

Taking Medicine That Heals: Teachers Engaging in Reflective Inquiry Through Community Cultural Wealth

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Abstract

This study explores how reflective inquiry can empower teachers from marginalized backgrounds, specifically women of color from immigrant families. Through the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Reflective Inquiry, K–12 teachers merged their *testimonios* with theoretical concepts to identify their own funds of knowledge and capital. The CCW Reflective Inquiry was developed through culturally responsive-sustaining methods to meet the needs of the teachers enrolled in a graduate-level course. This study highlights the necessity of integrating culturally responsive-sustaining methods of inquiry into teacher education to support educators in connecting to course content, navigating oppressive environments, and continuing their work toward social justice.

Context

I have realized that just reading the theories and research is like only reading the label on how to take a medicine; only after we engage in reflection do we swallow the pill and healing starts to take place. (Maya, bilingual teacher participant)

My students were struggling. It was not an academic struggle. It was a struggle inflicted upon them simply because of their identities. My students were predominantly women of color from immigrant backgrounds. More importantly, they were graduate students who taught emerging bilingual and immigrant K–12 children in public schools. Most of them have walked in the shoes of the children they teach. They know what it is like to learn a new language in a new country. They know what it is like to have to speak one language at school and return home to speak the language of their family. While this would seem like a perspective that would be valued in their workplaces, my students were being silenced and marginalized due to their backgrounds.

Early in the semester, there was a night in class that immediately caught my attention. I had seen how weary they were, but this particular night, I entered the classroom to the sounds of crying. I could see a large group of students huddling together. As I approached, they quickly apologized and dismantled their group. I explained they had nothing to apologize for and asked if they were okay. A few of them immediately started to vent about how they were being treated by their school administrators due to new policies that restricted diverse content in K–12 classrooms. After I asked for permission to discuss the issue with the whole class, they instantly began assembling their desks into a circle. While the desks were being reassembled, I looked over my lesson plans and lecture for that night, and I determined that their struggles were more important than the academic content I had prepared for them that evening.

We spent most of the class that night talking about the struggles they were facing. The new laws in our state and new policies in their school districts had made them feel helpless and like they had a target on their backs. No more diverse books on the shelves. No more curriculum centered around social injustice. They shared stories of fear that they would lose their jobs for creating inclusive spaces that met the needs of their K–12 emerging bilingual and newcomer immigrant students. It seemed as if the class content felt out of reach to my students. The class was centered around culturally responsive-sustaining practices (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Learning about theories related to this concept felt meaningless to them at this moment. It wasn't that they were rejecting the theoretical concepts or that they did not have the right mindset. Rather, they were so overwhelmed with the oppressive policies that their brains could not imagine how teaching in a culturally responsive-sustaining way was even possible at this point.

I went home that evening and reviewed my curriculum. Questions raced through my mind. How could I continue to teach as if nothing had happened? How could I meet them where they were at that moment? How could I continue to meet the learning objectives of the course and give them the academic content they needed, while still supporting their well-being and growth? I decided to dump a few assignments from the planned curriculum and replace them with reflective inquiry. My hope was to provide my students with some space—a space to process their struggles, identify their obstacles, and develop solutions.

Thanks to my students' authenticity with their struggles, I was able to develop the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Reflective Inquiry. This assignment is conceptualized through three key components: a model of inquiry (Dewey, 1938), two-eyed seeing (Hatcher et al., 2009), and the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005). After working through this reflective inquiry process with my students, I recognized the importance of studying their experience and better understanding how inquiry can be utilized to support social justice for our students and their students. What follows is an explanation of how I conceptualized the CCW Reflective Inquiry and my findings.

The purpose of this study is to explore culturally responsive-sustaining ways to engage reflective inquiry in teachers experiencing marginalization. The foundations of formal inquiry are often centered around Eurocentric and scientific approaches to learning. My goal was to develop a pedagogical tool and study how that tool can assist marginalized educators in connecting to course content in a meaningful way and applying those theoretical concepts. This study uses a critical perspective to explore teacher experiences and is situated in Chicana feminist epistemology (Bernal, 1998; Garcia, 2014). The research question that drives this study is: How do teachers from marginalized backgrounds respond to reflective inquiry that is founded in community cultural wealth?

