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In Times of Crisis: Our Story of Resilience

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In this paper, the authors take a reflective look at the precursor and process of designing a diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice project and course while navigating our own experiences of being othered as graduate student educators of color. We discuss our own stories and narratives of resilience during the COVID-19 global pandemic around issues of immigration, racism, police violence, the struggles, and challenges of English Language Learners (ELLs), and gender discrimination. Using storying as our methodology, the paper begins with the birth of our team through the lens/story of our colleague. This is followed by the introduction, our conceptualization of resilience (drawing on wider literature), the development of the project - the four-modular course and its impact. Each graduate student educator then provides their narrative on resilience and we conclude with a discussion on the implications for educators. We discuss how our personal, teaching, and scholarly experiences led to activism, advocacy, and social change, as our way of resilience.

Keywords: social justice | resilience | diversity | narratives

The Genesis

Teaching a multicultural education class in a face-to-face setting was already challenging.

An African in an American classroom

A predominantly white classroom

Talking about race, language, culture, sexuality, ability

Complex, content, complex, discomfort, necessary discomfort

On the horizon... a socially just world

Then Covid-19 hit, and the class was shifted online. With two kids also at home, I had to adapt; teach, help my kids with virtual school, take care of my home and conduct research. How did I do it? When I look back, I see faith, prayers, hard work and planning that is dynamic. When

summer arrived, I was still single parenting because of travel restrictions due to Covid-19. My research focus also changed, changing the trajectory of where I was headed. Then, there was the murder of George Floyd, conversations and rhetoric on immigration, people of color, police, Asians, healthcare, and the one closest to my heart, racial, cultural, and linguistic inequities in education.

In my research that focuses on African culturally and linguistically centered methodology through oral culture, my conversations with my African collaborators revealed how the current U.S. rhetoric influenced both negatively and positively how they identify as African, especially for their children's sake. The outsider gaze that is already visible in the color of the skin, the accent that tells the story of the tongue that twists and almost sings in its beautiful native language, oh! oh! The food.... Aromas that tell you we are here. So, they try to hide sometimes, especially the children within these families. Resilience is staying true to who you are, adapting when needed and showing that our beauty is in our differences.

On that fateful day when the call for the grant was announced, I knew it was my opportunity to do something. To be actively involved in shaping the racial conversation, in working towards equity, inclusion and justice. Thus, I began with a conversation. A conversation with my colleagues, who have become family, to pull together our experiences, our expertise, our voices to work towards change, a change that we had all been working towards in various ways. Resilience is adding on extra work to develop a course on social justice for the state when you have primary responsibilities to teach, work with your children at home (virtual school), work on your dissertation, take care of home and family, all the while navigating a positive Covid -19 test. Resilience is moving beyond the self to put together a team and leading a team to develop a diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice course that answered a need in the midwestern state. What was even interesting beyond winning the grant, was how we had to design a social justice-oriented course for an online setting. How we had planned for about 60 participants, only to have over 300 educators register from across Indiana and even internationally. Through this collaboration, I learned to lead beyond the academic and project focus. To lead in care and support for the group. To lead in encouraging others through various challenges. Holding each other's hands, feeling their pain, praying with them, laughing with them, and transforming educators for a better future that is equitable and just. Engaging with pre/in-service teachers to work towards diversity in the face of resistance, to build allyship, and move beyond just knowing and understanding to developing strategies for change. Resilience is doing all these and succeeding at making that impact. We planted a seed, in leading the planting, I have learned to do this work with others, to gain strength from them as I give it back.

Introduction

The world is coping with a myriad of persistent issues within a systemically inequitable world. These issues are made increasingly more evident because of the challenges presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the protests sparked by the police killing and murder of George Floyd and others, a heightened racial reckoning, and an emergent consciousness among people in the U.S. and around the world (Osei-Tutu et. al., 2022). Through the development of the four-modular course, "Building a Community of Diverse, Inclusive and Justice Oriented Scholars through Critical Theory (DIJS)" emerged the collective desire to respond to and take part in enacting change in the U.S. Midwestern context. Our goal was centered on fighting the proliferation of hate, anxiety, division, and fear during these unprecedented times. This is particularly pertinent when

