals and traditional-age college students working toward teacher certification in Wisconsin. One of the major barriers they note for students in these programs, which impacts attrition efforts, is "language and cultural comfort factors" (p. 147). Since Hmong children represent a sizable percentage of the school-age population in central Wisconsin, the initiative of this alternative, cohort program is to increase the number of Hmong teachers, teachers who may share cultural and linguistic norms with the student population and understand their experiences. However, the cohort or alternative program model positions students of color on the periphery of majority preservice teacher education efforts.

Integral to teacher education reform efforts is that a more racial, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity is needed and that the presence of such diversity has positive effects on the school performance of both mainstream students and students of color (Gay, 2005). In Au and Blake's (2003) collective case study of Japanese American and Hawaiian preservice teachers, they aimed to address the underrepresentation of teachers of diverse backgrounds and the importance of recruitment efforts of these teachers as a means for improving the achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students by considering the influence of cultural identity—including ethnicity, social class, and community membership—on the perspectives and learning of preservice teachers. They purposively selected participants from diverse backgrounds because they "believe[d] that research should be directed at understanding the perspectives and experiences of teacher candidates of diverse backgrounds, as a basis for designing teacher education programs" (p. 54).

Though the recruitment and retention of individuals of color should be important to reform in teacher education, current initiatives are having opposite effects, specifically reform measures that equate quality in teacher preparation and proficiency with standardized test scores (Gay, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2005)

argues that the solution to providing optimal teaching and learning opportunities for today's teachers and students is not simply about a "culture match." Instead, she contends that the point of creating a more diverse teaching force and a more diverse set of teacher educators should be to ensure that all students, including White students, experience a more accurate picture of what it means to live and work in a multicultural and democratic society.

The diminishing presence of students of color in teacher education programs remains an important issue. Delpit (1995) argues that in seeking viable solutions, the educational research community must consult teachers of color as a major source of guidance. There is a pressing need to illuminate the experiences of preservice teachers of color, focusing specifically on how they "become" teachers while battling socially imposed and self-internalized conceptions of being marginalized learners. The problem for preservice teacher education research and practice, then, is how to counter the reasons why the cultural and linguistic diversity of the teaching force continually decreases versus narrowly focusing on how to prepare a homogeneous teaching force for teaching a culturally and linguistic diverse student population.

Researching New Perspectives on Teacher Education for Literacy Educators

In 2012, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) updated their policy to promote diversity and inclusion within the Council. The policy states that the organization will:

- include people of color on all appointed commissions, boards, committees, task forces, and other official groups;
- include people of color among the leadership of the above groups;
- include people of color among the nominees presented by each nominating committee;
- include in NCTE conventions and workshops sessions dealing with interests of people of color and using as leaders or consultants practicing teachers of color from the levels of instruction concerned;
- include people of color in verbal and visual materials intended to represent or describe NCTE;
- include people of color as targeted groups in any recruiting efforts;
- ensure the regular election of persons of color to the NCTE Vice Presidency, the NCTE Nominating Committee is strongly recommended to run at least four slates of all persons of color in each twelve-year cycle.

Such policies are good wherein there exists a community of people of color from which to draw. The organization has many resolutions that promote diversity within the profession, specifically as it relates to how we work with diverse learners. However, little if anything is mentioned about a resolve to increase teacher

diversity within literacy and English education. This makes it difficult to have diverse representation within the Council when diverse representation does not exist among English and literacy educators. While increasing teacher diversity is a part of a national conversation across the field of education, broadly, I argue that it is of particular importance to the field of literacy and English education because English teachers are the gatekeepers of language, and language transcends all content areas. Understanding the hybrid literate identities and practices of preservice teachers of color is critical if teacher educators and scholars want to better understand ways to improve literacy teaching and learning for P–12 students.

Ball (2006) describes an approach to teacher education designed to create "carriers of the torch"—teachers who have a sense of efficacy and the attitudes, dispositions, and skills necessary to teach students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In her examination of teacher change and teacher education in two countries—the United States and South Africa—she proposes ways to prepare teachers for a rapidly changing global society. An aspect of her research that informs my own work is her focus on restructuring teacher education programs to cultivate teachers who are committed to teaching socially and economically disenfranchised students and who understand literacy as a tool of empowerment. By drawing from research with over 100 U.S. and South African teachers, Ball stresses the importance of teachers as change agents in diverse classrooms. Similarly, Irvine (2003) addresses how culture, race, ethnicity, and social class influence teaching and learning. Providing an analysis of conditions and reforms in education, Irvine offers suggestions for improving educational outcomes for all children by focusing on the importance of diversifying the teacher force.

