Chapter 11

Calling In, Not Calling Out:
A Critical Race Framework for
Nurturing Cross–Cultural Alliances
in Teacher Candidates

Anita Bright
Portland State University, USA

James Gambrell
Portland State University, USA

ABSTRACT

With a focus on transformation, this chapter engages educators in considering how the key ideas in Critical Race Theory may be immediately applicable in their own settings. The authors explain ways to define, identify, and disrupt microaggressions, and explore ways to serve as empathetic allies to marginalized students, families, and teachers. Grounded in the lived experiences of the two authors as they teach courses in an initial teacher preparation program at a large, urban institution in the Western U.S., this chapter includes vignettes that highlight the processes of calling in and being called in as a means to work towards greater equity and reduced oppression in educational and social settings.

INTRODUCTION

“I can’t believe you just said that.” The class froze and fell silent, uncertainty and electricity hanging in the air. Margaret, a teacher candidate in our graduate program, pointed angrily at Ryan, her classmate, and continued, “Mexican isn’t a language, it’s a nationality. You’re ignorant and need to get a clue, Ryan.”

With a clear focus on working towards achieving greater equity and social justice within educational contexts and within the world at large, we (Anita and James) take our work as teacher educators quite seriously. As faculty members in an initial teacher licensure program at a large, public institution in the Western US, we have the humbling privilege of working with several hundred teacher candidates each year, as these candidates embark on their journeys towards becoming educators. Part of our work involves

navigating interactions like the in-class conversation between Margaret and Ryan (pseudonyms, as are all individuals named in this chapter aside from the authors), described above.

In the very first term of their program of student, our teacher candidates take a foundational course that lays the groundwork for the remainder of their studies, and hopefully for their professional practices as educators. This course, which focuses on educating for equity and social justice, addresses a range of issues related to identity, positionality, power, privilege, and oppression. As professors, we learn side-by-side with our teacher candidates, welcoming the unending flow of new opportunities to deepen our own understandings while also marveling at the newly rich understandings of our teacher candidates themselves.

In our work as educators, we recognize there are multiple times throughout a each day wherein we might speak or act in ways that unintentionally oppress or wound those around us. As each individual carries and enacts a uniquely constructed and evolving cultural identity, the interplay between these cultures has great potential to lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and even oppression (Brookfield, 2002).

**BACKGROUND**

“Little c” Culture Impacts on Transformative Learning

Although many understand culture to be the observable and most superficial expressions of group identity, evident in things like musical traditions, architecture, food, and literature, these may be thought of as manifestations of “big c” Culture (with an uppercase C). For the purposes of this chapter, as we discuss cross-cultural interactions, we will be referring to “little c” culture, which include “cultural practices that subsume patterns of behavior” (Herron, Cole, Corrie, & Dubreil, 1999, p. 519). Elements of “little c” culture include the informal and often hidden patterns in behavior, made manifest in things like styles of discourse and communication, conceptions of politeness and rudeness, constructions of taboos, expressions of identity.

Congruently, Brookfield (2012) states that “personal identity is not developed in a series of purely self-contained, individual choices, but is shaped by collectively generated and maintained roles, assumptions, images, and expectations associated with one’s race, class, or gender” (p. 139). Therefore, there exists a need to create space for “learning through the lenses of culture, diversity, and difference as well as animating awareness through the experiences and performance of the arts” (O’Sullivan, 2012, p. 173). Furthermore, as critical educators, we aim to promote the voices of the marginalized through our research and teaching, which necessitates the need to open up class time to provide space for these interchanges (Clark & Cresswell, 2010; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

These aspects of culture-- again, unique to each individual, and shaped by family, community, the school, and media-- are not static nor fixed, but rather, continue to shift, evolve and transform over time, creating the very real possibility that two people who may have formerly shared near-identical little-c cultures could easily reach a point wherein their cultures no longer aligned, which may precipitate a need to create cross-cultural alliances, as described in this chapter.

Brookfield (2012) asserts that transformation is one of the most powerful words in the English language; it indicates that something is fundamentally different than what it was before. Transformative learning, such as through the construction of cross-cultural alliances, results in a profound change in