the entire world is, all at once, experiencing social and emotional (global pandemic and rise in ultra-nationalism and neo-Nazi supremacist groups, xenophobia, racism), environmental (global warming), and economic challenges that cry out for immediate attention and assistance. The aforementioned incidents, and the many more assaults on human rights, freedom, and democracy, especially those directed at minoritized, and marginalized groups now have heightened exposure due to technological advancements and the proliferation of social media. The silver lining of this historic moment is that it has revealed the interconnected nature of the environmental, health, socio-economic, and political challenges and can be considered as a portal to a new reimagined world (Roy, 2020). Communities are rising to the challenge, presented by continuous threats to human rights, respect, and dignity of life, by showcasing greater resilience than ever (Baker, 2021). This paper characterizes our effort to apply an analytical framework guided by resiliency theory to examine our individual and collective roles and stories while designing a critical theory course. The methodology is a qualitative approach in which data is generated from the participants' experiences and stories. One of the conclusions put forth is that through resilience, we were able to create new spaces for dialogue to challenge (pushing against) racial injustices within U.S. educational systems. Building on our cross-cultural positionalities, multidisciplinary experiences, and diverse theoretical approaches, we reflect on our experiences in designing and implementing this unique course; a course that aims to explore critical perspectives on race, immigration, gender, and English Language Learners (ELLs) for educators and different stakeholders, as an act of resilience.

Course Overview

Our grant team consisted of graduate student educators who matriculated in the University at similar times and shared courses, assistantships, offices, or primary professors. Throughout our interactions and collaborative academic and personal initiatives, we realized there was a common thread that was woven through many of our conversations in and outside of our coursework. We often discussed a desire for more opportunity or space to explore the foundations for developing the theoretical framework for our epistemology and scholarship. Many of us delved into critical, post-colonial, and decolonizing theoretical perspectives for our research and wanted to create a space for this discussion in the community. As a team, we believed there was a general lack of opportunity to be exposed to courses in critical theory. We identified this as a gap in our scholarship and practice within the College of Education. When the events of the summer occurred around the murder of George Floyd (and Centering Around the BLM Movement) it became even more evident that we needed critical engagement and exposure to be able to speak about and deconstruct the dynamics of power that exist such that this horrible event could be possible. We individually began to identify various aspects of critical theory as means for facilitating both an academic and empirical dialogue to reveal and challenge power structures, more specifically power structures in the United States.

The graduate student educators realized that despite studying at a Tier 1 research university we were lacking language and vocabulary to engage in intellectually meaningful yet anecdotal dialogues around issues of power inequities that haunt our communities. By extension the in-service and pre-service educators within our general reach were experiencing a similar dearth in the very scholarship that undergirds diversity, inclusion, and equity. Our original approach was to fashion a course that would incorporate the key elements culminating in a fireside chat format over two semesters. We learned quickly that such an idea faced several logistical limitations within the

university culture and its academic and financial frameworks. Furthermore, with the uncertainty associated with COVID-19 and its impact on in-person learning opportunities, we understood that for this effort to be viable, it would most successfully be deployed through an online platform (College of Education Professional Development Portal).

With an opportunity to provide professional development through this platform, we could attract and reach a wider target audience in the educational sector that included university and K-12 professional learning communities. We believed, if properly tooled, using the online professional development medium, our learning modules tool could be designed and relatively automated to have reoccurring usage. We selected this approach for its cumulative utility – the ability to be effective and efficient.

The impact of designing, setting up, and implementing the course for the authors has been incredibly significant. The collaborative time and commitment to achieve this has been far beyond what we anticipated. Yet, as a group we have persevered. We have remained committed to seeing it through because we felt the need to fill a gap. In addition, we have exponentially broadened our knowledge and understanding through exposure to wide range of critical theories. We individually and respectively contributed our specific domain and disciplinary knowledge to the group as we developed and managed the students/participants (reduce hierarchical aspect of student/teacher) through the multiple theoretical subject modules.

We envisaged a few participants participating in the course, but the initial response was overwhelming as judged by the numerous people (over 300) who enrolled in the PD course. We still went ahead and modified the course to accommodate all participants. As they began to explore the readings, we found that some felt it was going to be too challenging while others embraced the material and responded very well to the tasks outlined in the module. Through this experience, we have come to a better understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), concepts that played a critical role in our conversations with participants on building a multicultural classroom culture. Such a classroom must prioritize the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students in pedagogical designs, make room for the incorporation of the culture of ethnically diverse students and perpetuate – in a sustaining way – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Purbhai-Illich et.al., 2017). We were pleased with the level of critical and academic dialogue and the depth of understanding exhibited in the cooperative learning process facilitated by this course. We had participants who have expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn about critical theory (especially for those who had never heard of it) and the chance to engage in conversation with others through the course.

