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**TEACHING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS THROUGH
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION:
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY DRAWING ON
SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURE**

A Thesis in

Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to implement and examine the impact of pedagogical strategies designed to increase culturally responsive education and critical consciousness in an undergraduate social work class at a small, Christian, liberal arts college. The study participants were nine students enrolled in an undergraduate class focused on group development and learning skills for working with groups in social work practice. The study critically examines culture and spirituality as a worldview and draws on perspectives of culture and spirituality from adult education and social work education through the theoretical lens of poststructural feminist thought, intersectionality theory, and the discourses of critical multiculturalism and antiracist education. The framework for the study attends to positionality, power relations, and systems of privilege in the context of teaching and learning. A critical action research design was used to systematically look at knowledge production by introducing change and observing the effects. The main data collection methods were focus groups, reflective journals, and online asynchronous discussions.

The findings from the study are presented in the context of the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages of the action research cycle and address three major themes. First, participants moved beyond Christianity as the only valid spirituality, to understanding the spirituality of others and themselves as influenced by culture. Second, they indicated new learning about cultural competence for social work practice by connecting spirituality with culture, and understanding the effects of culture and White privilege in their own and other's real life experiences. Third, participants found the culturally responsive educational experience extremely positive because it foregrounded

multiple dimensions of their learning: the spiritual, cultural, affective, and experiential, as well as rational work typical in higher education. The themes and findings are discussed in light of the five elements of poststructural feminist thought: knowledge construction, shifting identity, voice, positionality, and authority. In addition, there were several implications from the study for the fields of adult education and social work including: the importance of hearing others' voices, the value of group process, the importance of ongoing support, value of creating space, and the value of technology.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time...
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.
Lilla Watson, A Brisbane based Aboriginal educator and activist.

Undergraduate social work education prepares students for generalist social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organization, and communities. Accredited social work programs in colleges and universities strive to help students learn skills and gain the knowledge necessary to be effective practitioners. In addition, social work programs provide ways for students to identify values and gain self-awareness to practice in a diverse society.

My undergraduate and graduate social work education took place in large universities well known for their strong social work programs. I clearly remember portions of courses devoted to learning about “other races and ethnic groups” that usually consisted of a class or two each semester talking about what to look for when working with a client who is Asian, Hispanic, or African American. Warnings such as “Asian clients do not like eye contact” and “if a Hispanic client is late, it is because they have a different concept of time” ring in my ears even today. This was largely the extent of the training and exposure I and social work colleagues had with issues of culture.

Spirituality was even less visible. I remember a group of students who met at a professor’s house to discuss how they could integrate their faith with the values and teachings of social work education. The climate in the institution was not conducive to talking about higher power or acknowledging spiritual tension in the classroom or in practice. That particular professor was willing to address obvious issues of spirituality and took the risk to meet with students in order to help them explore spiritual issues. However, nowhere in my undergraduate

or graduate experience was spirituality considered or addressed as part of social work education, and I received both degrees within the past 15 years.

I began my teaching career in 2000 in the same undergraduate social work program I received my degree. Little change occurred in dealing with spirituality in the classroom, although attention to culture was slightly more visible. Now I teach in an undergraduate social work program in a small Christian college. The social work program is very small, and speaking about spirituality is encouraged and expected. Rather, speaking explicitly about Christianity is expected. Spirituality is perceived as synonymous with religion, and religion is Christianity. The College ascribes to a definition of spirituality that refers to beliefs about the meaning of life, the purpose, values, and sense of wholeness and connectedness we find in our social and educational arena (Astin, 2004). However, the assumption underlying this definition is that true spirituality is Christianity. This fusion of spirituality and religion is not an uncommon phenomenon (Cascio, 1998; Damianakis, 2001; Hodge, 2002), and contributes to the larger picture of avoidance of directly dealing with spiritual issues in social work classrooms and in social work practice (Cascio, 1998).

In addition, diversity and multicultural education are often discussed around campus, and attention is given to programming designed to increase awareness of “the other” (i.e. those different from the White middle class mainstream population). The College *appears* very concerned with helping students gain experiences in cultures different from their own, evidenced by the extensive network of study abroad programs. Also, the availability of “cross-cultural” mission experiences enable a large percentage of students to travel out of the country at least once during their undergraduate years. However, there seems to be underlying assumptions inherent in these highly organized travel experiences. From conversations with students as well

as faculty leading the trips, the agenda appears to be to “bring truth” to the foreign cultures and present students an opportunity to provide service to the needy. Again, the implication is that “the other” is somehow wrong and needs to be fixed.

