

## **The Matrix of Privilege: Transformative Curriculum in Context**

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*This article outlines a curriculum project entitled The Matrix of Privilege that included popular culture as a vehicle for helping students grasp the complexities involved in understanding concepts, such as power and privilege, often discussed in diversity-related courses. The project presented served as a catalyst for campuswide discussion and personal transformation for many who were either directly or indirectly engaged in course dialogue. The curriculum and events that unfolded during the project shaped the consciousness and experiences of both students and professor alike. As a result, the work encouraged deeper reflection and a more focused agenda towards issues of social justice. A synopsis of the curriculum and circumstances prompting its development are presented as images of what is possible when professors activate creative processes, work from a sociocultural perspective, and commit themselves to helping students coparticipate in a diverse and global society. Included is a summary of the curriculum design and processes used, as well as the lessons learned from challenging students' worldviews and encouraging conversations sometimes viewed as taboo within the academy. The information offered is intended to encourage others to utilize the arts as a medium for redesigning curriculum and to understand the benefits of doing so in helping students grapple, especially, with topics of race, class, and gender.*

We are often challenged to design curriculum that activates new knowledge in ways that might transform society. Yet, the availability of resources, coupled with institutional dynamics, can make curricular decisions toward this end difficult. Designing curriculum is, therefore, a highly politicized act that is not without its consequences. As Mazzei (2004) observed, such pursuits are especially problematic when we pursue knowledge differently from the status quo. In creating new visions for transformation, professors face an often overwhelming and difficult task when responding to issues of what is worthwhile to know and how best to present this knowledge. Do we support prevailing tenets, retain expected norms? Or, do we pursue academic freedom and have the courage to challenge views even when we know they counter those of others in the setting? Do we dare challenge students—our colleagues even—to question their reality, to suspend the status quo in order to see their role in the maintenance of knowledge construction? Do we dare re-think, re-imagine all that we thought we knew, to go beyond the conventional wisdom of our peers?

While new approaches to curriculum can yield positive results, choosing this path can be a risky venture with far-reaching implications for both students and faculty involved. The process seems especially dangerous for new and untenured faculty who are often politically vulnerable within their new professorial roles. For example, the decision to pursue pedagogy that may be viewed by some as unorthodox in its design and/or presentation may create animosity among students, as well as peers, and result in institutional pressure to abandon such ideas. Underlying this dynamic are competing philosophies among those involved regarding what is worthwhile to know and possible legacy traditions regarding what it means to be a professor. The legitimacy of knowledge construction is therefore called into question and is a central concern when considering the redesign of curriculum. It seems critical to contemplate possible value clashes and opposing definitions for the meaning of success.

The ideas that personal concepts and generalizations influence curriculum and that success can be defined from a variety of perspectives are not new. Curricular and instructional decisions can (and often do) yield unexpected results, especially when they counter those of people in positions of power and authority. For some faculty, these results can do irrevocable harm, especially to their professional

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careers, making it difficult to retain jobs and acquire the cultural capital needed for long-term success (Wright & Dinkha, 2002). For example, negative reaction from both students and colleagues often seems to increase in terms of frequency, intensity, and duration when professors are of color and female (Carriuolo, 2003; Turner, 2002; Wright & Dinkha, 2002; Gregory, 2001). Given this, the curricular question becomes: Do we dare teach differently as women and professors of color within a high stakes, politicized environment that does not understand our pedagogical or scholarly concerns?

The curriculum discussed here began by imagining what is possible when we do what Pierre (as cited in Mazzei, 2004) suggested: to “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (p. 26). The curriculum was developed in response to a series of “what ifs.” What if we consider teaching as performance art or performance art as teaching? What if classes are presented as staged conversations and theatrical presentations rather than lecture or discussion? What if content is centered on critical pedagogy and designed for the empowerment of students as well as for their personal transformation? What if we acted on Banks’ (2000) suggestion to *really* challenge students’ worldviews in ways that broaden their multicultural understandings? What if hooks’ (1996) view of the “beloved community” (p. 263) was a part of this experience as students are encouraged to pursue intellectualized discussion and transform this into active knowledge? What if Nieto’s (2000) view regarding affirming diversity is a part of students’ daily experience as they are encouraged to move beyond tolerance towards acceptance, respect, and a deeper reverence for humanity? What if we created a curriculum that encouraged a consciousness of hope, intrinsically motivated learning, and a passion for living more fully in life with others?

### **Conceptualizing the Matrix Curriculum**

The Matrix of Privilege curriculum began in the Fall of 2000 but has, until now, remained undocumented in the literature. The curriculum was based on social learning theory and designed from the perspective that behavior manifesting within social settings is shaped (either directly or indirectly) by a variety of psychosocial, historical, and political forces. These forces influence and are influenced by our

decisions, choices, and interactions within a given context. As such, the curriculum was structured around the premise that our experiences affect not only the formal education of students, but also the personal, professional, and social well-being of teachers themselves. The curriculum also focused on unpacking the nature of formal education while exploring intercultural connections to and communications involved in *being* teachers. The professional identity of future teachers was therefore a central issue; of specific concern was students' ability to manifest deep reverence and hospitality for others with different backgrounds. For this reason, the curriculum stressed myriad ways prospective teachers might become more aware of (a) their own and others' political position/s within schools, (b) the historical and cultural dynamics shaping those positions, and (c) the assumptions underlying their acceptance and perceptions of others.

The purpose of the curriculum was to encourage respect for human diversity, which was defined from a multiple perspective that went beyond race, class, and gender to include ability, learning styles, creativity, and other ways in which we differ from each other. The curriculum also addressed the relevance of pursuing social interactions, policies, and practices as free as possible from bias. However, the curriculum was not designed to provide answers to social problems. Rather, it was designed to raise questions about future teachers' responsibilities toward others and their underlying feelings toward working with people different from themselves. It was expected that students would use the course as an initial vehicle for personal transformation and continued professional growth.

The goal of the curriculum was to examine the nature of multicultural education by: (a) discussing the implications of various historical, social, cultural, and political interactions among people in the United States; (b) stressing the importance of affirming diversity within our daily decisions, policies, and social interactions; (c) investigating ways social and cultural identity influence academic motivation and performance; and (d) exploring ways formal education institutionalizes social stratification in society at-large. The central question posed to students was: How can we create a consciousness of hope and leadership in affirming diversity within contemporary society? The framework chosen for the curriculum was born of Hollywood

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mania, movie-screen glitz, and special effects of the movie *The Matrix* (Silver, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 1999). Ultimately, the curriculum touched many lives and altered my own.