Conceptualizing Resilience for our Reflections

Resilience research is currently being employed as a tool to understand the intertwining and complex global problems that exacerbate social inequities and environmental degradation (Attalah et. al., 2019). Two of the “overlapping hazard categories” that our paper responds to are violent and nonviolent social crises, which include structural discrimination and violation of human rights as paramount crises (Wisner & Kelman, 2015). Social crises are a product of natural or environmental hazards or a result of systemic and structural apparatuses that maintain control and further marginalize the already oppressed. Ikeda (2021) in his peace proposal to the United Nations underscores the importance of countries and communities working collaboratively to make it on the other side of the COVID-19 global pandemic,

The fundamental challenges will be to create and maintain a shared awareness of the need to work in solidarity to overcome the present crisis and to expand the number of people taking responsibility to build resilience in their respective societies. (p. 10)

Our perspective contrasts with the first wave of resilience thinking and research that primarily focuses on individual-level resilience as opposed to inter-societal realities (Atallah et al., 2019). We found working in solidarity and from cross-disciplinarily domains, as Atallah (2019) suggests, necessary to effectively challenge racist and xenophobic ideologies as we endeavor to eradicate structural oppression.

Amid the various and most recent crises arising over the last few years, both individuals and communities are under stress, uncertainty, and even threat. As a result of these crises, system embedded injustice has become much more visible. And at the hands of this injustice, people from historically underrepresented groups are most likely to suffer worse experiences. As a form of resistance to the “Trump Effect,” Muñoz et al. (2018) examined the experiences of undocumented Latinx college students during this heightened period of “racism and anti-immigration rhetoric.” The authors have found that undocumented students experienced “citizen fragility,” racist nativism microaggressions, and exploitation. Despite experiencing stress and trauma, participants found support in shared solidarity, demonstrating courage and resilience. Thus, *resilience* is either examined from the perspective of the individual or from an ecological/contextual perspective where the focus is centered on the social, cultural, and political environment that characterizes the experiences of the individual (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018; Johnson et al., 2014). It reflects a “complex, dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon” (Mansfield et al., 2012, p. 364) that engages “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of positive adaptation and ongoing professional commitment and growth in the face of challenging circumstances” (Wosnitza et al., 2014, p. 2). To fight for a more just world, we may reconsider resilience and its research to help us understand the complexities that exacerbate social injustice and to better fight against unexpected events (e.g., anti-Asian).

As educators, it is our responsibility to positively influence the cultural climate of the educational system and the society writ-large, thus resiliency must be an essential characteristic for educators facing massive challenges and particularly when the spaces we access can intersect with oppressed and marginalized communities (Taylor, 2013). This knowledge and understanding obtained through reflective processes and scholarship can positively inform the resilience that we seek to employ in our personal and professional practice, the resiliency we encounter collectively in our colleagues, students, and their families, as well as the resilience that we need to be able to nurture and inspire in the same groups in communities exposed to multi stressed environments (Attalah et. al., 2019).

Shafi et al. (2020) describe resilience as “the emergent property of the range of dynamic and reciprocal interactions between the individual and contextual systems and subsystems” (p. 189). Beyond individual traits bouncing back from adversities, resilience is a collection of interactions within a series of systems. Shafi and colleagues developed a dynamic interactive model of resilience (DIMoR) to illustrate that resilience is situated in a risk-protective, vulnerability-invulnerability framework, and within other wider systems. The DIMoR framework reminds educators to shift focus from individual, purely internal, levels of resilience toward considering both internal *and* external factors, such as environment, relations among people or people and contexts, and psychological connections which impact individuals and communities in a dynamic way (Shafi et al., 2020). Understanding the broader factors at play and on multiple levels, can

provide a more acute and accurate perception of the social and community capacity for resilience necessary to transition from a deficit-based interaction within the school community climate to an asset-based approach and mindset.

