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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AWARENESS  
THROUGH ONLINE FICTION

**Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper aims to examine preservice teachers’ understanding of culturally responsive teaching and the use of technology to deliver pedagogical information and facilitate inquiry.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study in this paper blended qualitative methods, specifically grounded theory within a framework of narrative inquiry. The study is situated within a theoretical framework related to the use of storytelling for teaching and research and of the use of Web-based technologies to deliver instruction and conduct research. An online fictional story was used to initiate dialogue about culturally responsive teaching, provide a framework for organizing ideas and reflecting, and encourage participants to tell their own stories.

**Findings** - Findings indicate that the use of online fiction effectively facilitated participants’ reflection and communication of their thoughts and levels of awareness and understanding, thereby facilitating data collection.

**Research limitations** - Limitations include possible researcher bias, participant honesty, short duration of the study, and the scope of the study.

**Practical Implications** - This paper demonstrates the practical value of combining technology and fictional storytelling to promote and examine awareness of culturally responsive teaching in pre-service teachers.

**Social Implications** – The findings of this study are significant in their relevance to preparing future teachers for diverse classrooms, a critical factor in eliminating inequities, cultural misunderstanding, and prejudice in our society.

**Originality/Value** – The unique use of technology and narrative in this study is significant to teacher educators who seek ways to engage preservice teachers in sensitive topics and to facilitate research on their understanding. The use of narrative is unique in this study because it was initiated with a fictional story which was then revised to include participants as characters in the final chapter.

**Keywords:** Multicultural, pedagogy, Internet, education, ethnicity, intercultural.

**Paper Type:** Research Paper

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## **1. Introduction**

Preparing future teachers for diverse classrooms is critical in teacher education. Usually it is done through the use of textbooks. However, this study was initiated and propelled by the use of *Christie's Journey: Becoming a Culturally Responsive Teacher*, an online fictional story. This story, offered to student teachers, has five chapters that follow 'Christie Miller' through her first year of teaching. The story, authored by the researcher, was provided to participants in this study to illustrate some principles of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), to provide participants a context for framing their thoughts about this topic, and to encourage their own storytelling as a means of data collection. They were able to access the story in the form of online text and as a series of podcasts.

The study aims to examine (1) how and to what extent preservice teachers understand culturally responsive teaching, and (2) how the Internet can be used to deliver a fictional story intended to inform participants and to promote reflection,

## **2. Preparation for the Study**

In preparation for this study, I created a five-chapter fictional story based on central tenets of culturally responsive teaching, also called culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001). Participants accessed the five-chapter story from a researcher-created Web site.

Since the participants were extremely busy with student teaching during their final semester, the story had to be crafted carefully so they would not resent having 'one more thing to do.' To make it engaging and relevant, I wrote it in the format of a story about Christie Miller, an uninformed, young, White, female first-year teacher of students

whose cultural background and socio-economic status is different from hers. This context represents that of many new teachers. The story reveals Christie's frustrations, her blind spots, her foibles, her good heart and dedication, her successes, and her growth from September to May. Each chapter focuses on an important component of culturally responsive teaching (classroom management, caring and high expectations, communication, curriculum, and pedagogy) and presents the information through the voices of Christie's mentor teachers. Humor is sprinkled throughout the story to lighten the reading and to provide "edutainment." After reading or listening to each chapter, participants responded to reflective questions via e-mail. This electronic correspondence created dialogue in a safe, individual environment.

### **3. Theoretical Framing: Storytelling and Narrative**

Egan (1989) regards the story as one of the most important inventions of humankind and suggests that storytelling provides a link to meaningful learning. Stories can promote new perspectives, and according to Burk (1997), stories can help students achieve success. While the story in this study was used as a teaching tool, it was also used to facilitate narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state: "The main reason for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who... lead storied lives" (p. 2).