### ***Overview of the Curriculum***

The curriculum included a ten-week course, with an introduction and final exam, which made numerous connections to the first movie in the *Matrix* trilogy sequence. In the movie, the main character, Neo (as in “new”), becomes increasingly conscious of the environment around him only to discover that the world he perceived was not reality. (A similar dynamic occurred among students as they learned that their perception of reality was an illusion of inclusion.) In the movie segment, Neo goes in search of the truth about his peaceful, comfortable, yet illusory existence. Neo’s search was, therefore, particularly influential in developing the foundation needed for students’ transformation. The segment was integrated into a performance art piece and presented as a course introduction on the first day of class. The scene selected for the introduction highlighted Neo’s initial encounter with Morpheus, an encounter that ultimately revealed distinctions between reality and the illusion created by the Matrix. As a result of this self-reflection and struggles with the unknown, Neo transformed himself and discovered new knowledge, skills, and dispositions he did not think he possessed. His journey triggered a revolution resulting in positive change for humanity and the end of warring relationships with a race of machines. Similarly, students were challenged from the first day to pursue continuous self-reflection as a vehicle for understanding their interactions with others and to consider ways in which this path might influence constructive change and collective self-efficacy.

In essence, the Matrix of Privilege curriculum was designed to help undergraduates enrolled in a multicultural education class discover new truths about the history they were taught and believed to be the complete truth. During this process, students experienced curriculum material, personal reflection, group dialogue, and activities designed to help them question reality and deconstruct worldviews. Materials encompassed reading books and a plethora of articles about white privilege, multicultural education, class and gender issues, students with special needs, creativity, learning styles, and critical race

theory. Required books included Nieto's (2000) *Affirming Diversity*, Perry and Fraser's (1994) *Freedom's Plow*, Clarke's (1999) *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan Holocaust*, and Brown's (1970) *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Articles and select book chapters assigned during the ten-week period included a range of texts, a sampling of which is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Articles and Book Chapters Included in the Matrix Curriculum

AUTHOR/S	DATE	TITLE
Anzaldúa, G.	1987	La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a new consciousness. From <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i> . San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute.
Bowers, C. A.	1999	Why culture rather than data should be understood as a basis of intelligence. In J. Kane (Ed.), <i>Education, information, and transformation: Essays on learning and thinking</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Cajete, G. A.	1999	The making of an indigenous teacher: Insights into the ecology of teaching. In J. Kane (Ed.), <i>Education, information, and transformation: Essays on learning and thinking</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Collins, P.	1989	The social construction of black feminist thought. <i>Signs</i> , 14(4), 745-773.
Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C.	1984	Introduction. In A. H. Dyson & C. Genishi (Eds.), <i>The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community</i> . Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
Fine, M.	1997	Witnessing whiteness. In M. Fine, L. Weis, & L. Powell (Eds.), <i>Off white: Readings on race, power, and society</i> . New York: Routledge.
Goodson, I. F.	1998	Storytelling the self: Life politics and the study of the teacher's life and work. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), <i>Curriculum: Toward new identities</i> . New York: Garland Publishing.
Gose, B.	1998	A sweeping new defense of affirmative action. In <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> , September 18, 1998, p. A46.
Hwu, W. S.	1998	Curriculum, transcendence and Zen/Taoism: Critical ontology of the self. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), <i>Curriculum: Toward new identities</i> . New York: Garland Publishing.
Jesness, J.	1998	What's wrong with bilingual education?: Repair it, don't replace it. <i>Education Week</i> , 17(43), 72-74.
Ladson-Billings, G.	1999	Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In L. Parker, D. Dehyl, & S. Villenas (Eds.), <i>Race is...race isn't</i> . Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F.	1995	Toward a critical race theory of education. <i>Teachers College Record</i> , 97, 47-68.

Table 1. (continued)

AUTHOR/S	DATE	TITLE
Levine, D.	1995	Building a vision of curriculum reform. In D. Levine, R. Lowe, B. Peterson, & R. Tenorio (Eds.), <i>Rethinking schools: An agenda for change</i> . New York: The New Press.
Levine, J.	1997	White like me. In V. Cyrus (Ed.), <i>Experiencing race, class, and gender in the United States</i> . Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.
Maher, F., & Tetreault, M. K.	1997	Learning in the dark: How assumptions of whiteness shape classroom knowledge. <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> , 67(2), 321-349.
McIntosh, P.	1988	<i>White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack</i> . (Working Paper 189). Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.
Miner, B.	1994	Why students should study history: An interview with H. Zinn. In B. Bigelow, L. Christensen, S. Karp, B. Miner, & B. Peterson (Eds.), <i>Rethinking our classrooms: Teaching for equity and justice</i> . Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
Norman, G.	1998	<i>Hairstory</i> . Unpublished manuscript.
Pomplun, M.	1997	When students with disabilities participate in cooperative groups. <i>Exceptional Children</i> , 64(1), 49-58.
Slavin, R. E.	1996	Neverstreaming: Ending learning disabilities before they start. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 11(2), 74-76.
Sleeter, C. E.	1995	An analysis of the critiques of multicultural education. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee Banks (Eds.), <i>Handbook of research on multicultural education</i> . New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.
Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A.	1987	An analysis of multicultural education in the United States. <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> , 57(4), 421-444.
Titone, C.	1998	Educating the white teacher as ally. In S. Kincheloe, N. Steinberg, R. Rodriguez, & R. Chennault (Eds.), <i>White reign: Deploying whiteness in America</i> . New York: St. Martin's Press.
Urion, C.	1991	Changing academic discourse about native education: Using two pairs of eyes. <i>Canadian Journal of Native Education</i> , 18(1), 1-9.
Valdes, G.	1997	Dual-language immersion programs: A cautionary note concerning the education of language minority students. <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> , 67(3), 391-429.
Weiler, K.	1991	Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference. <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> , 61(4), 449-473.
Winant, H.	1997	Behind blue eyes: Whiteness and contemporary U.S. racial politics. In M. Fine, L. Weis, & L. Powell (Eds.), <i>Off white: Readings on race, power, and society</i> . New York: Routledge.
Yzaguirre, R.	1998	What's wrong with bilingual education?: Is it 'lingual' or is it 'education'? <i>Education Week</i> , 17(43), 72-74.