In class, I find that students are often very concrete in their thinking with a very conservative bias. For example, often I hear students comment about right and wrong (especially on issues of abortion, sexual orientation, and gender roles), with no room for exploration of where their values are based and why, or how they will apply these strong beliefs in practice. Students will often cite parental influence and their religious upbringing as their value orientation. They identify those strong roots as part of them and do not see a reason to look further. In a recent social work class, I asked students to try to identify influences on their beliefs. I introduced a constructionist model conceptualizing three domains (individual, culture, and universal) by which our beliefs are most strongly influenced (Zastrow, 2001). While several students identified cultural and universal influences, most students displayed the highly individualistic tenets common to the Christian college population and openly disagreed with the concept of the model I presented.

This classroom culture has provided a particularly challenging issue for me in teaching, especially given the nature of social work practice. In practice, social workers struggle daily with values, ethics, and personal bias when working with client populations who bring extremely difficult situations to our doorstep. I wonder how these students can become competent social workers unless they gain a greater sensitivity to difference. I wrestle with how to help the students recognize the narrow lens through which they view the world. I feel responsible to create a classroom environment and curriculum that challenge the perception of the students in this social work program to help them see the bigger picture and explore other ways of thinking.

This is not just a personal feeling of responsibility, but is part of the purpose of social work education and a directive for all accredited social work programs (Council on Social Work Education, 1991).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has included curriculum policy statements in its accreditation standards that mandate programs to “prepare practitioners for work in diverse communities” (Rittner, Nakanishi, Nackerud, & Hammons, 1999, p. 421). This is done by infusing diversity content and content on oppression (Nagda et al., 1999) into the curriculum for all baccalaureate (and master’s level) social work students in an accredited social work program (CSWE, 1992). By stipulating this curriculum content, CSWE is attempting to ensure that newly graduated social workers will be exposed to an emphasis on aspects of diversity as well as self-awareness. They expect students to confront their own prejudices and biases that can begin to enable them to practice in a more culturally competent manner (Rittner et al., 1999; Lee & Greene, 1999). In addition, the National Association of Social Workers sets forth standards in their Code of Ethics that include a policy statement charging social workers to be ethically responsible and culturally competent (NASW, 2001). Social work practitioners (and educators) are expected to adhere to these standards and the goals and objectives therein.

With these mandates in mind, along with the current culture observed in the classroom, it is important to look at the larger picture of where this lack of attention to cultural and spirituality issues is situated. It is not just a deficit present in the student population or within institutional bounds, but manifested as well in the teaching strategies, methods, and worldviews of social work educators. Both social work and adult education identify the importance of addressing culture and spirituality in order to increase authenticity and “teach for cultural relevance” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Tisdell, 2003, p. ix). Guy (1999a) and Tisdell (2003) speak to this

when they discuss the need for educators to understand the culture of the learners they are teaching, increase their own cultural self-awareness, and employ teaching approaches that are inclusive. In addition, they discuss the need to evaluate traditional educational processes and goals to determine what changes are needed in order to “assist learners whose individual and group identities are most at risk in terms of the dominant culture’s definition of success” (Guy, 1999a, p. 12-13). Culturally responsive education, therefore, takes into account the cultural identity of educator, the cultural identity of the learner, the power structures (positionality in relation to the dominant culture based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation) and the dominant cultural norms that are typically embedded in the classroom structure, as well as the connection to spirituality inherent in our cultural being.

Historically, social work has roots in religious and church based organizations as with the early settlement house movement, and agencies exist today that exemplify the religious base of social work (e.g. Salvation Army, Catholic Charities) (Day, 2000; Miller, 2001). Addressing spirituality is consistent with social work’s focus on using a strengths perspective, holistic approach, and attention to individual growth and empowerment (Cascio, 1998). The issue of spirituality as an important component of social work practice is becoming more recognized as a factor needing attention, as evidenced by a resurgence of the topic in professional conferences, scholarly writing, and research (Cascio, 1998; Hodge, 2001; Lee, 1997; Sheridan & Von Hemert, 1999; Sue & Sue, 2003). However, within the literature there is not clarity in the use of the term spirituality. The matter of spirituality and religion are handled in a variety of ways, from using the terms spirituality and religion interchangeably, as in Moore’s (2003) article on spiritual assessment, to Canda (2003) who uses the qualifier “religious and nonreligious forms of spirituality” (p. 82). Others simply do not attempt to define or clarify the relation between

spirituality and religion. The Society for Spirituality and Social Work, an organization founded in 1990 states that its mission focuses on supporting practitioners and scholars concerned with honoring and encouraging spiritual development and justice for all people, with an emphasis on respect for those of diverse religious and non-religious paths (Society for Spirituality and Social Work, 2004).