Pajares (1993) proposes that narrative holds promise as a research tool to help explain the process of developing beliefs. Those new beliefs often transfer into new practices. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1994), awakenings, transformations, and changes in practice can result from the use of narrative: "The horizons of our knowing shift and change as we awaken to new ways of 'seeing' our world, to different ways of

seeing ourselves in relation to each other and to the world” (pp. 154-155). Throughout a teacher education program, preservice teachers reconstruct their own life stories.

Skouge and Rao (2009) propose that digital storytelling can be an engaging medium for teaching about the community, culture, and traditions. In the context of their report, digital storytelling refers to using multimedia to create stories for students, and for students to create their own stories. Ziegahn (2001) found that an online medium can encourage students to reflect on and discuss sensitive issues related to culture and social justice more freely than in a face-to-face instructional environment. It seems to have enabled students to reinterpret prior experiences and create new frames of reference. MacDonald (2009) suggests that in spite of the ability of storytelling to produce meaningful learning, instructional designers do not appear to use the power of storytelling to its fullest potential.

In the study reported here, the use of storytelling for purposes of instruction and research is somewhat unique. By *initiating* the study with an online fictional story, participants were given a tool for exploring their perspectives and experiences, and generating their personal narratives.

#### **4. Method**

Qualitative methods, specifically constructivist grounded theory within a framework of narrative inquiry, were used to examine how and to what extent participants in this study understood culturally responsive teaching and to solicit subtle information about their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions. Glesne (1999) and Schram (2006) suggest that individuals construct understanding in social settings, and this is true of the participants in this study. Social factors such as field-based

classroom experiences and the Capstone class contributed to their construction of their understanding. Any examination of attitudes toward diversity requires an understanding of underlying assumptions, values, beliefs, biases, and perhaps misconceptions. Narrative inquiry provided a means for eliciting stories from participants that revealed this subtle and sensitive information.

### *Participants*

Using purposive, convenience sampling, ten preservice teachers (Capstone students) were selected as participants to provide variety in backgrounds, student teaching placements, previous exposure to diversity, and perceived attitudes toward and knowledge related to teaching diverse students. All participants were female since no males were enrolled in this Capstone course. Eight were White; one was biracial; and one was Hispanic who explained that she had been “raised White” by adoptive parents. This predominance of White, female participants is representative of student enrollment in the teacher education program at this university. All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

### *Measures*

Data sources included a pre- and post diversity survey, initial interviews, a focus group, exit interviews, responses to reflective questions at the end of each chapter of the story, field observations, and course assignments such as lesson plans, diversity essays, and final course reflections. Data was collected over the course of one semester.

## *Use of Narrative and Technology*

This study incorporated the use of narrative in several ways. The study *began* with a fictional story that I wrote and posted online. Participants used the story in this study as a framework for organizing their ideas and examining their own thoughts related to teaching diverse students. The story in this study provided a context for discussions, reflections, and questioning. In electronic reflections and during interviews, participants often told stories from their personal lives or their classrooms, adding to the narrative element.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) focus narrative methods in four directions: (1) inward, (2) outward, (3) backward, and (4) forward. In this study, these directions were translated respectively to mean (1) participants' internal attitudes, perspectives, and thought patterns, (2) participants' words and actions, (3) participants' previous life experiences, and (4) participants' perspectives on their future roles as teachers. These directions provided a structure for interpretation of participants' stories in this study.

Ethnographic research is sometimes reported with a narrative followed by a separate analysis, and sometimes the two elements are interwoven (Berg, 2004). In describing the results of this study, I interweave participants' stories and my analysis of them.