Understanding Reflective Inquiry in Education

To understand reflective inquiry, we must first address each component individually. Reflection has become a buzzword in education, but it is a tool that has been applied within many academic fields for over 100 years to assist with meaning-making, processing knowledge, and growth (Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983). Additionally, it is used as a tool to guide practitioners toward careful consideration of beliefs and actions (Dewey, 1933). Reflection has deep historical roots within philosophy and psychology, and it can even be traced all the way back to antiquity and the walls of the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Nicholson, 2002). It also has contemporary ties to teacher education and has been proven to be a powerful stimulus for the transformation of current practices, for assisting with coachability, and for generating new ideas (Marcos et al., 2011; Reichenberg, 2022; Tay et al., 2023). In addition, critical reflection, which incorporates perspectives of culture, power, and privilege, has been identified as a key element among educators who are culturally responsive to their students (Howard, 2003; Regalado et al., 2025).

Inquiry falls within a similar space as reflection; however, while reflection focuses heavily on a pause or a serious consideration, inquiry is typically guided by an investigative question and encourages action (Chin & Duncan, 2021). Inquiry is used often in the sciences but has emerged as a tool to guide experiential, student-centered learning in other disciplines (Hammer et al., 2008; Iglesias & Tejada, 2024; Levy et al., 2013). Inquiry is often guided by a model or framework that leads learners through various phases. Over the past 25 years, specific inquiry models have been developed, especially in the field of education. Common inquiry models include the 5E model (Bybee, 2009), the big six information problem-solving process (Herring et al., 2000), and guided inquiry (Kuhlthau et al., 2015). Research has indicated that utilizing inquiry-based learning can increase student engagement and improves task performance (Faulconer, 2016; Hwang & Chen, 2017; Aidoo et al., 2024).

Combining the two concepts, reflective inquiry is complex and often determined by the professional field in which it is being utilized. Brown et al. (2021) broadly define reflective inquiry as

a collaborative, dialogic process in which educators both consider and aim to address pressing educational issues or problems. Such a process involves the collective generation and testing of ideas linked to enhancing their own practice, with these ideas based on evidence in the form of literature and/or data and displaying internal attribution. (p. 9)

Currently, some studies show promise in using reflective inquiry as a tool to deepen professional learning, build stronger networks of learning among educators, and work through obstacles (Eshchar-Netz & Vedder-Weiss, 2021; Poortman et al., 2022; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). Additionally, Vujaklija (2021) found that reflective inquiry can assist teachers in identifying their authority to stand on theoretically sound beliefs. While research on reflective inquiry indicates that it can help educators process new knowledge and apply it, there is limited research that advances our understanding of how reflective inquiry can support teachers from marginalized backgrounds, especially during these tumultuous socio-political times; thus, this study seeks to fill that gap.

Mode of Inquiry

In order to understand students' experiences with the CCW Reflective Inquiry, I will explain the conceptualization of the project and discuss how students engaged in the process. First, guiding my development of the CCW Reflective Inquiry was a conceptual framework consisting of three approaches: Dewey's model of inquiry, Marshall's two-eyed seeing, and Yosso's CCW model. Dewey's model of inquiry is supplemented by the other components because Dewey's pragmatism does not take into account issues of power and marginalization. Both two-eyed seeing and the CCW model are essential to provide a more holistic educative experience for students. Second, a description of the process is provided to understand how students engaged in decolonized aspects of learning through *testimonio*.

Conceptual Framework

The first component of the reflective inquiry conceptualization derives from John Dewey, who is the most widely taught educational philosopher and often referred to as the "father of progressive education" (Williams, 2017, p. 94). Dewey's model of inquiry has five key elements:

- 1) Recognizing a situation as problematic
- 2) Considering the difference it makes to define the problem one way rather than another
- 3) Developing a possible line of action as a response to the problem
- 4) Evaluating potential actions in terms of their likely consequences
- 5) Taking actions that are felt to be likely to address the problematic situation

Dewey himself believed that reflection is the highest form of critical thinking and inquiry (Dewey, 1938a; Dewey, 1938b). Contemporary research continues to support Dewey's ideas that reflection is one of the most powerful mechanisms for supporting learners in processing information and assisting them in moving toward application of that new knowledge (Dimova & Kamarska, 2015; Latasha, 2020).