Specific assignments (provided in greater detail in the section entitled *Course Assignments*) included a cultural autobiography, voice papers, discussion of assigned readings, attendance at select campus or community activities, and a final exam designed to support students' growth as future teachers. Students also experienced a series of critical encounters with invited guest speakers that also challenged them to move beyond personal comfort zones in dealing with diversity-related issues. Dialogue during these sessions focused primarily on race and skin privilege, which seemed to be the most challenging material for students and often led to lively debates. For many, the interplay of ideas presented as a part of the curriculum resulted in rapid change. Several students commented that the curriculum served as a catalyst for change, which reflected the curricular design intended to facilitate personal transformation. The revolution created within these individuals was viewed by me as a prerequisite for their ability to accept, receive, and be responsive to differences in ways that might lead to collective change within school and society.

Ultimately, the personal revolution within, guided by students themselves, might lead to transformation and collective change in ways yet unknown. A similar point was raised in the final release of the movie trilogy, *The Matrix Revolutions* (Silver, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 1999), which occurred after course completion. The connection between revolution and unity among people is perhaps more informative if we consider that a respected colleague on the topic of race matters, Cornel West, was included in the movie cast. Sitting as a valued member of the Council, West provided advice and wisdom related to the revolution and supported Morpheus and Neo's views, which often countered those of the majority. A few years prior to the movie, West sat as a member of the audience during a presentation, which was based on the Matrix curriculum, and provided a number of positive comments relative to the content and its connections to understanding privilege. The presentation, like the curriculum itself, integrated art, lecture, discussion, and the following introduction, which was also used during the first day of course instruction:

The revolution will not be televised next time, not be tele-  
vised. [*The word "revolution" is written on the board, the  
"r" erased, revealing the word "evolution."*] The act of

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*erasing the word symbolically removing the hierarchical boundaries between 'US' and 'them.'*] The revolution will not be televised next time, not be televised. The revolution will not be televised because it is about the evolution of our mind, the vast interior landscape, and the self. It is about discovering WHO we are; acknowledging the "I" in the "all that I AM" in order to understand the "Me" who is capable of co-participating with and celebrating the "We." [*Lights out. Darkness surrounds. A segment from the movie "The Matrix" begins highlighting the first meeting between "Neo" and "Morpheus," where Morpheus extends an invitation for Neo to understand what the Matrix "really is." Segment ends. Lights up. Standing and displaying a silver tray with a mound of red and blue jellybeans, offer, in a Morpheus-like fashion, an invitation for students/audience members to choose either to leave or stay and see "how far down the rabbit hole they can go with the topic at hand."*] The choice is yours. Take the blue pill and you can stay in "la-la-land," comfort zone intact, or take the red pill and, as Morpheus noted, "I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes."

–Comments, first day of class, Fall 2000;  
Conference presentation, Spring 2001

### ***Curriculum Development***

The idea of using the movie emerged from candid conversations with trusted colleagues regarding my critical encounters with students and peers and my observations regarding their receptivity to difference—particularly as it related to race. In describing these encounters, I began referencing the movie and found it helpful in illustrating the interpersonal, intercultural nuances involved that seemed difficult for many students and colleagues to understand. Ultimately, the movie became a metaphor for discussing race or skin privilege and helped students make critical connections to gender, class, and other diversity-related issues such as sexuality, special needs, and multiple intelligences. The metaphor appeared to be a powerful vehicle for transformation and facilitated students' ability to grasp subtle details

about their receptivity to difference while encouraging their intellectual analyses of difficult, typically controversial, and often emotionally charged material. My assessment of this was based on interactions with students and, specifically, the growth and depth of their verbal and written responses throughout the course.

Both personal and professional experiences, including a background in the arts, research interests in creativity, play, and issues of social justice, inspired the Matrix of Privilege curriculum. Using the movie as a vehicle for transformation was viewed as essential in this case given interactions experienced with students and colleagues that appeared more salient to my race, gender, and class (Black, female, and working class background) than my professional position. Given that many students and peers were born and raised in the Midwest, some openly commented on my southern nature and/or communication style. A few spoke candidly about my race and shared comments that indicated their uneasiness. Many either appeared or proclaimed that they were fearful and intimidated by my presence. As a result, it seemed that a new paradigm was needed in order to teach the critical perspectives espoused and required by the core professional curriculum of my department. These prior teaching experiences eventually led to an action research project designed to facilitate meaningful learning experiences about multicultural perspectives for students. Quite frankly, I needed to create a bridge between the curriculum desired and students' geographically situated worldviews in order to help them negotiate the slippery terrain of what seemed to be an illusion of inclusion experienced on a daily basis.

Popular culture (the *Matrix* movie) was selected to create the bridge. The storyline and visual impact of the movie, coupled with its popularity among students at the time, made it an easy and ideal vehicle for making creative decisions and connections to course material. The use of popular culture not only helped students understand the complex concepts of power and privilege and other course material related to race, gender, and class, it also encouraged my own creativity that, until that time, had remained largely suppressed by the Ph.D. and academic process. The creative and contemporary edge to the work also likely shielded the curriculum from possible attack during its earlier stages of development. By its nature, popular culture is accessible and offers something familiar to its audiences. As such, the movie appealed to the

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interests of both students and colleagues alike who were curious about the connections made. Students especially enjoyed the novelty of seeing the movie differently, as a catalyst for intellectual dialogue. The use of popular culture was, therefore, essential to the curriculum design and was included for several additional (and perhaps more salient) reasons. For example, much of students' prior experience shared with me regarding race, class, and gender seemed to have resulted in largely passive and indirect knowledge. Many involved in the actual Matrix curriculum had led sheltered lives and saw themselves not as young adults but, rather, as adolescents; paradoxically, many willingly aspired to positions of leadership in teaching, medicine, etc. The movie was, therefore, a way of inviting students to reveal the Matrix through ongoing self-reflection about race and skin privilege, by identifying their personal inhibitions or ambivalence regarding difference, and by encouraging the pursuit of equity, freedom, justice, responsibility, and hooks' (1996) "beloved community" (p. 263).