## **5. Results**

### *Participants' Reactions to the Fictional Story*

Participants' comments about the use of a fictional online story instead of a textbook to facilitate exploration of culturally responsive teaching were positive. Their comments included the following:

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- “I can totally apply it to my student teaching now....It made me realize why my kids act the way they do.”
- “It made it more real....At the school I’m at now, I could really identify with her [*Christie, the first year teacher in the story*].”
- “I think there’s been a lot of theory about what to do. This way [*the online story format*], you’re seeing what to do in a classroom, and what is good for students, like in culturally diverse teaching and how to put that together, realistically, in the classroom.”
- “You could read it and feel that bond with someone and kind of find the similarities. You can feel an emotional bond with Christie [*the fictional first year teacher in the story*].”
- “I think that it was really helpful. You know, it was put into our terms, real-life situations, things that would really happen to you.”
- “I enjoyed it a whole lot better than I would a textbook. I have a hard time reading textbooks because I end up skimming and not really paying attention, or having to re-read the same thing over. But I didn’t have to on the story, and I loved the way they [*the chapters*] entertained.”
- “I really don’t read the textbook [*for the Capstone course*]. I’ll skim it. But the story format kept your attention and made it a little easier to read.”
- “I liked it because it was kind of like watching a TV show.”
- “I think it’s probably one of the best things you could do. If more professors would do that, I’d probably be able to remember more of what’s been going on in my college career.”

When asked if they preferred the story as text or as podcasts, most expressed a preference for text. Several explained that they like to print the story and highlight as they read.

### *Participants' Stories*

Through electronic reflections and interviews, participants shared stories through which they expressed their experiences, concerns, beliefs, feelings, the influences of their own backgrounds, and their understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Some stories were very short; others were longer and quite detailed. Some stories were nested within conversations I had with participants. Several stories follow.

#### *Allison's Stories*

##### *Story 1: I Spy*

We had a field trip on Friday to Mr. Gatti's and I rode on the bus with one of the students, and we were playing I Spy. You know, I spy something of a different color, and I said, "I spy something white." And the little boy goes, "You!" I was really surprised that he said that. I really didn't go into that. I just said, "Oh, well, it's not me." But, the fact that he had said white and it's me. . . it kind of took me by surprise."

Analysis: This story illustrates the fact that Allison was unaware that even very young children of color have a strong sense of "color" because they live with discrimination and inequities on a daily basis. Allison's sense of surprise revealed her assumption that Whiteness is just 'normal,' and not something that gets noticed or labeled.

##### *Story 2: Catch me if You Can*

Thursday morning was really bad...My teacher took a half-day off, and there's this one little girl who just didn't listen to me and she was hopping

around the room, at the teacher's desk, and trying to pull all the people's cards. I was pretty upset, and I was telling her, "You sit down," and she didn't listen. I got up and I was going to take her across the room to one of the other teachers and she about ran away from me, like she wanted me to chase her. I wasn't going to chase her, so I had the principal come and help me, and he took her out. She came back and at first she was quiet and did her work. But before lunch she stood on top of her desk. I still can't believe she stood on top of her desk. And she just had a big old smile. I took her down and said, "That's not okay. It's not safe. And when you come back from lunch there will be consequences." But, I don't know ....When they don't listen to you, that's really, really frustrating because you can't do much. I mean you can't physically pick them up and move them somewhere.

Analysis: This story demonstrates that Allison's classroom management was compromised because she did not have time to build a relationship with this student, even though she knew the importance of doing this. Her student teaching experience was difficult, and I could tell from her quietness at times that she questioned herself.

However, Allison made impressive growth during the semester *because* she questioned herself, and because she could make direct connections between the story and her own student teaching experience. At the end of the semester, Allison seemed to understand culturally responsive teaching better than the other participants.

### *Lisa's Stories*

#### *Story 1: Cultural Transplant.*

When I asked Lisa to describe the evolution of her understanding of culturally responsive teaching, the following exchange took place.

Lisa: It would definitely be a lack of knowledge. And that's really strange because you know my parents are White, and I'm Honduran. I grew up in that higher, middle-higher SES...I really didn't know anything about other cultures. Now when I got married, I married outside of that. So you would think that having so many blends in my life like that, that I would be more aware. But I really wasn't....I have a lot of Hispanic friends, but I don't know a lot about the Hispanic culture.

M: Was your husband Hispanic?

Lisa: No, he wasn't. He was African American.

M: Okay.

Lisa: Yeah, isn't that weird?