The second foundational concept in our reflective inquiry is two-eyed seeing, which is birthed from Indigenous ways of knowing and connected to the ideas of Albert Marshall, an Elder of the Mi'kmaq Nation (Bartlett & Marshall, 2007; Hatcher et al., 2009). Education in the United States has always been heavily influenced by Eurocentric notions of knowledge, which often consist of reading works from published scholars who have gathered data from participants using the scientific method or stringent qualitative approaches. Scientific inquiry learning is not separate from this Eurocentric approach. If anything, it is often even more heavily ingrained in the perception that knowledge is only produced by scholars doing empirical research. To be engaged in inquiry, there is a belief that a learner must be diving into existing research. The Eurocentric approach silos scientific knowledge from natural, human, and spiritual ecosystems. Fortunately, two-eyed seeing recognizes the importance of personal lived experiences, holistic networks of knowledge, and ecological systems (Gardner-Vandy et al., 2025). Gregory Cajete, Indigenous educator and Tewa citizen from Santa Clara Pueblo, argues that "inherent in Indigenous education is the recognition that there is a knowing Center in all human beings that reflects

the knowing Center of the Earth and other living things” (2021, p. 104). Additionally, two-eyed seeing embraces self-reflection as a key component to the “transformative capacity of knowledge” (Forbes et al., 2020, p. 2). Thus, two-eyed seeing is essential to this conceptual framework because it merges together scientific knowledge with lived experiences.

The third foundational concept of our reflective inquiry is Tara Yosso’s community cultural wealth model (2005). Yosso is a scholar from University of California, Riverside (UC Riverside), who has founded her work in resistance to deficit views of learners and situated her research at the intersection of Chicana feminism, LatCrit theory, and education (Yosso, 2006). The CCW model is based upon Bourdieu’s capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). However, the CCW model reconceptualizes capital by viewing it through a critical race theory lens (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). The purpose of CCW is to identify and acknowledge forms of cultural capital that are often dismissed for marginalized people. The goal of CCW is to create an asset lens through which educators can view their students. Within Yosso’s CCW model (pp. 77–80) there are six forms of capital:

- 1) Aspirational: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers
- 2) Linguistic: the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style
- 3) Familial: cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition
- 4) Social: networks of people and community resources
- 5) Navigational: skills of maneuvering through social institutions
- 6) Resistant: knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality

Each of these forms of capital comes from students’ funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005), which is developed through their backgrounds and lived experiences.

While the terms “funds” and “capital” might seem to reflect transactional Eurocentric and capitalistic concepts, these terms, which were developed by scholars of color, reflect a strategic linguistic subversion of Eurocentric notions (Pengfei, 2025; Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Spivak, 2005). They decolonize and subvert Eurocentric concepts by creating “social relationships of reciprocity and mutual trust with families (*confianza*) that facilitate the development and exchange of historically accumulated sets of resources, strategies, and ideas” (González, et al., 2011, p. 488). Each form of capital built into CCW can stand on its own or interact with other forms of capital. Additionally, these forms of capital are not static. They are dynamic elements shaped by the place and space our students are experiencing. CCW reminds educators of the value in our students’ insights and the knowledge they bring to the classroom.

Process of CCW Reflective Inquiry

I began by assigning a freewriting activity that simply asked, “As a teacher, in what ways are you being silenced?” I chose freewriting over a formal essay because freewriting allows students’ thoughts to flow freely onto the page without concerns regarding grammar and mechanics. In addition to the freewriting, students engaged in oral storytelling centered around their own *testimonios*, defined as “a tool for inscribing struggles and understandings, creating new knowledge, and affirming our epistemologies” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367). Since English was the secondary language for most of my students, freewriting and *testimonio* enabled them to engage in translanguaging practices (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). I wanted them to connect deeply with their experiences and insights rather than focus on strict academic language regulations.