Bartell et al. (2019) posit that teacher education programs must be explicit in cultivating teacher agency. They explain that “teacher education programs [should provide] a foundation for resilience while taking on the responsibility of preparing teachers with an understanding of, and strategies for navigating, the realities of the school climates and contexts they will enter” (Bartell et al., 2019, p. 303). As a way of confronting/challenging the status quo, Bartell et al. (2019) suggest that teacher networks can promote and support teacher activism. Thus, “teacher networks, including their configurations and varying relational strengths, also play important roles in sustaining justice-oriented and activist teachers through the profession. Teachers can seek out allies—others striving toward justice-oriented teaching—to work together against forms of oppression” (p. 303). These authors display in their thinking the value of developing professional networks and support teachers’ actively developing their professional networks, especially as and in support of teachers of color. Resilience by its very nature is an act of resistance to failure. Resistance generates endurance and endurance is the means to overcome. As such, it is activism and activism like critical theory, when properly focused, becomes the means to overcome existing threatening systems and inequitable power structures.

Resilience can be a way of pushing back against flawed neoliberal systems in education; such systems fail to have any concern about the children or educators but are rather consumed with feeding the capitalist system. Educational spaces that serve an economic goal and purpose, under the neoliberal paradigm, inhibit relationships between students (Noddings, 1992). Conversely, solidarity is a bedrock element of resilience. The neoliberal agenda obstructs the relationships between students and hence serves to suppress resilience; for this reason, educators must be armed with information about the growing utilitarian purpose of education from a critical perspective. In other words, by empowering educators, our course addresses social crises that are intertwined with cultural, economic, and political agendas that can be challenged through a collaborative approach to resilience.

Scholars have explored counter narratives of children in poverty who demonstrate resilience and strength (Baker, 2021) contrary to how they are represented as failing in education policy (MacDonald & Figueredo, 2019). We argue that there is room to include the voices and efforts of educators who exhibit resilience and help in dismantling the project of structural discrimination. Resiliency is thus inextricably entwined with the act of exploring, understanding, and internalizing the importance of critical theory.

In reflecting on our experiences, we engage both the individual resiliency and the ecological/contextual situatedness that necessitated the strong will to work towards diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice consciously and actively, not just in our research but also towards the transformation of our Midwestern community through the development of the four-modular course, in the face of white ultranationalism, xenophobia, homophobia, COVID-19 and online education. In the sections below, we discuss the course overview and personal narratives that are indicative of resilience and resilience praxis (internally and externally) and conclude the article with implications from this research.

Method

If resilience is intangible and subjective, then, what is the best way to represent resilience? Stories provide the framework through which to investigate our experiences (Rooney et. al., 2016). Storying, employed as a method of inquiry in this paper, reflects the concept of story as both a source of information and analysis or meaning-making (Osei-Tutu, 2021). In other words, the shared stories are representations of data and findings by which to illustrate how the development of the PD course underscores our experiences of resilience. We decided to reflect on our individual and collective experiences to tell the story of resilience because “story is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2005, p. 477). In the process of “storying” the experience of resilience, which was our tool of analysis, we dabbled with the ethics and transparency of narratives. By storying as analysis, we resist/push back against dominant forms of analytical approach and agree with Brayboy (2005) that our stories are theories. As graduate student educators who are often othered our stories represent the non-dominant voices who conduct the painful and often stigmatized work of diversity, justice, and equity (Risam, 2018). As scholars of color, we often risk our mental health and well-being to teach and educate about the harmful effects of structural violence, all the while being subjects of discrimination in our personal lives.

The stories came together as each author reflected on our exercise in solidarity and resilience (Muñoz et al., 2018) in the design, implementation, and teaching of the course, *Building a Community of Diverse, Inclusive and Justice Oriented Scholars through Critical Theory* (DIJS). As mentioned earlier, DIJS was designed to create opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers, school directors and administrators, graduate students, and the general Midwestern community to engage in conversations around critical theory. The course was divided into four modules consisting of critical approaches to Race, Immigration, Language (ELL/EB) and Gender and Sexual Orientation. Due to the varied backgrounds and the large number of participants, we had to navigate scaffolding at varied levels while negotiating the nuances of our own experiences when considering the modules. Therefore, as pedagogy in and of itself (Huber et al., 2013), our stories are conduits centering the Deweyan idea of experience as educative or mis-educative. A shared document was created where each author wrote their experience. We read each other’s stories providing affirmation and feedback. This process of sharing then culminated in the reflection of how our experiences, individual and collective, expounds resilience in the face of multiple crises and our commitment to diversity, equity, and social justice in education.