M: Not in my family! [*I am White and one of my sons-in-law is African American.*]

Lisa: My son is being raised the way I was raised, and that's the White culture. That's what I know, and that's what he knows. And he doesn't have a lot of the African American input in his life just because of...you know. [*Lisa's son was present, and she didn't want to mention her divorce.*] And so he really isn't aware of that....I think more of it as he has gotten older, because I've kind of watched how people treat him...And most people don't know that [*he's biracial*]; they think he's just Hispanic because he looks so much like me. You know they ask me, but I never

volunteer the information just because it makes a difference in how he's treated. It does. And so, that has made me kind of watch and see how people act and how they do things in school. In fact, I put him down [*at school*] as Honduran because that's what I am and it's just easier than going into the whole story.

Analysis: In this story, Lisa reveals her own cultural insulation during her childhood. Interestingly, it was not her native culture. Adopted at age five, and moved from her home country of Honduras to the United States, she was indoctrinated into mainstream, European American culture by her parents. She forgot most of her very early childhood and she forgot how to speak Spanish. This story also demonstrates Lisa's fear of discrimination directed toward her biracial son. She concluded that it was easier for him to deny his African American heritage. As a result, cultural amnesia was passed from one generation to the next. Lisa's understanding of promoting healthy cultural identity development and her conflicting choice to suppress full cultural identity in her personal life seemed paradoxical. She had apparently not thoroughly processed and reflected on that aspect of culturally responsive teaching.

*Story 2: Paper or Plastic? Bias at the Super Store.*

I was in Walmart one day, in the checkout line, and he [*the clerk*] started speaking to me in Spanish, and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't speak Spanish." His whole demeanor changed....I've gotten a lot of, "Well, you're Hispanic, but you act weird. You don't act Hispanic. What's going on?" I'm an enigma. It used to drive me crazy when I was younger. And, as I've gotten older, it's just funny now.

Analysis: It is easy to see from this story that Lisa occasionally suffered the consequences of her transferred cultural affiliation. Without knowing her history, people were confused by her inability to relate to the Hispanic culture. Lisa appeared to have intentionally developed insensitivity to it in order to cope with such situations. Hopefully, however, this will not prevent her from understanding the subtle yet important challenges her future students will experience when trying to navigate two cultures.

### *Stephanie's Stories*

#### *Story 1: New Kid on the Block.*

There's one little boy in our class. He's very new to the school and he's not like a lot of the other kids in the school. He has a tendency to *[steal]*. And he's lower *[I think she was about to say "class" but she stopped herself]*. His mom is living with someone, and she's just a waitress and has three kids. He has a very different attitude than a lot of the other kids at school. I asked him one time why he comes to school and he said, "The free food." He gets really frustrated *[with his schoolwork]*. I sometimes worry that he thinks we're picking on him. But we're holding him to the same expectations that we hold the other kids to, and he's not used to that.

He gets really frustrated and he got a bad grade on one test and he just shut down and said, "I'm a failure," and pouted. We were writing a paper and his handwriting was not neat. I said, "This is your final draft. This has to be your best handwriting." He crumpled up his paper and threw it on the ground and threw little tantrums, which did not fly at all with me....So I was like, "Okay. Here's your new piece of paper. Go ahead

and write it again,” like throwing it on the ground didn’t really help. At this school, they have a lot of expectations for kids to do well on the [standardized test] and to perform. And I don’t think he had that at his old school. I don’t know if he’s used to being pushed that hard. I want to push him, and he can do it.

Analysis: Stephanie exhibited limited awareness in this passage. She understood the importance of high expectations. She stated that she believed the student could do better. She wanted to push him to do so, and she believed that simply pushing harder would produce results. She did not realize that she must first increase her level of caring and support to this child, academically, culturally, and emotionally. Unlike a culturally responsive teacher, Stephanie made classist and judgmental remarks about the child’s mother. She will need to further examine her own biases to grow as a culturally responsive teacher.