After students had explored the ways they were being silenced in their classrooms, I began to scaffold their understanding of CCW. They were given a graphic organizer that broke down each of the six forms of capital. I asked them to write down ways they see their own K–12 students utilizing CCW. I started there because the teachers I have in class are reluctant to brag about themselves. However, if you ask them to brag about their students, they can talk all day long. Once they had developed a foundational understanding of CCW, we dove into some readings that deepened their theoretical understanding of the concept. After the readings were concluded and students understood CCW better, they were asked to identify one of the forms of capital that they felt the most confident in. Students took time in their small groups to share stories of their families and lived experiences that shaped their confidence in their chosen form of capital. We continued the process as they worked their way through each form of capital, from highest level of confidence to lowest level of confidence. Once we got down to the lower levels of confidence, I added an additional reflective prompt asking them to share the “why” behind their lack of confidence. This last step encouraged them to tap into their critical consciousness, or *conscientização* (Freire, 1973).

Once scaffolding had been put into place to support their understanding of the concept, students began to investigate more deeply. They were asked to go into their schools with a CCW field note guide. This guide had each of the six forms of capital and a graphic organizer where students could begin filling in their observations. They were guided by the essential question: How is your community cultural wealth serving you and your students at your school? They were also provided with a series of additional guiding questions for further support. Their objective was twofold: 1) document the ways in which they were already using their six forms of capital at their schools, and 2) document moments they felt marginalized and jot down ways they could use their different forms of capital to push back. After they had completed their CCW field note guide, we came back together as a learning community and shared experiences. Lastly, they were asked to write a report on their process and findings.

Methodology

In this study, I used qualitative discourse analysis to understand how teachers from marginalized backgrounds respond to culturally responsive-sustaining reflective inquiry. Discourse analysis was chosen as the method to study student responses due to its recognition of often dismissed or marginalized knowledge; its emphasis on understanding historical or cultural contexts, rooted in a social constructivist stance; and its exploration of how knowledge is linked to actions and practices (Fairclough, 1992; Gill, 2000). My goal was to understand students' situated meanings of language within their final written reports (Gee, 2014). Discourse analysis was beneficial in understanding how the students negotiated knowledge development, meaning-making, and their identities within their professional teaching contexts (Hunt, 2018).

Participants were students enrolled in a master's-level course focused on meeting the literacy needs of diverse language learners. Out of the 23 students enrolled in the course, 18 were currently K–12 teachers and four were serving outside of the classroom in leadership roles. Approximately 95% of participants were female, 87% self-identified as a person of color (predominantly Latinx), 83% grew up speaking a language other than English, 78% immigrated to the United States or were children of immigrants, and 16% were undocumented citizens. All names used for participants in this study are pseudonyms.

The data in this study comes directly from the CCW Reflective Inquiry. The purpose of focusing on just this specific assignment was to help educators better understand how students' own lived experiences can be utilized for inquiry-based learning. Written reports were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Student writing was initially analyzed to identify segments of text that were relevant to the research question. Through multiple iterations of this process, initial codes were developed. Codes were analyzed and synthesized to develop categories, which were used to formulate overarching themes.

Findings

The findings discussed below are directly related to the research question for this study: How do teachers from marginalized backgrounds respond to reflective inquiry that is founded in community cultural wealth? Through inductive thematic analysis, three main themes were identified: 1) Pushing back against social and cultural messages; 2) Looking into the past to change the future; and 3) Tapping into critical hope. Each theme is explored in detail in the following sections, supported by quotes from the students.

Pushing Back Against Social and Cultural Messages

Through the CCW Reflective Inquiry process, the students were able to identify the main cause of their struggle with our course content, which was social and cultural messaging. My students recognized that their connection with the class content was being disrupted by the messages they were receiving from outside of our classroom. The data revealed that these messages were twofold. One source of messages was coming from sociopolitical narratives heard in the news, comments made by colleagues, and administrative discussions. The second source of messaging was coming from their own families.

Since most of my students come from marginalized backgrounds, they have been exposed to negative socio-political commentary on who they are as humans and as educators. This caused them to live in fear and forced many of them to stay under the radar, especially those from immigrant backgrounds. This messaging has prompted many of them to teach in more traditional approaches so they can fit into the status quo. For example, Zahra expressed her desire to stay under the radar and not make too much noise: “As a visibly Muslim-American Black woman, I find myself teetering the line of authenticity and pushing through by watering myself down.” Many students echoed Zahra’s fears and mentioned that their ethnicity, religion, or language were common targets in sociopolitical messaging. For example, Azucena, who is a first-generation Mexican immigrant and had just started her second year of teaching, expressed her frustration with the messages she receives: “I am having to hide who I am to my students and silence myself. In the first seven weeks as a teacher, I thought I chose the wrong profession, and that feeling has nothing to do with the students.” In addition, Manuel shared that he was afraid due to his sexuality. He shared an experience he had at his school recently: “I’ve been warned by my peers about current politics. I’m a proud gay man, and I’ve been told that I should not talk about my fiancé in front of my students or have pictures of us in the classroom.”