### **Context and Curriculum Design**

The Matrix of Privilege curriculum was designed for a multicultural education course that involved undergraduate students who attended a small, private, liberal arts college in the Midwest. A majority came from privileged backgrounds and referred to campus life as living "inside a bubble" (Student Comment, 2000). As a visiting professor on sabbatical, the bubble image seemed to reflect a somewhat fragile existence that students in the setting either proclaimed or appeared to face; this differed markedly from my home institution at the time, where most students were working class, first generation, and seemed more resilient. Given that many in the new setting had either led or appeared to lead sheltered lives, a transformative approach to curriculum design was selected as a better fit. In many ways, the transformative approach provided students greater access to otherwise complex and potentially emotionally charged material. As such, the course served as a vehicle for processing knowledge in ways that challenged students' preconceptions and somewhat sheltered life experiences.

Following selection of the movie, which was analyzed for possible connections to course content and used as a vehicle for making decisions about curriculum material and content, a choice was made to structure the course on a pass/not pass basis. The use of the pass/not pass rather than a traditional graded route appeared consistent with one of the course goals, which was to initiate students' self-reflective process. In order to encourage students to be as open and honest as possible, it seemed necessary to avoid evaluating their personal belief structures and progress in meeting course goals. In essence, students could take the course without fear of being judged or worrying about making mistakes. The pass/not pass system also encouraged students to be more reflective without having them worry about their grade or trying to construct responses around perceived notions about what the professor wants.

To facilitate meaningful conversations, students were encouraged throughout the process to be honest about their thoughts—although some (mostly White students) were reluctant, at first, to express their opinions. Others (mostly students-of-color) felt comfortable from the beginning disclosing personal feelings and reactions to course material throughout the course. A few (specifically, four White women) remained reluctant to disclose information throughout the course and appeared to engage the course in the context of resistance. The four also appeared more constrained by the course material, as evidenced by their comments during individual meetings after class in which they openly expressed dislike for course material written by African American authors. My analysis of their remarks and actions was also based on conversations with guest lecturers (who experienced a similar dynamic when interacting with students) and observations of colleagues teaching similar material at other institutions. These conversations suggested that the women involved might have projected feelings actually intended toward me onto African American authors. In other words, the students seemed uncomfortable having a woman of color challenging them about their worldviews—especially regarding race, class, and gender.

However, these intercultural dynamics were considered integral to the course design. A review of the literature, prior teaching experiences, and stories shared by colleagues prior to the Matrix curriculum all suggested that skin color of the professor is a crucial

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factor in how students react to course content. For example, students-of-color participating in the Matrix curriculum stated that they felt comfortable revealing thoughts to me as a professor-of-color or to guest lecturers who were of-color, but expressed reluctance to do so with White colleagues on campus. Similarly, White students seemed more likely to express feelings to colleagues who were also White or appeared more comfortable with guest lecturers who were White. In any case, the four White women previously mentioned were more reluctant than other students to share their thoughts and tended to describe the methodology and course material used in derogatory tones, sometimes recounting the work as racist or as perpetuating racism. These feelings were noticeably present in the students' journal reflections, collected on a weekly basis, and during informal conversations in which the women expressly referred to themselves as "liberal" and as having a "more evolved" consciousness than their peers (Student Comments, 2000). It appeared that the women were more engaged in trying to convince me of their evolution than actually addressing the assumptions underlying their reactions. Meetings after class were used to engage the women in critical conversations regarding the relationship of their reactions to White and class privilege.

### *Course Assignments*

A series of assignments was also designed to facilitate students' personal inquiry into possible gaps between their stated or perceived reality and what actually happens and took into consideration the backgrounds and interests of the students' involved. In addition, I processed the curriculum on a weekly basis with peers teaching similar material at other institutions and with guest lecturers both prior to and immediately following their class presentations. These strategies proved helpful as a way of maintaining objectivity when analyzing students' reactions and in crafting responses intended to keep them actively engaged in self-reflection.

Reflective practice was central to the overall design. For example, students began the course by creating a cultural autobiography, which was later expanded into an e-journal submitted weekly to a digital drop-box. The autobiography and e-journal were ways of checking in

with students on an individual basis throughout the course and of monitoring students' growth. With the autobiography, students were initially instructed to:

Identify and analyze the transmission of some aspect of your culture (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion) and speculate as to how this feature of your cultural identity will shape your future role as a cultural worker. If appropriate, examine how membership in a culturally dominant group/s might result in advantages over others, even if unwarranted or not desired.

At mid-term, students were asked to prepare a second draft of their autobiography and were instructed to:

Review your first draft and prepare an addendum analyzing any changes (if any) in your perceptions as a result of class discussions. Outline the factors you believe influenced your decision as to whether or not your perspective shifted.

Students also completed a final draft, at the end of the course, in which they were asked to:

Review your first two responses. Then, reflecting on what you have learned in the course, discuss ways your original autobiography shifted (if any) as a result of the dialogue presented. Discuss any plans for expanding your personal and future professional life relative to affirming diversity (or your rationale for not doing so if you so choose). Conclude with a self-assessment concerning your overall growth as a learner during the course (commenting, in the process, on your first and second drafts).

As previously noted, students' cultural autobiography responses were expanded into weekly e-journals in which they were asked to comment on ideas presented in class, assigned readings, guest lectures, and other class dialogue. Students were provided opportunities to modify and resubmit their original ideas, which were then analyzed at the end of the course as a way of documenting changes in perceptions that might be related to course content.

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To provide emotional support and in order to establish rapport, students were required to meet with me on a bi-weekly basis. Students were also encouraged to take advantage of office hours. These meetings consisted largely of qualitative interviews with students and were designed to gain their insights about course content and emotional reactions to the material presented. These conversations were viewed as essential to course goals and especially necessary for students who perceived themselves largely as “still adolescents” rather than young adults (Student Comment, 2000). Bi-weekly conversations were especially critical in establishing a stronger bond with students who might otherwise be reluctant to express themselves in class. Given this, these meetings offered students opportunities to say things they otherwise would not say in class and provided me with a way of monitoring their perceptions, reflections, and emotional state during the course. Coupled with required readings and other assignments, these conversations were critical in the unpacking, especially, of White and class privilege. For example, these meetings provided the four White women mentioned earlier a vehicle for analyzing their belief that they had “already overcome assumptions about race and gender” (Student Comment, 2000). Several of the women shared, as well, their surprise at the subsequent realization that they may still hold assumptions that shape their interactions and reactions to others. One of the women was in tears at the realization that she might have used her position of power and privilege to discount a class discussion I had led earlier that day.