### *Jessica’s Stories*

#### *Story 1: Generosity at the Shelter*

Right now, we’re having a canned food drive. And we have several students who are getting help from shelters. They brought some canned food from the shelter, and some of the other kids made fun of them because they took food from the shelter, and it’s going right back to the shelter. At first I felt sorry for them, but then I didn’t because they were trying to do something to help. I told one of these students that it didn’t matter where the food came from; they were giving it to somebody else, and that’s what the whole food drive was about.

Analysis: Jessica made an important realization about economic diversity and the fact that the spirit of giving is the same, no matter who it comes from. Perhaps she had never thought about what life in a shelter is like, but this brought it to her attention. Her compassion and respect for the child from the shelter are positive signs of growth. Her choice not to pity the child is a strong sign that she understood one of the principles of culturally responsive teaching.

*Story 2: Cultural Extravaganza*

Growing up, I went to a predominantly Black school. We learned Spanish every day and...so it was really culturally responsive, but it was never called that. So, when I hear teachers that have strong biases, I really don't understand that. They don't see the importance of teaching diversity, and that's just a part of me, that's who I am.

I love social studies, I love history and I think that's the main place to have culturally diverse teaching. You can invite people that you know from diverse cultures; you can invite family members in. [At this elementary school] we had Brotherhood Month. We spent a whole month, each grade level, studying different cultures. We decorated the classroom, the halls and everything around it, like that country, and the last week we invited everyone from the city to come in and take a tour of the different countries. It was just a huge cultural experience.

Analysis: Jessica had benefited from significant childhood experiences with diversity since she is White and her elementary school population was predominantly African American. Her positive attitude toward diversity was clear, but she still seemed to think



of multicultural education in terms of the “tourist approach” in which only special days are set aside to talk about other cultures in their most stereotyped representations, instead of teaching more accurate, multi-dimensional information about cultural groups throughout the academic year. Jessica had not realized that this approach to multicultural education is inadequate.

*LeAnn’s Stories*

*Story 1: Lament at the Laminating Machine.*

As soon as I read the section [*in Christie’s Journey*] about ‘blaming the victim,’ I immediately thought about a conversation I heard in the teachers’ workroom. One of the teachers had called the home of one of her students to talk about their [*sic*] behavior and received a message saying the phone had been disconnected. She then proceeded to call the mother at work and speak with her about it. It was a very short phone call, and when she got off the phone, another teacher who was standing there said something along the lines of, “I guess she didn’t care too much.” The teacher responded by saying, “Well, I don’t know how I can expect someone who can’t even keep their phone turned on to care too much about what their child is doing at school.” I was really shocked by this statement. My first thought was that this woman was interrupted at work with a phone call telling her how badly her child was doing and nothing positive was said. The fact that she got off the phone so quickly to me was not a big deal because if her home phone is cut off, then she is probably working hard to make ends meet, and I’m sure she doesn’t want to get

caught on the phone, not working. I have definitely thought to myself before that a child's parents must not be very involved in their child's schoolwork because of their performance in class. But I have never shared those thoughts with others! That doesn't make it any less wrong, but sometimes I have found it hard not to think those kinds of thoughts when children come back, day after day, with [papers] unsigned by their parents. I really think that now I need to be more cautious about the way I think and not just jump to the conclusion that the parents or their living conditions have something to do with poor performance on schoolwork. Maybe I should spend a little bit more time thinking about how I can better teach my students so that they really understand new concepts that are being introduced to them. If they are still having trouble, then I should find the extra time to work with them and take on their school performance as my responsibility instead of [blaming] their parents.

Analysis: LeAnn showed evidence of reflection about and sensitivity to the life conditions of other people. She knew not to make assumptions about why a student does poorly in school or how much a parent cares. Her sense of shock at the other teachers' comments was a sign that she was clearly developing awareness as a culturally responsive teacher.