Unfortunately, sociopolitical messaging often infiltrates families from marginalized backgrounds. Families, especially those from immigrant backgrounds, assimilate as a means of survival. Camila expressed that her mother had shared stories from her workplace, and those stories have influenced how she is moving in her teaching:

I know the stereotypes that come with being a Latina teacher. I already face challenges because I am a different race than most of my colleagues. I do not want my colleagues to think less of me because English is not my first language. When I speak up, I have to defend my opinion unlike my white colleagues, but I am scared.

Many students shared that they have been taught to be grateful for the tiny things they have been given—which includes having a job. To make noise would mean to express ingratitude, which is at the least disrespectful and, at the worst, risky. For example, Ana was an undocumented student who came to the United States with her mother when she was in middle school. She shared, “My mother raised me to not question authority or elders. In our Latino community, it was disrespectful because elders have earned their respect. Additionally, she believed that a supervisor is not a boss but rather a father/mother figure.” Staying silent was a survival technique that had served them well for decades. However, this forced assimilation develops messaging that says not to disrupt or make noise. The students in my course were struggling to fully engage with the culturally responsive-sustaining concepts being taught in our class due to the messaging they were receiving, and they were even more afraid to apply the concepts for fear of losing their jobs.

However, once students were able to engage with the CCW Reflective Inquiry process, they realized that the messaging was not serving them well or protecting them. They were still struggling despite staying under the radar. Manuel shared this conclusion:

My hopes and dreams will continue to be just hopes and dreams if we continue to stay silent in the face of injustices. I challenge all teachers to speak up at faculty meetings, become advocates for their peers, advocate for themselves, and continue to question authority.

Students began to name and claim the negative messages and explore how these messages were damaging them, which in turn was damaging their own students. At the end of the inquiry process, Ana reflected:

How has this changed me? It has changed me to help teach students to learn to advocate for themselves. My job is to make sure our students feel valued and seen. With instructional material being censored, I can imagine many possible situations where my students will miss an opportunity to learn the truth about history or people or themselves.

Students began to shed the negative messages and search for the positive messages that can fuel them in their work. Azucena recognized this when she shared, "I now feel empowered to continue my work. I can place value on the importance of speaking up and looking out for each other using the three main pillars I was taught: *familia, escuela, comunidad*. The perfect trifecta."

Looking Into the Past to Change the Future

Another element of the CCW Reflective Inquiry process was students' new awareness of their community cultural wealth and how they can utilize their different forms of capital to create inclusive and equitable learning experiences for their own students. Tapping into their past to make a difference in the future was predominantly seen in students' exploration of their linguistic backgrounds and their family history.

For example, this was the first time that most students had explored their linguistic background as an asset and not an issue to be fixed. They began to recognize that their linguistic background had served them well in their past. Now, in their present, they began to see themselves as a skilled bilingual professional. Lorena, a student who grew up speaking Spanish in the home, affirmed, "I have the ability to communicate in two languages, so I need to use this advantage to its full potential." Furthermore, they recognized how to use their linguistic capital to provide meaningful learning experiences for their own students. One example is from Aisha, who immigrated to Canada first and later to the United States. She explained:

I want my students to know their linguistic capital is valued. I have created a multilingual word wall displaying the vocabulary words of our thematic units of study in Spanish, Arabic, and English. I know this takes more work than just using one language in my classroom, but I am seeing the differences in my students' engagement and comprehension.

Other examples from students included creating a Spanish-speaking homework assistance line for parents, developing a donation account for multilingual books for their classroom, and providing Spanish materials for monolingual teachers in their buildings.