Students were also required to create a Voice Paper in which they were required to interview a person from a culture different from themselves about their experiences growing up and, in particular, about school and/or college experiences related either to their gender, sexual orientation, and/or cultural background. Students were verbally instructed to write a narrative as if they were the person interviewed and then have that person review the work for possible errors and/or misconceptions about what they said. In other words, students were asked to have the person interviewed check assumptions and accuracy of what they believed they heard. Once the Voice Paper was written, students were then assigned to groups and required to present their paper orally, on assigned dates, and to engage their peers in a discussion afterwards about the content presented. Instructions noted in the course syllabus for this assignment included the following:

This paper is an attempt to have you research and write from the perspective of another individual, one who is a member of a social group/s related to the topics listed in the syllabus for the date/s noted. Your paper may be presented either in the manner of Nieto's case studies or using a variation of your choice. In total, your presentation should be no more than eight minutes in length, with additional time following the panel of presenters for class discussion. Your work should include thoughtful discussion of the particular issue faced by people from the social group selected. Try to enlighten, inform, and provoke thoughtful discussion while supporting your ideas from several scholarly sources (including assigned readings). Submit a one-page synopsis of your salient points, along with a description of the procedures used in preparing the paper, via the *Paperless Class*. Also, discuss the references used in your work.

The use of student-led discussions was integral in the course design, which included a variety of reading material (see, for example, Table 1). Students already knew some of the material from other courses (e.g., McIntosh's 1988 article entitled *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*). However, many commented in their journals or during informal conversations with me that their prior exposure was primarily passive in nature. Several also noted that their understanding of these readings was not really activated until they experienced the Matrix curriculum. In essence, students' precourse knowledge appeared to be sedentary, hidden from view and, when not hidden, expressed in highly intellectualized ways that resulted in somewhat contrived conversations about race, class, and gender. Because most did not personalize the information, many were unable to meaningfully apply what they had learned to their personal lives or in their interactions with others outside the institution. Given this distance and depersonalization, White students, in particular, tended to use language typically viewed as politically correct. This allowed students in this case to avoid disclosing information about their true feelings regarding course content. As a result, students' emotional reactions sometimes undermined their learning while reinforcing the depersonalization of the content experienced. Such was the case with the four White women

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who appeared to have depersonalized engagement in intellectual discussions, thus allowing them to use language deemed by them as more “politically correct” (a term mentioned by one of the women during our weekly meetings). Such depersonalization tended to reinforce the very stereotypes students in this case supposedly wanted to dispel. Similarly, the comfort zones of majority students, in general, were often maintained by distancing themselves from the daily reality experienced by a small minority of their peers also enrolled in the course.

In many ways, the maintenance of comfort zones by some of the majority students was unfortunate, for many in this category were not only intellectually capable but, by virtue of their dual privilege of class *and* race, were in perhaps the most powerful position to actually make a difference. With futures bright and leadership potential strong, but with such power prospectively vested in people so young and without direct experiences, an incredible loss of potential seemed inevitable using more traditional methods. To break this cycle required a different type of curriculum—one that encouraged students to develop wisdom and make discerning decisions, to work at uncovering and hearing multiple truths, and to become independent thinkers capable of coparticipating and teaching in a multicultural democracy.

To offset the possibility of depersonalization of course content, students were asked, in response to a class discussion, to keep a journal of critical incidents across campus they believed were race and gender related, to report their findings back to the class, and to discuss this with peers during class discussions. In addition, as a part of course assignments, students were required to complete three or more Reality Teaching Activities, which involved participating in five multicultural events (one mandatory and the others self-selected with approval by me beforehand) that they would otherwise not attend and that challenged their comfort zone by virtue of interacting with people different from themselves. Following their attendance, students were asked to submit a reflection describing the event and the people present, their reactions during participation and afterthoughts, and any changes in or reinforcement of their perceptions regarding the cultural group in question. Students were also asked to provide evidence documenting their attendance (ticket stub, photo, etc.).

Course material, therefore, encouraged students to process the psychological remnants of a historical past fraught with contradictions (depending on whose perspective is shared). These contradictions have resulted in the present-day illusion of inclusion, giving rise to the belief among many students that “racism no longer exists” (Student Comment, 2000). Thus, the Matrix of Privilege curriculum established the foundation for understanding history as a unit of measurement for current decisions, actions, and interactions. The curriculum also focused on how existence in our highly complex, diverse, and often contrived, highly industrialized society is bound by historical parameters of our not-too-distant past. Further, the curriculum revealed how our current ideologies are linked to this past. These images manifest today as mutated forms that continue to shape our social and personal consciousness. In other words, we both are influenced by and influence the continuation of this dynamic. Presenting the curriculum from a systems perspective of human behavior assisted students’ understanding of their interactions among people, environment, and behavior. A systems perspective further enhanced students’ understanding of Mills’ (2000) conception of the sociological imagination, which emphasized the relationships among social, personal, and historical dimensions. Readings, class activities, and individual and group conversations were also used to help students recognize how we are ultimately the architects of society. In confronting the social and psychological content included in the Matrix of Privilege curriculum, students were told, just as Neo recognized, “You are ‘the one’ you’ve been waiting for” (Silver, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 1999).

The curriculum developed, therefore, provided a prototype for working with diversity-related material and exploring anti-racist ideologies. The curriculum was purposefully designed to facilitate students’ entrance into the world of others, otherwise commonly known as minorities. In particular, the curriculum assisted students’ transition between theory and practice and encouraged them to transfer knowledge gained in their daily lives into practice as individuals and professionals. Further, the curriculum was interdisciplinary in nature and relied heavily on content drawn primarily from sociology, psychology, philosophy, the arts, and education. Shared tenets based on these disciplines both inspired and challenged students, many of whom aspired to teach others

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(or minorities) in P-12 settings. As a result, students were encouraged to push personal, perceptual boundaries and to work in more profound ways, with a deeper sense of purpose about human life.