*Story 2: Cold and Scared*

LeAnn: And then there are situations that I've been in this semester that have made me want to cry. There was one little African American girl who came to school and it was before the time change, so I mean it's pitch

black out in the morning before school starts, when they're having to come to school. She showed up one day and I remember because my cooperating teacher wasn't there that day, her son was sick. So it was me. I was in charge and I was by myself. I remember she came in bawling and first of all, it was freezing outside and she wasn't wearing a coat. And so you know, I kind of pulled her aside.

M: Had she been standing out there a long time?

LeAnn: Well, she had to walk to school by herself that morning, because she lives with her aunt and her aunt's car was broken.

M: How old was she?

LeAnn: Six. Six years old. And she told me that she was scared last night because she couldn't sleep because their power got turned off. It was cold and she was scared of the dark, and then... I mean, I think for me, it was such an eye-opener because I don't come from that kind of place. I can't relate to that at all. I've never *not* had a coat. I've never in my life experienced not having power, other than if the electricity goes out for everyone. And so, for me it was so difficult to be able to relate to her and comfort her. I did the best that I could. I was so upset and I just couldn't understand who would send their child to school like that. But I thought, well, if their car's not working, and their power got turned off, she's probably trying to work, get to work early, maybe work some overtime to get the bills paid, so that she can have the electricity turned back on so it's not freezing at night. I guess I can see how she would have to do that. I

told the child, “Well, we’re going to turn the heater up and we’ll get it warm in here.” It was just so difficult because it was one of those situations where I wished that I’d had something better to offer her. But I didn’t. It was hard, but it made me think that I wanted so much more to be able to relate to her and to be able to do something more.

Analysis: Other participants had told me touching stories too, but none of them revealed this much genuine emotion and humility. LeAnn’s heart had truly ached for this little girl, but without pity or feeling that she could ‘save’ the child. Instead she was at a loss, so she just loved the child, comforted her, and helped her get warm. LeAnn also withheld judgment about the girl’s aunt, which would have been difficult for many teachers in this situation. Her knowledge of culturally responsive teaching prevented her from jumping to conclusions about this child’s home life. LeAnn’s heart was open, empathetic, and humble, and she was poised to become an effective culturally responsive teacher.

## **6. Discussion**

As participants read each chapter of the online story, they were asked to respond thoughtfully and candidly, through e-mail, to reflective questions that challenged their thinking and provided a window into their knowledge and beliefs. Results indicate that the online story was useful in helping participants develop cognitive structures on which to map the new information about culturally responsive teaching. It provided a familiar context and a character with whom they could identify and empathize. Since some participants had not heard of culturally responsive teaching before this study, the story provided a humanized presentation of the information and a non-threatening, safe space

for examining their own ideas, beliefs, and biases. The online story facilitated a running dialog about culturally responsive teaching throughout the semester, through which I had the opportunity to examine their understanding and attitudes toward this approach to teaching diverse students.

The character *Christie* provided an evolving model to which participants could compare themselves. By beginning the study with this online story, they found it easy to relate the information to their own teaching and personal lives, and found practical language for expressing themselves and evaluating their own awareness. They demonstrated new awareness of topics such as culture, class, stereotyping, poverty, bias, ethnocentrism, and critical examination of curricula. This greatly facilitated the collection of informative data. Participants *wanted* to talk about Christie and her mentors and felt comfortable doing so, whereas they might have been more reluctant to share their thoughts and responses to information in a textbook due to a lack of motivation or a fear of being ‘wrong.’ The one exception was Emily, a participant who responded to many reflective questions and interview questions with platitudes or information copied from Web sites. Emily seemed to be disconnected from some of the realities of teaching. When asked what she thought was the cause for academic failure of some students of color, she replied, “I didn’t know there was a failure.” Obviously, she was unaware of an achievement gap.

While I included some of the participants’ stories above, they also resurface in a revised final chapter of *Christie’s Journey: Becoming a Culturally Responsive Teacher*. The participants are transformed into characters in the fictional tale, new colleagues of Christie Miller. This study pushes the limits of narrative inquiry and blurs the boundaries

between research and creative writing. As with many products of the post-modern age, it defies narrow definition and constrained interpretation. It is an exploration into the realm of possibility for contemporary qualitative research.