Another pattern of past and present awareness came through exploring their family's history. When given the time and space to critically reflect on their family's experiences, they felt empowered. They recognized that they came from a lineage of strength and resilience. When reflecting on her journey to become a teacher and work on a master's degree, Juana proclaimed, "I have fought for my dreams like a lion." She went on to proudly share her family's immigration story from Mexico and stated, "I know it

in such a detailed manner that I can close my eyes and still see the river.” She realized that she needs to continue to stay motivated in her learning so “their life-risking act would not be in vain.” Remembering these moments encouraged them to develop curriculum for their own students that centered around recognizing one’s worth. For example, several students decided to not just use published children’s books; they wanted to use their own students’ stories as a part of the curriculum. Azucena explained, “I have received so much familial capital information I can use now in my teaching and lessons. This is where the idea of the identity boxes came from.” The identity boxes became a main part of her curriculum, where students would bring items from their cultural backgrounds and use those items as a springboard for exploring geography, writing, and even science.

A key component related to familial capital is the importance of mothers. Many of the students remembered nurturing moments from their mothers and *abuelitas* (grandmas). Engaging with those moments reminded them of why they wanted to become a teacher in the first place. Gloria, who was an undocumented child and was given DACA status as a teenager reflected on her literacy practices:

My mom is an avid reader and someone who just loves to learn. She was also more than glad to take me to all the writing workshops I wanted to attend and made sure that I had what I needed to succeed. She was and still is my biggest supporter.

Gloria went on to elaborate on how she wants to be that person for the children in her classroom. Students also shared that they had forgotten to listen to their inner voice, which is guided by their family members and ancestors. There was advice and guidance offered from family that my students had dismissed as not having value in their professional lives. Maya, who was only in her third year of teaching, was struggling with whether or not to stay in the profession. However, she remembered some key guidance offered to her from her grandmother. She explained:

It is my obligation not only to represent the product of a humble hard-working family but to use my knowledge of language learning and bilingualism to prepare others to reach their full potential. As my *abuelita* always told me, “*De todo se aprende la vida.*” You learn from everything in life.

Maya, like many others, recognized how that advice can assist them with overcoming oppressive practices taking place at their school and developing a safe space for their own students.

Tapping Into Critical Hope

The last main finding from the CCW Reflective Inquiry process is the shift from discouragement to critical hope. Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade (2009) describes this as “teaching in ways that connect the moral outrage of young people to actions that relieve the undeserved suffering in their communities” (p. 181). This type of hope encourages us to acknowledge injustice while also standing in solidarity with youth to push back collectively in order to move forward. The focus of critical hope is to support action and resilience (Bozalek et al., 2013; Freire, 1994). At the beginning of this process, students were so overwhelmed by current negative experiences in their schools that they could not focus on the possibilities proposed in our course content.

Overwhelmingly, students clearly identified and confronted the injustices that were weighing them down. Repeatedly, particular obstacles were mentioned: lack of representation in the books children read, white-washing of history content, and lack of ethnically diverse administrators. The most prevalent injustice explored was book bans taking place across the United States. Azucena shared, “I’m fearful of the famous book ban. I pride myself in creating culturally relevant books in dual-language and ESL classrooms. I have fought for classroom libraries that are authentic Spanish books and not just a translation of English books.” However, she goes on to discuss how she has developed action steps: “I have been to many board meetings where I have to cross lines of protesters against certain books being in the schools.” Acknowledging the issues became the first step for students to eventually move toward solutions.

Toward the end of the CCW Reflective Inquiry, students began to develop goals and potential actions. These were clearly connected to the content in the course, along with the concepts of CCW. Maribel, who had immigrated with her family to the United States from Guatemala, wrote about her experiences as an undocumented immigrant child and how participating in an afterschool program called the Migrant Lab was her “saving grace” because it helped her learn English and understand her homework, while also giving her a sense of belonging and teaching her how to navigate the educational system in the United States. She shared her efforts to create an afterschool club for migrant youth:

I felt as if I started a tiny revolution with my allies and teacher friends. I knew that as someone who is a part of multiple marginalized communities, my funds of knowledge included navigational capital as a part of my communities’ cultural wealth.