Importantly, the curriculum *was not* about trying to change students' minds or trying to convert people. Rather, the curriculum was about helping students reflect deeply on the issues presented and encouraging students to perceive their world from different viewpoints—to encourage all to remove blinders. To assist this end, the curriculum included a long list of seasoned guest speakers, all of whom had direct experiences and professional expertise in the historical perspectives included as a part of the course syllabus. A carefully selected list of articles, books, and chapters (noted previously) were also included as reading assignments. During class, students processed these ideas through an assignment called Table Talk, which included using a fishbowl technique in which students were literally invited to a table (complete with table cloth, tea/coffee, flowers, etc.) to discuss assigned readings. In groups of four to five, students were asked to present readings on select dates. Students began their discussion by first individually identifying a sentence that resonated particularly with them and then reading this sentence without commentary while others at the table listened. Afterwards, students discussed why they selected the passage. In addition, students were asked to think about three things that they learned, thought, and still had questions about and to question each other, if needed. Students not involved in the Table Talk discussion sat on the perimeter of the table in a large circle and observed/listened to the dialogue. These students also took notes and, following a 30 to 40-minute period (depending on the Table Talk discussion), were provided an opportunity to share reactions, comments, or ask questions of presenters. Typically, this involved having students, one-at-a-time around the perimeter, share their thoughts either about the comments made and/or the interactions among their peers during Table Talk. If students did not want to make a comment, they simply said "Pass" and the next person would have the floor. I also observed each Table Talk group and students around the perimeter as discussion unfolded and provided comments at the end of class. I then provided each team a written assessment regarding the level of synthesis and participation among group members.

In addition to Table Talk, students made presentations (many of which included student-made movie documentaries or performances based on personal experiences) addressing course content presented in the syllabus related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disabilities, and/or creativity. For example, one student analyzed a variety of websites perpetuating hatred and White segregation. Another made a presentation analyzing gender issues related to Barbie dolls based on a literature review. Another had peers view the movie *The Color of Fear* (Lee, 1994) and discuss this afterwards. During this segment, one student came to the realization that one of the cast members was from his hometown. He shared this with the class and outlined his realization that he held similar views. He later commented how the movie helped him recognize his own views and strengthened his commitment to question assumptions.

Course assignments such as those previously described were enhanced by students' independent participation in chat-room discussions about the class, which (based on conversations with students) also challenged group norms and individual comfort zones. In addition, throughout the course, students self-assessed their progress and met individually with me, as needed, after class to process course content and discuss concerns.

In lieu of a traditional final exam, students were assigned the final task of creating a collaborative performance-art piece that was described in the syllabus as the following:

In lieu of a final exam, you are asked to work as a class to prepare a capstone multimedia experience addressing either the meaning of multicultural education or some aspect related to the course. Your work should be presentable to an intergenerational audience, be educational, and informative in nature. Class meetings will be held periodically throughout the semester to allow time for group coordination of events. Your exhibition, presentation, and/or performance may be as creative as you like. Try to include sound, visuals, movement, text, etc. However, the entire segment (all participants included) should not exceed two hours including time afterwards for audience dialogue.

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As a part of this assignment, students prepared and distributed publicity materials and invited peers, other professors, and the local community as an audience for the staged event. As an assessment of their work, students were required to answer audience questions following their performance. In addition, students responded to inquiries posed by a panel of invited faculty members from area institutions. The panel consisted of faculty with an active research and/or teaching interest centered on multicultural, anti-racist topics. Colleagues were further charged with rating the performance using a rubric designed for this purpose and providing feedback both to students and to me about the quality of the work. The goal of the final project was to teach others while reflecting on cumulative knowledge gained through the course. In particular, the final exam embodied the tenets of critical pedagogy and empowerment to help students make sense of the material in personal and meaningful ways. The final also mirrored the collective experience of students while honoring the individual, personal journey each had decided to take.

The consensus among students was that the final exam was, by far, the most powerful aspect of the course. As one student noted in response to a panelist's inquiry about the exam process, "I just took a Chemistry exam and promptly forgot everything. I will remember this exam for *the rest* of my life" (Student Comment, 2000). Students also used a multimedia approach to their final performance, which included a movie clip of Mohammed Ali describing the Me/We connection highlighted during our class discussion, poetry readings with students individually spotlighted on stage, and a human chain of students chanting key phrases "about getting on board" with multicultural education (Student Comment, 2000). Also included were brief theatrical scenarios, quotations from assigned readings, and additional video clips designed to illustrate key concepts and understandings in multimedia form. Staged conversations mirrored salient features from students' Table Talk assignments and highlighted critical events that occurred in students' class discussions. The consensus of faculty observers (including me) was that students conveyed not only the depth and breadth of course content, but also a sense of their personal growth gained during the course. In addition, they effectively captured the essence of multicultural education and the necessity for creating a stronger, more inclusive community.

### Reflections About the Curriculum

The curriculum designed seemed to facilitate students' growth in dealing with difference by focusing on processes necessary for constructive transformation. Given that many in the class aspired to become teachers, the curriculum highlighted, in particular, the ideals of teachers as cultural workers espoused by Freire (1998). Thus, underlying goals of the curriculum were to encourage self-reflection, critical analysis of personal interactions with others, and decisions manifesting a deeper reverence for others and connectedness to higher ideals. I did not (and do not) think such goals were contradictory to the tenets of higher education, although one student described my teaching methods as "unorthodox" and warned me to adopt a more traditional approach in order "to be invited back" (Student Comments, 2000). Notwithstanding that student's opinion, I took guidance from several influential thinkers. For example, Freire (1998) believed there is reciprocity in the teaching and learning process where the professor and students are virtually indistinguishable from each other. Freire also urged teachers not to separate the intellectual self from the emotional self. Likewise, educational philosophers such as Steiner, Montessori, and Dewey all viewed the intellectual self as interconnected with the feeling and willing self. In essence, the integration of emotions within the intellectual discourse seemed to encourage both students and myself to go against the conventional tenets and to dare to be different. The process of daring seemed particularly relevant given many students' future aspirations of also being a teacher. As Freire noted, as teachers,

[w]e must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion. We must dare so that we can continue to teach for a long time under conditions that we know well ... We must dare so that we can continue to do so even when it is so much more materially advantageous to stop daring. (p. xvii)

So I dared. I dared to teach with the fullness of my being. My approach was simple: "All that I have, all that I am, all that I know, I will share with you. All that you want, all that you yearn for, I will strive to help you obtain" (Comments Shared with Students, 2000). Transformations were slow; deeply held beliefs are highly resistant to

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change. And yet, transformations occurred. For example, one student mentioned how the class encouraged her to create a staged discourse about the campus experiences of Japanese students. Others, but not all, spoke of personal changes they made as a result of experiencing the course. Still others contacted me later to share news of critical shifts they made in their thinking. These shifts have, gratifyingly, been seemingly enduring.