In reflecting on our experiences, we exposed our vulnerable and personal experiences which constitute a glimpse of our lived reality. We felt exposed and as if we implicated others in our stories at the same time. Moreover, in the process of writing our stories, we learned of each other’s story/ies of resilience for the first time. Finally, our decision to include our stories is for the shared educator knowledge they bring to bear on teaching and teacher education (Carter, 1993) and because we realized that we cannot fully immunize ourselves from being known. Sharing our individual stories also eliminated generalizing our experiences of stigma, discrimination, and resilience.

Storying our Resilience: Five lenses on shared goal of Social Justice

In the previous section, we discussed our understanding of resiliency as a concept and how that is reflective of our experiences that engendered our approach to designing the four-modular course. Research shows that the “precariousness of the COVID- 19 pandemic posed a challenge

for students and educators” (Dwomoh, 2021, p. 57). As individuals, we faced a plethora of stressors, both personally and professionally, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on our experiences as human beings, as scholars, and as educators we listen to our inner voices as well as critically examining the contexts we are situated in. Storying allows us to tell our own lived experiences in a way that exhibits feelings, emotions, contradictions, and resilience. Sharing our stories helped us to take in others’ voices, respond to others’ stories, connect thoughts and feelings among one another, and form our community voice. Storying our resilience as teacher educators during the wake of COVID-19, became our way to address racial and social justice issues through counter-stories. Our shared stories and experiences brought us together first as a community of like-minded people and second as teacher educators to critically look within our space and confront social justice issues within our local community. As a team of scholars, we were able to navigate our experiences through the four PD modular courses to engage local teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, and school superintendents in critical discussions that foster change. The authors’ feelings of frustration, often helplessness, led to the collective goal of intrapersonal, intercultural, interdisciplinary, and transformational societal change. Here, we/ team share our deeply personal narratives and stories of resilience and what drew us to design, teach, and implement this course in these times.

The Calling

2020, the year when we consistently and repeatedly addressed not just the elephant in the room, but of our lives, death, I was in New Delhi, India for spring break when the first wave of COVID intensified in the US and George Floyd died. All of humanity was grappling with grief, loss of loved ones, and loss of old ways. A few months before that I had been thinking about the plight of the Jawaharlal Nehru University students in India who were attacked, beaten, and imprisoned for protesting the Civic Amendment Act that discriminates against Indian Muslims and jeopardizes their citizenship status. Many students went missing and were probably brutally murdered at the hands of the government for expressing dissent.

I have personally experienced adverse effects of identity-based discrimination due to my parent’s inter-caste marriage. Moreover, pluralistic India is still discriminating against those of the “untouchable class” or “Muslims” to this day. I learnt to think critically and attribute my reflexivity and spirit to challenging dominant discourse in my graduate studies in the US when I started to understand the parallels between racism and casteism. Casteism predates US racism and is insidiously woven into the fabric of Indian society. Thinking about the students who lost their lives protesting and countless other marginalized people in the US, India, and around the world who are victims of the power apparatuses that strip them of dignity, my commitment to advance social justice has intensified. Even though I have devoted my research and academic interests to decolonizing and critical pedagogies and teaching courses on multiculturalism, I felt the need to squarely address identity-based violence. Coinciding with the time I was undergoing my inner turmoil, the College of Education at my university put out a call to propose a project to build a diverse, equitable and just community. A friend, colleague, and fellow international student asked me if I wanted to collaborate on a project together and I instantaneously responded affirmatively. I felt called to advocate for and call into question the hypocrisies of power and systems that legitimize the marginalization of people.

You've Known Me

One day in March 2020, my daughter came home from school with worries on her face. She is a talkative girl. I always say that she is a noisy bird. But she did not say anything when I picked her from the bus stop and with tears in her eyes. I noticed her changes and asked what happened. She told me, on the school bus, some kids yelled at her and said she has a virus. I was shocked and felt upset. At that time, the world just learned about COVID-19 even though it did not have an official name for it but call it a virus from China or China virus. What shocked me was that my daughter identified some kids' names with whom I am familiar. They live in the same community as us. They are all good kids, polite and have good manners. Sometimes, I saw them play with my daughter in the playground. I was upset because of those kids who knew my daughter and they also clearly knew spreading the virus was not her fault, but they still attacked her.

If that was a start, soon later, what really shocked me was the changes in some colleagues' attitudes. In one of my weekly research meetings, these colleagues have been working together with me for at least two years. Sometimes before the meeting, we chat a bit. I even did not remember how the conversation started. The two colleagues complained China is a greedy country and tends to colonize the world. I was very embarrassed by the unexpected topic and did not know what to say. I know them well and they know me well; we are colleagues in profession and friends in person. It was the first time they complained about China in front of me, that was during the beginning of the pandemic.