## **7. Conclusions**

In spite of the short time frame of this study, participants made notable growth in their understanding of culturally responsive teaching. However, indications of implementing these strategies in their classrooms were somewhat limited. This is probably because becoming a culturally responsive teacher is an ongoing journey and these individuals were only at the beginning of that journey. It is also due, in part, to the restrictions placed upon participants by their cooperating teachers or by the adoption of scripted curricula.

Using an online fictional story as a teaching tool proved to be effective. Participants expressed unanimous preference for the story over a textbook because it was more engaging, it put the information into practical terms in a context similar to their own, and it provided a character with whom they could identify.

Given the choice to access the story as either online text or in the form of a series of podcasts, surprising few participants chose to listen to the podcasts. Some participants stated that they prefer to print the story and highlight as they read. One participant chose to print the story for future reference in her classroom. This finding appears to contradict the popular belief that students wish to multi-task by listening to instructional podcasts while doing other activities.

Results of this study also indicate significant potential for the use of online fiction to *initiate* narrative inquiry. It provided a useful framework for participants' reflections

on story characters and on themselves. It provided points of comparison and reference. It created a safe context for discussing sensitive topics, and it portrayed a fallible character that made participants feel more comfortable in discussing their self-doubts or inadequate understandings. In conclusion, the use of an online story in this study succeeded as an instructional tool and a means of facilitating research.

## **8. Limitations**

### *Researcher Bias*

Researcher bias is possible since I developed the fictional story and implemented it with my own Capstone students. The modules are only one of the many factors that might have affected participant understanding of culturally responsive teaching, so the influence of multiple factors must be considered in analyzing the data in this study. I attempted to maintain an awareness of how my own expectations or relationships with the participants may have affected interpretation of the data.

### *Participant Honesty*

Since the participants were my students, it is possible that they masked their true opinions and said what they thought I wanted to hear, for the sake of instructor approval or benefit to the course grade. In order to counteract this possibility, participants were assured that their responses would have no effect on course grade and all responses would be honored as representing their current position on the journey to becoming culturally responsive teachers.

### *Short Duration of Study*

The duration of this study was a single semester. A study over a longer period of time might better reflect the process of constructing understanding related to complex topic such as culturally responsive teaching.

### *Scope of the Study*

The topic of culturally responsive teaching is complex and extensive. The scope of this study narrows it to five major tenets to fit within the time frame of one semester. While this is not a comprehensive treatment of the topic, the scope is appropriate to this application. Addressing language diversity and religious diversity are important aspects of culturally responsive teaching. Teacher activism is also fundamental to culturally responsive teaching. However, these tenets were not included in the present study because of time constraints. An extension of the study to include these topics is advisable when culturally responsive teaching is being examined more thoroughly.

## **9. Recommendations**

Additional studies are needed to further explore this approach of using fiction in an online environment, to determine its value in uncovering tacit information on sensitive issues. Further research is also needed to examine how preservice teachers apply their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom after beginning their teaching careers. Future studies might also include posting the fictional story online in Wiki format and inviting participants to modify the story to reflect their experiences and growing understanding. The result would be a collaborative construction of understanding and a valuable use of Web 2.0 technology.



## 10. Significance

While other qualitative researchers have created compelling narratives in the *reports* of their studies, none to my knowledge have *initiated* their studies by using fictional narrative as a means for facilitating inquiry. This study pushes the current limits of narrative inquiry and blurs the line between research and creative writing. This study is an imaginative exploration into the realm of possibility for contemporary qualitative research.

Research into preservice teacher understanding of culturally responsive teaching is important in determining how well teacher education programs are preparing educators for the realities of today's diverse classrooms. Teacher education programs must be evaluated and retooled to meet this challenge, and studies such as this one can provide insight into where to begin. Using web-based technology to instruct and to facilitate inquiry provides an entry to further possibilities in conducting teaching and research in the twenty-first century with emerging technologies.

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