### *Replicating the Curriculum*

Readers wishing to precisely replicate the curriculum will find it difficult given that the design presented embodied a dynamic process of class discussion and questioning that was spontaneous in nature. Although the curriculum structure is provided here for consideration, specific commentary and questions posed to students were explicit to this particular campus, geographic region, and group of students. However, the discussion of assignments may be helpful in creating a similar course. From my perspective, the key elements inherent within the curriculum design that are critical include: (a) an emphasis on personal transformation and self-reflection, (b) use of popular culture as a vehicle for making content-related connections, (c) use of a pass/not pass grading system, (d) weekly meetings to provide system support for students' emotional reactions, (e) involvement of colleagues who teach similar content in the creation, delivery, and evaluation of students' work, and (f) use of a final exam and course activities with guest lecturers as a way of rebuilding community and healing residual emotions among peers and between students and professor. Finally, in the words of Freire (1998), "Don't let the fear of what is difficult paralyze you" (p. 27).

### *Student Reactions*

While initiated four years ago, the curriculum appears to have created an internal revolution for some students that continues today. Specifically, there appears to be a fundamental change in the interior landscapes among those who willingly shared their stories with me once the course was over and after leaving the institution. Such change was noticeable not only among those enrolled in the course, but also among others on the campus who were indirectly affected. For example,

in-class conversations were continued outside of class with peers, faculty, and staff. Many of these I participated in and have firsthand knowledge of; others involved people who shared their observations with me afterwards. From my perspective and that of many students who participated in the course, it seemed that, suddenly, people were increasingly talking, *really* talking about race, class, and gender matters. Some of the students enrolled in the class formed groups with others across campus to discuss topics raised in class. One student in the course created a theatrical production centered around mutated racism and minority group isolation and invited the campus community to attend. She discussed her ideas with me beforehand and, during this conversation, linked her ideas specifically to class discussions that she described as “still reverberating” in her mind (Student Comment, 2000). Following her production, she engaged the audience in a dialogue about the performance and content presented much in the way we did during class.

Students’ enrolled in the curriculum also shared that they regularly engaged in course-related discussions with peers during other classes (i.e., history), which was confirmed by colleagues teaching these classes. In essence, many in the small campus community seemed to come alive with conversations about the matrix of privilege. While I cannot say for certain that this was directly related to the curriculum, it appeared that both scholars and others with expertise on white privilege, race, and gender matters were suddenly invited to campus and that these events were related to students’ campuswide discussions. Many of the events also occurred during the latter part of the course and initial weeks of the following semester. Even alumni shared stories of their campus cultural experiences and invited students to attend. Students, faculty, and staff alike all attended these events, which were rich, full of emotion, and highly intellectual. The intimacy of the small campus seemed to encourage debate and conversation that might not have been possible in a larger setting. As a student enrolled in the course noted, campus conversations “were taken to the next level” (Student Comment, 2000). Many others also expressed excitement about the possibility of long-lasting change. Another student in the course, who described himself as an “upper class, white, heterosexual male” wrote and later publicly presented the following:

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On the most basic levels, I benefit from the matrix. My life is easy because I don't have to fight against the world I live in in order to survive ... I've been raised to appreciate the things that I have and have recognized from an early age that not everyone is as lucky as I am. Despite this, I have never really known, or at least I thought I didn't know, how to treat and interact with someone who does not occupy the same place as me in the matrix of privilege ... I was striving to be color, class, and gender blind. I have come to realize that this point of view is dangerous ... I hope that some day I will be able to fully overcome my own barriers that I have created and bring the world a little closer together in defeating the matrix of privilege.

At the conclusion of the class, many students shared their appreciation for having gone through the curriculum. As one noted, "I've read some of these materials in another class but now I *really understand* them" (Student Comment, 2000). Others, mostly white males, shared their appreciation for having had an opportunity to encounter course dialogue about race, in particular. Still others noted their desire to continue to "pursue ideas related to the matrix of privilege" (Student Comment, 2000). Many students-of-color expressed gratitude for having had "meaningful conversations" about race issues and appeared validated in the setting (Student Comment, 2000). Some students assumed leadership roles following the course to address issues inherent within their own campus setting. However, a few students (the four White women mentioned earlier) expressed anger about course content related to race in particular. The four appeared most uncomfortable with the fact that their peers-of-color were more comfortable discussing race, gender, and class issues than they were. To offset the possibility of negative perceptions, additional meetings were held with me to process their feelings. Nevertheless, I cannot say for certain that these feelings were dissipated.

### *Accomplishments*

Overall, the preponderance of students expressed an increased awareness and acceptance of their responsibility regarding their co-participation in society. The majority expressed confidence that, as a

result of the course, they would continue to uncover new truths about themselves and others. There was also consensus that “the real work” was just beginning (Student Comment, 2000). Four years later, students who were freshmen at the time of curriculum implementation and not enrolled in the course contacted me and shared how much campus discussions had affected their worldviews and commitment to issues of social justice. An invited visit to the campus shortly thereafter to make a presentation also revealed a staff member who stated that she had altered her approach in working with students as a result of the curriculum. Clearly, transformation had occurred on some level and some were no longer the same as before—including me. Whereas other campus conversations may have also contributed to these results, informal conversations with those present appear to support the role of the Matrix curriculum as a catalyst for change. From my perspective, that is accomplishment enough. What began as action research to explore ways to help students divest themselves of deep-seated beliefs regarding their reactions to and interactions with people different from themselves ended with a possible vehicle—the arts and popular culture—for helping faculty and staff understand the same. Even within my present institution (although still in the Midwest and more urban in nature), where people are more used to interacting with people-of-color, I continue to observe incidents of mutated racism and the residual effects of privilege. Nevertheless, there is peace in knowing that our institutional mission—one of creating a spirit of hospitality and deep reverence for others—guides our decisions and is especially useful to our work in teacher education. If asked specifically what was accomplished in this course, my response would be simply that we planted seed thought-forms that have the potential for becoming something greater than the self that manifested in each of us at the time. Such thought-forms just might create a new paradigm of hope regarding social justice.