From the two happenings, I learned how easily the public views are influenced by social media, political climate, and contexts. Because of the pandemic, many hidden issues became visible and increased scales which could keep simmering to a huge social event. In the current information explosion era, voices we hear might not align with our inner voice, but we still follow without being aware; misleading is everywhere. There is a need for critical perspectives in public, and the need for critical perspectives of educators is even more urgent. When my colleague invited me to join the group, after she described the topic of the project, I immediately said yes. I am happy to make contributions to promote social justice in teacher education. As a female researcher who conducts research in women and STEM and addresses gender inequity issues in education, I realized gender is not an independent issue but often intertwines with class, race, etc. It is a scholar's way of resilience for me to help teachers to develop critical perspectives and implement these perspectives in their practice to impact their students. Resilience for me is a roundabout way to practice resistance, resisting dominated power, and promoting diversity.

The Teacher in Me

Both my identity as the daughter of an immigrant, as well as my professional identities (former 6-12th grade U.S. teacher, current teacher educator, and emerging qualitative researcher), played a significant role in my decision to join and working collaboratively with the DISJ team to develop and teach a professional development course for in-service teachers.

On a personal level, as an Arab American, Muslim child who attended predominantly white, Catholic schools, I struggled to connect with my teachers whose backgrounds (i.e., cultural, religious, linguistic) differed from my own. Daily microaggressions from classmates and teachers made me feel ashamed and inadequate both socially and academically.

As a teacher educator, for the past four years, I have had the privilege of preparing pre-service teachers for future careers as educators. Because preservice teachers (PSTs) are

predominantly white, female, and monolingual, as a teacher educator, I feel a tremendous responsibility in raising PSTs' cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic awareness. In addition to sharing my experiences working with diverse student populations in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Idaho, I have been explicit in raising PSTs' awareness of the current state of education by discussing my research with them. As emerging qualitative research, I recently completed my dissertation research which focused on rural educators' experiences working with and caring for Latinx immigrant students.

From my dissertation research, I found that white teachers had difficulty establishing caring relations with immigrant students, specifically, undocumented students. The teachers blamed elementary school students and their families for failure to assimilate into the dominant classroom culture. Often, when “newcomers” would arrive in their classrooms, teachers would feel frustrated by the language barriers. Overall, these feelings of inadequacy, lack of resources, and training led to linguistically diverse students being physically and socially isolated from their classmates.

For nearly one year, I observed immigrant students being dismissed and/or ignored. My frustration with my participants' lack of care for their immigrant students poured out onto the pages of my dissertation chapters. However, I longed for an opportunity to shift from writing about deficit thinking and practices, towards adopting a more active role in addressing systemic racism.

The summer of 2020 was overwhelming. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, writing my dissertation, and watching the protests for racial justice and civil rights unfold on TV, I felt isolated and helpless. Both personally and professionally, I was frustrated by my inability to make meaningful change; all I could do was sit in my home office and write.

When presented with the opportunity to co-develop and teach a free, PD course for in-service teachers that addressed diversity, inclusion, and social justice, I felt ignited. As a former teacher, I had never been exposed to PD that focused on social justice issues and I knew that this PD course was desperately needed, now more than ever.

Navigating Through the Racial Tensions

The racial tensions in the U.S. intensified during the COVID-era as we observed from the news series of protests—and some spiraled social and civic unrest—that resulted in looting, vandalism, and arson. To aid in de-escalating racial tensions, discourse that allows teachers to reflect on their teaching and its direct relevance to today's culture are essential. Also, when people are psychologically or emotionally derailed, their motivation dwindles in pursuance of interests, especially when their voices become silenced over time.

On March 12, 2020, during the zenith of COVID-19, I experienced a racial confrontation at the grocery shop by a White man. I visited the grocery shop with my spouse. I was trying to buy some items from one of the shelves, fully masked, and my spouse was on the other side of the aisle. A White man who was a little distant from me passed behind me suddenly and pushed me towards the shelf. I was stunned, and I could not retaliate because I did not know what informed his action. A few minutes later, the shop authorities (two staff members) came and asked me to take them to the man who assaulted me, and he was about to check out of the store. When the two staff confronted him, he became very aggressive towards me through his racial comments and actions. The staff asked if I would like to press charges. I made sure the issue did not escalate, so I did not press charges but quietly left the shop with my spouse. I am sharing this because racial and social

justice issues stare us in the face almost every time, and we need to have open and candid discussions around them to address them.