Few research studies exist in the field of literacy and English education that explicitly examine the experiences of teachers of color as it relates to their teacher identity development and taking on of teacher discourses. Milner (2003) conducted a case study of a Black female high school English teacher over a five-month period. His goal was to examine what sources, such as race and gender, impact her comprehensive knowledge and self-reflective planning. He found that her experience as a Black woman significantly impacted her role as a teacher and was central in her daily planning and decision making. Milner acknowledges his role as an observer and not as a participant in the research study, critiquing his ability to fully articulate the cultural comprehensive knowledge of the teacher through his documentation of interviews and observation. This study, however, was not focused on the teacher's identity as an English teacher, specifically, but on her identity as a teacher, generally, with implications for a broader education audience. Some literacy scholars of color have written about their own work with students of color. For example, Camangian (2010) taught autoethnography as a strategic pedagogical tool to support students' examination of the ways that they experience, exist within, and explain their racial, cultural, and gendered identities and the intersections these identities pose. Within the field of literacy, however, a call for increased teacher diversity is silent and barely heard.

Reflecting on the research literature on race and literacy preservice teacher education, where researchers often conclude that such programs need reconceptualization, Willis (2003) draws attention to the "excessive publication of, and overindulgence in, helping European American students understand their whiteness." This attention, by "many well-intentioned folks," according to Willis, almost always leads to:

> the marginalization of the needs of the students of color, and a superficial attention to the intersection of race, class, gender, and power in pedagogy and content. In the future, it is advised that narratives written by scholars and teachers of color, as authentic voices of our experiences, be included. (pp. 68–69)

Over the years, the literacy research community in the United States continues to move toward more nuanced and complex treatments of racial, cultural, and linguistic differences. Adding another dimension to discussions about teacher quality (see Gere & Berebitsky, 2009) and about who can or should become teachers, I wrote *Cultivating Racial and Linguistic Diversity in Literacy Teacher Education: Teachers Like Me* to engage with others in the literacy community in necessary and continued conversations about increasing the presence of teachers from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in English and literacy education.

The Promise of Cultivating Racial and Linguistic Diversity in Literacy and English Teacher Education

While an immediate concern for preservice teacher education research and practice has to be how to prepare the current predominantly White, monolingual teaching force for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Haddix, 2008), this concern does not have to undermine efforts to increase teacher diversity. Addressing this concern should not mean that the experiences and perspectives of those preservice teachers who fall outside the dominant teacher demographic profile are less important (Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004). An underlying premise of this book is that teachers of color are invaluable when it comes to improving teaching and learning experiences and outcomes for increasingly diverse P–12 students. Yes, increasing the number of teachers of color can equate to student success in the classroom, especially if teachers of color serve as role models who have a deeper understanding of students' cultural and linguistic identities. Understanding their students' cultural and linguistic identities, or knowledge, can serve as the foundation for the curricular and pedagogical goals of teachers of color. It is important for students of color to see and interact with teachers of color to undermine a larger dominant narrative that only White, English-monolingual women are qualified to teach. Further, it is just as important that White students see and interact with teachers of color to disrupt that same

understanding about who holds the monopoly on who has the ability to teach or serve as educational role models. A homogeneous teacher force can mean that homogeneous worldviews are drawn upon to assess and analyze students' needs (Sleeter & Milner, 2011).

As current trends in teacher education research highlight the cultural and linguistic mismatch between today's teachers and students, another kind of mismatch is often neglected: the cultural and linguistic gaps that exist among some preservice teachers and the context of traditional teacher education. The overemphasis on the preparation of an assumed homogeneous teaching force potentially constructs teachers as monolithic entities, negating the complexities of teachers' identities. This overemphasis minimizes the complexities of the intersections of race, gender, language, class, and sexuality on teacher identity performance. As the literacy scholarly community considers future directions in English and literacy research, inclusion of the experiences of preservice teachers from underrepresented racial and linguistic groups can result in a greater awareness of the kinds of experiences that all P–12 students have as they participate in new discourse communities and, by extension, transform English and literacy education. Cultivating diverse teachers for English and literacy classrooms holds great potential for bringing richer perspectives to literacy and language teaching in P–12 classrooms.

Notes

1. I use the term "African American Language" to name the linguistic variety spoken by generations of African Americans. Linguists have used several labels to refer to this variety, including African American English, Black English Vernacular, and Ebonics (see Green, 2002 for more discussion of the naming and origins of African American Language).
2. Mainstream American English is the language of schooling (Schleppegrell, 2004). I refer to it interchangeably with academic English and "standard" English because it is the "standard" for curriculum and pedagogy in school classrooms and in society at large.
3. This concept is long part of *oral tradition* among sociolinguists. However, Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich is often credited with its origination (Wardhaugh, 2002).

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