In hindsight, the relevancy of course content, based on the geographic setting, personal experiences, and interests of students, encouraged student co-participation in other campus decisions affecting their lives. Such participation helped students to demystify the process of teaching and learning in higher education in order to understand ways of accomplishing the same in P-12. As a result, the course provided one way to openly discuss ways to manifest a deeper reverence for

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people. To accomplish this, it was necessary to avoid making things too comfortable. In addition, the use of interdisciplinary, creative approaches encouraged the imagination which, as Greene (1995) noted, is critical to social change in education. At the very least, *The Matrix of Privilege* curriculum helped others (including me) to rethink the use and design of final exams. It demonstrated how students' knowledge construction could be assessed and documented differently in higher education.

If asked how I specifically know that I accomplished these things, my response is quite simple—many of the people involved told me so. It was observed in their remarks, their writing, the growth observed over time, through stories shared following class and since graduation, through comments from colleagues and the observations and feedback of those in particular who observed me teach, who worked with me as guest lecturers, who evaluated students (and me) during the final exam, and who continue to process ideas with me regarding the *Matrix*. If asked to provide specific data supportive of this, my response is to paraphrase Albert Einstein—not everything that counts can be counted. Nevertheless, what I can provide is a plethora of anecdotal data—insights gained from emerging themes identified from hours of contemplation. Regardless of what we believe, I feel confident that many of those involved in the curricular experience described have since thought about our earlier conversations in one way or another and that these thoughts have been especially prevalent in a post 9-11 cultural climate and the aftermath of Katrina. Perhaps one day I will be able to contact students again for one last Table Talk to check my assumptions.

### **Lessons Learned**

Of most relevance to my current endeavors is a continued emphasis on transformation and how such processes can facilitate personal growth among both practicing and preservice teachers. In addition, the experience has been most helpful in mentoring both colleagues and students regarding the value of and risks involved in using creative approaches to pedagogy. In these cases, I have encouraged students and colleagues to integrate teaching, scholarship, and service to bring about desired change. In addition, I cautioned all

to remember that although perceived as beneficial, peers might view creative approaches as unorthodox and even dangerous. Instead of ignoring the challenges, I have advocated fearlessness from job constraints in order to accomplish the goals desired.

Personally, I have modified earlier instructional conversations based on the specific needs of students. In many ways, my current practice increases the emphasis on and necessity for balancing the social, psychological, and political dynamics involved in teaching and learning. In these cases, discussions about diversity and social justice now appear to be more relevant and meaningful in their efforts to create hooks' "beloved community" (1996, p. 263). These discussions could not have been actualized without a commitment to perspective-taking and reflective practice. For example, perspective-taking allowed many involved in the Matrix curriculum an opportunity to see things from another's point of view and to make critical connections to historical events. Nevertheless, I am careful to forewarn both students and colleagues not to move beyond the boundaries of their capability when engaging in such conversations with their own students, advice I also strive to follow. I also advocate the use of reflective practice and self-study as a way of understanding the issues involved and pursuing continuous improvement.

As noted earlier, the pattern of behavior initially observed among my professional interactions and that ultimately inspired the Matrix of Privilege curriculum was particularly noticeable among majority students and peers. While similar interactions continue to present themselves in my professional arena, with each new encounter additional insights are gained that inspire new ideas. In these situations, the power of the intuitive, creative, and intellectual process is ever present as a vehicle for constructive change. Viewing curriculum as performance art is therefore an enticing alternative to traditional, more static models. However, readers are asked to also consider Sawyer's (2004) criticism of performance art as staged, scripted events that inevitably enact "a performance *for* students" in the design of similar projects (p. 12). As Sawyer observed, using performance art as a metaphor for teaching "is problematic, because it suggests a solo performer reading from a script, with the students as the passive, observing audience" (p. 12). Given this, Sawyer noted that:

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The teaching as performance metaphor must be extended to recognize the collaborative and emergent nature of exploratory classroom discussion. Otherwise, the metaphor could become just another form of scripted instruction, denying teachers the creative freedom that the metaphor was initially intended to evoke. (p. 19)

Here, the Matrix of Privilege curriculum did not *use* performance art as a metaphor for teaching. Rather, the curriculum itself *was* performance art—a work that included students as co-participants in the decisions affecting their lives, which included discourse that they themselves created in response to material presented. Except for the opening statement on the first day of class, students were, as Sawyer (2004) advocated, *active* participants, fully engaged in collaborative conversations. As opposed to passive witnesses of traditional curriculum, students were, from the beginning, largely in charge of their own journey. Even in the opening statement, which was more an invitation to participate than a dictate, students were provided a choice. Literally, students assumed responsibility for their own learning. The curriculum simply served as the vehicle or catalyst for change as students were both actors and audience in the improvisational dialogue—especially with activities such as Table Talk. My role was secondary, more art critique than direction, and more facilitator than the traditional perspectives of “teacher.”

Acceptance of a greater leadership role took time for some students, due largely to habits gained from more traditional instructional approaches and resistance to difference. Nevertheless, as Sawyer (2004) promoted, students were involved from the first day in an interactive and improvisational endeavor that activated “new knowledge and insights” gained from self-reflection and “exploratory discussion” with peers (p. 19). The acquisition of this knowledge created a dream space for students’ further discovery of the sociocultural enigmas influencing lived experience. The dream space also encouraged students to be open to vulnerability in the learning process. Both the quickening of minds and the readiness of hearts were essential for the cultivation of what Qiuyun (2001) referred to as an “ethic of caring” critical for future success and the collaborative nature of the final exam (p. 107).

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Since its conception, the Matrix of Privilege curriculum morphed into a body of work that fueled new research related to collective self-efficacy and professional identity. From those earlier, meager seeds, it appears that something sprouted and new beginnings, ways of seeing and of understanding, were cultivated ... not only among students, but also among a few peers and within my own consciousness as I continue to pursue what it means to teach and “to know with our entire body” (Freire, 1998, p. 3). As Freire (quoted in hooks, 1994, p. v) wisely presaged, the students and I discovered how “to begin anew, to make, to reconstruct and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand, and to live life as a process—live to become.” This was/is perhaps a worthy goal for something called *higher education*.

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