In addition, people who want to express their opinions overtly nowadays do not find the joy in doing so because of some unwarranted confrontations they receive from colleagues. I observed on social media platforms during the COVID-era how several comments and discussions with peers, friends, and public intellectuals that were innocuous received derogatory remarks full of prejudices and stereotypes. The language used in such discussions sometimes discouraged me (and I believe several others) from engaging in certain discourses on social media platforms. I know a teacher who deactivated her Facebook account for six months because she could not cope with the numerous confrontations on social media. One of my social media friends and educator Frank (pseudonym), on January 8, 2021, shared on his post,

Social media: A place to connect with people and share the human in us. But these days, it appears so many people are angry or frustrated by someone or something. A seemingly “harmless” post could attract a lot of “cynical tackles”. What is wrong with us? Why do people attack or react like that?

Gauging from these two experiences I had during the wake of COVID-19, I was excited when our team leader reached out to me to participate in the PD course. I realized that was the best opportunity for me to be resilient and address my fears of marginalization and stigmatization. During the development of the PD course that focused primarily on four modules: Race, Immigration, Emergent Bilinguals, and Women and Gender issues, I shared the lessons I gleaned from those racial encounters and the proactive ways to address them. My experience and that of my colleagues have taught me forbearance, especially in addressing racial and social justice issues. Educators, during the COVID-era, can make our voices amplified regardless of the prejudices and stereotypes we face. That, to me, is an overt way of showing resilience and fostering change in our societies—and this PD modular course we developed—offers the avenue for such discussions and change to occur.

Head bloodied but Unbowed

I see, understand, and experience resilience as the attribute of or ability to adjust, adapt, respond, and overcome. Yes, we bend but don't ever (won't ever) break. But more than survival, resilience is that quality that allows you to scratch out ways- emotionally, intellectually, physically - to emerge stronger and better despite the loss you may experience in the process.

In the societal context of US culture, as an African American man with a mixed racial and ethnic heritage (Latino, African, White, and Native) living Black, on many levels, is by itself an act of survival. Resilience for us is the ability to survive and yet prevail over the powers and forces that the arc of history has bent against us. The trials and tribulations of Black life - from childhood to adulthood - seek to rob us of our humanity, dignity, dreams and desires, and our belief in our right to be equal, if not dare to be better than those people of privilege who would position themselves as our adversaries based strictly on our race.

*My promise to my family, my people, and myself is (and has always been) to face down my opposition, to not shrink away from the pursuit of excellence in all I do, no matter what I encounter, without losing my ability through faith to love myself **and** my adversaries. As such, I could garner*

a way to always emerge from all hurtful encounters with “head bloodied but unbowed,” yet strengthened and better prepared for the next seemingly impossible challenge.

I have a broad range of personal, academic, and professional experience, but I believe most pertinent here - I am a former police officer, a doctoral student-centered in public pedagogy, decolonial and critical whiteness theories focused on the resilience and revitalization of majority-minority communities stemming from the African Diaspora, and I currently serve as a City Manager in a Midwest community. With the frame of reference that comes from my personal and professional positionality, the events of COVID-19 followed by the George Floyd murder crystalized a perfect storm of challenge and opportunity. Both circumstances served to rip off the scab of American culture and undeniably exposed much of the unknowing world that we as minoritized peoples in oppressed communities have been forced to deal with for decades.

Through our academic interaction, my colleague and I had begun a dialogue around our common interests in deconstructing the power structures of oppressive systems using the platform of education and curriculum studies. We long discussed that the lack of critical theory resources afforded by our university and program posed an obstacle for us in our research, in conjunction with the other critical minded colleagues within the program. Thus, the opportunity to develop this PD course was ideal - especially across the diverse experiences and perspectives of our group in the wake of the extraordinary environmental circumstances of a pandemic and a social injustice milestone of the public agonizing murder of Floyd.