Maritza, a student who immigrated to the United States from Venezuela with her husband, wrote about an administrator from her school. Maritza also aspired to be a leader in the school one day and had looked up to this administrator, but she had not been able to fully understand why until after compiling the CCW Reflective Inquiry. By reflecting on her field notes, she realized this administrator was using different forms of capital to help Latinx students in the school, and she desired to follow that lead. Maritza wrote, “I’m developing my navigational skills to teach my students to stand up for themselves and feel proud of their funds of knowledge. I am also preparing a staff development [program] for my colleagues to learn more about culturally relevant-sustaining practices.” The concepts of funds of knowledge and culturally relevant-sustaining practices were both key concepts from the course that semester.

Discussion

According to Pedaste et al. (2015), who conducted a review of 32 inquiry-based learning studies, most inquiry cycles have five main phases in common: orientation, conceptualization, investigation, conclusion, and discussion. The graduate students in my course who participated in the CCW Reflective Inquiry worked their way through each of these phases.

Through this process, they were first able to recognize that hegemonic messaging pervades their sense of self and their professional work. The negative impact of dominant narratives on teachers from marginalized backgrounds has been well documented (Bettini et al., 2022; Brown, 2014; Castro, 2022).

However, what my students recognized and shared through their final reports was that their own families had been infiltrated by hegemonic discourses. This was surprising to many of them and disheartening. Nonetheless, identifying it and confronting it was the first step in orienting themselves in the struggle. Students were also able to identify other systemic obstacles they were facing which included book bans, lack of representation, and dismissal of multilingual and multicultural work being done in K–12 schools. LaBoskey (2009) argues that this process of “name it and claim it,” which derives from Black American churches, is an essential piece of developing social justice in teacher education.

Once students were able to orient themselves to the obstacles they were facing and conceptualize questions and theoretical perspectives, they could begin to investigate how they had been impacted. Students recognized that their teacher training had encouraged them to view their own students through an asset lens rather than a deficit lens (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Valencia, 1997). However, due to the obstacles and messaging they were facing, the teachers were not viewing themselves through an asset-based lens.

Students moved into the investigation phase, where they took notes in the field and engaged in discussions with colleagues. Guided by Yosso’s CCW model, students were able to connect their personal, lived experiences with their professional work. Similar to other teachers from marginalized backgrounds, they were able to utilize the six elements of capital to recognize their own funds of knowledge and recognize their value that had gone unnoticed by whitemainstream, Eurocentric perspectives (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Trigos-Carrillo, 2020). At the end of the process, most students were able to re-conceptualize their sense of self and their professional worth.

Western concepts of psychology have claimed that humans must release their emotions in order to begin processing with their logical brain (Oatley et al., 2011). However, more recently, decolonized ways of thinking have generated more holistic understanding that we can hold emotional knowledge and logical knowledge at the same time (Asma & Gabriel, 2019; Bhatia, 2020). While negative emotions can skew our view of reality, it is important that we don’t dismiss our emotions completely. Mlodinow (2022) explains that rather than moving past our emotions to become more logical, we must just recognize them in a more nuanced way to achieve logical progress. Through their reflective inquiry, students were able to identify the injustice they were experiencing, move through the dark emotions, and shine a light on moments of progress and potential. The progress displayed in their final reports represented a critical hope fostered through a radical pedagogy combining “hope, critical reflection and collective struggle” (Giroux, 1985, p. xvii). In the end, the reflective inquiry process led students to connecting more with the curriculum and building actionable steps.

Conclusion and Implications

This article began with a quote from Maya, who uses a medicine analogy for her experience with the reflective inquiry. As teacher educators, we have an opportunity to create healing in educational spaces. This study highlights how healing can take place and the importance of developing culturally responsive-sustaining inquiry practices in teacher education classrooms, especially those that engage with students from underrepresented populations. Geneva Gay (2013) tells us that it is important to “teach to and through our students” (p. 49). The teachers who are entering the workforce and those returning for an advanced degree deserve the space to explore their professional self in a holistic way that does not dismiss their identities.

In the classroom, teacher educators should be willing to occasionally do some curricular off-roading. This can be unsettling in the beginning, but innovation often develops out of struggle. In addition, it is important that teacher educators recognize that some students have difficulty connecting to the curriculum due to destructive messaging that stands in the way of processing new knowledge and applying it. Therefore, it is important to identify culturally responsive-sustaining models and frameworks like CCW to assist students in developing an asset-based view of themselves.

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