The personal challenge for me within the framework of developing this course and the subsequent writings has been to maintain a full time 80-hour a week job, adjust to children forced to learn in a hybrid virtual learning environment, and to navigate the challenges of COVID and issues of police violence on a real-time daily basis as a leader responsible for a highly marginalized majority-minority community served by a failing education system. Attempting this while contributing to the scholarship of our group was a massive intrapersonal effort. This was extremely difficult for me, due to pure time constraints, to be forced to yield the role that I am accustomed to filling throughout most of my life as a lone contributor in a climate of antagonism or as the project/program lead of reluctant teams. In this effort, I had to trust and learn to rely upon the brilliance of the scholarship and lived experience of my group team members, when and where my ability to contribute was extremely limited. Adjust, adapt, respond, overcome, and through love and faith – bend but do not break.

Conclusion

In this paper we examine our individual subjective experiences and present them as stories informed by different theoretical perspectives of resilience. We employ a qualitative approach of storying to understand our experiences as facilitators of a critical theory based professional development course. Our first-person accounts point to the complexity involved with engaging in work that some might deem controversial. We argue that it is through resilience that we were able to create opportunities for dialogue, in the form of the PD course, around issues of injustice that we have personally experienced and showcased. We channeled our feelings and experiences into action, an embodiment of resilience. Collectively, we sought to amplify one another’s voices, putting theory into practice, pushing against a world of injustice. We shifted our focus from individual-level toward contextual levels, such as educational environments and relations among people involved in the environments. And in our small corner of the world, we developed and facilitated a PD course for pre/in-service teachers.

COVID-19 challenges people's health and livelihoods as well as values and beliefs. We interrogate our inner voices to provide a window through which to see how social issues are closely related to individual human beings. We also hope our stories of resilience serve as a mirror to reflect social injustice and raise people's consciousness of continuing injustices. As educators, we have a responsibility to work together with teachers to fight injustice and humanize education.

The graduate student instructors of this course and this text are all positionally presenting diverse experiences in a world inclined to discriminate against the validity and value of our identities and contributions. The focus of our professional development module in fact serves in a concomitant role/relationship with resilience. Critical theory gives those, such as us, who are minoritized by othering, the means to define and thus understand the systemic and structural nature of the prejudicial treatment to which we/they are subjected. It creates the space within which we come to know ourselves more clearly in the juxtaposed context of such oppressive forces, rather than through the warped/skewed lens of that overt and covert oppression. The axial knowledge imparted by Critical theory, of the hate and indifference that is appropriated by the structures and systems of discrimination, illuminates truth. Articulating these tools of oppression that are bent on hoarding power while depriving the "others" of intrinsic value, gives the oppressed a truer knowledge of Self. It can free us from self-hate, self-doubt, self-loathing, self-abrogation, and thereby simultaneously expand the possibilities of our being. The ability to know and understand oneself and to know and understand one's opposition is a mechanism for activating and enacting resilience.

As we walked with in-service teachers on this journey of deepening our understanding of social justice issues, our community grew, and relationships strengthened. We learned that teachers were grappling with similar feelings of loss and disillusionment. We developed the course to create a space to demonstrate our resilience as scholars who are othered and concerned about the lives and education of people from minority groups. Our course also became a space for teachers to engage with topics often considered "controversial" or "taboo." Together with our course participants, as a unified front, we sought to advocate for a just world and challenge the status quo. Through resilience, we created new spaces for dialogue in the hopes of challenging (pushing against) racial injustices within U.S. educational systems.

To authentically answer the call to teach is, we believe, to devote oneself in the service of others. As educators, we are called to confront our implicit and explicit biases and attitudes. To teach means cultivating change, expanding our pedagogical practices beyond the four walls of our classrooms. As we shift our teaching perspective from a "traditional" view on learning, towards a progressive "teacher-as-learner" centered approach (Van Den Akker, 1988) we began to foster new relationships with our students, their families, and the communities in which we live. In answering the call, we embrace and enact activism. A major implication of our community-building efforts and reflection through storying is that by addressing issues of marginalization and oppression, instead of ignoring them, one can enact resilience. We need to inhabit these spaces as homes for these difficult but important conversations to take place.

From different disciplines and different cultures, we brought our perspective of resilience that epitomizes what we can achieve when we embrace our differences and work together. The collaboration between us made the course initiative successful and allowed us to reconceptualize resilience in our discipline through the power of storying. We highlighted the collaborative nature of school, families, and communities and suggested pre- and in-service teachers promote resilience by using school as a lifeline to cooperate with relevant parts, explore critical perspectives, and build foundations of resilience.

*The genesis
The calling
The teacher in me
You've known me
Navigating the racial tension
Head bloodied but unbowed
Ever imagined the face of resilience, look to each other*

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