Disparity also exists within the social work profession as to the rights and ethical responsibilities of social work practitioners and educators when dealing with spiritual issues. As in the field of adult education, some authors question whether educators and practitioners are competent to address spirituality (and therefore religion?) in curriculum discourse, and whether spirituality can or needs to be nurtured and facilitated in the classroom and in agencies (Fenwick, 2001; Harris, 2001; Lauzon, 2001; Miller, 2001). The predominant feeling seems to be that spirituality is part of all being, such that it cannot be separated or left out of any area of life (Canda & Furman, 1999; Fenwick, 2001; Gillen & English, 2000; Harris, 2001; Lauzon, 2001; Miller, 2001; Sheridan, 2001; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). Here again, this conversation points to the unclear boundaries in the discourse of religion and spirituality, and underscores the issues faced in a social work classroom in a Christian College, where students see only through the lens of Christianity rather than embracing an understanding of spirituality in a global sense.

Spirituality and culture are less visibly linked in the social work literature. However, underlying the discourse and attention to culture given by writers, spirituality would be inherent in the culture of many social groups. For example, Sue (2003) discusses spirituality in the context of culture as a “cultural strength” of persons of color, specifically African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino-Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans (p. 267). Sleeter and Grant

(2003) make no direct mention of spirituality in their discussion of structural social change, although the marked role of spirituality in society cannot be overlooked.

Understanding spirituality in the context of culture in the social work classroom addresses two dimensions important to the social work student, especially with regard to working with a client population (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). Spirituality and religion are integral parts of culture, and help clients address difficult questions and conflicts in their lives (Cascio, 1998). Students encouraged to look at the mind-spirit-body connection and spiritual development (in the context of cultural identity development) can develop an approach that “deepens and broadens their worldview” (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999, p. 55). Assisting students in understanding the nuances of religion and spirituality, and beginning to discern their religious beliefs by broadening their sense of meaning about themselves, life, and reality will be a step further in their own identity development (Canda & Furman, 1999; Miller, 2001). By attending to prescribed competencies (spiritual and cultural), students can gain self-awareness and build skills that lead to culturally relevant practice (Cascio, 1998; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999).

In my social work classes at a Christian college, there is little evidence to support this view. Students appear to only see spirituality in the context of religion (Christianity), and most have not been encouraged to look beyond the formal, organized body of knowledge informed by the Bible to begin to embrace an alternative framework for spirituality. In preparation for practice, I strongly believe social work students need to be exposed (at the very least) to a constructivist approach which can begin to help students make connections, foster spiritual development, and move away from a solely religious focus and toward a meaning of connection and wholeness, situated in a cultural dimension. They will be working with clients who exhibit vast diversity foregrounding the need to comprehend spirituality from a conceptual view.

Encouraging this shift in thinking sets the basis for teaching from a culturally responsive paradigm, thereby seeking to develop spiritually and more culturally competent social workers.

The field of adult education has begun to support and nurture the concept of culturally responsive education in both teaching and learning, now the field of social work must address this in educational programs as well. Tisdell (2003) and Shahjahan (2004) purport that spirituality is part of the classroom environment, hence to ignore it is disregarding an essential piece. The concept of “centering our spirituality” in the classroom with attention to pedagogy is necessary to acknowledge the spiritual dimension (Shahjahan, 2004, p. 302). In the field of social work, there is clearly attention on spirituality in social work *practice*, but less on the level of undergraduate education where prospective practitioners are gaining a knowledge and skill base as a foundation for future work. This discourse is just beginning to find its way into the social work literature. Very little is written on integrating spirituality into social work education. Since religion is a large part of my students’ value system, I am greatly remiss if I do not address the concept with culturally responsive pedagogy. There is no argument for the need for culturally responsive social work education. Book after book highlights the increase in diverse populations and the growth of minority groups necessitating increased understanding and sensitivity of practitioners to issues of oppression and social action (Sue & Sue, 2003). In addition, a basic social work tenet is treating the client holistically, which includes the context of not only biological, psychological, and social aspects, but also spiritual as well (Canda & Furman, 1999; Zastrow, 2001)

In order to accomplish this monumental task, social work education programs must provide students with the knowledge, skills, and tools to work in a complex society. Social work is a profession geared toward helping individuals, families, groups, organizations and

communities enhance and increase social functioning through provision of resources, prevention, advocacy, and empowerment (Zastrow, 2001). As a social work educator, I am committed to providing students with tools they can use in practice, but more importantly, I see the need to help students understand and gain self-awareness of their cultural lens and spiritual beliefs. It is imperative that social work education provide the vehicle for students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the influence of culture on their belief system, as well as how that belief system influences practice. The paucity of literature regarding culturally responsive pedagogy in social work education necessitates more work in this area. Building on the strong literature base supporting culturally and spiritually relevant practice, it follows that in order for social work practitioners to shift to a more culturally and spiritually grounded skill base, higher education programs must respond by including pedagogy designed to increase focus on cultural and spirituality in social work education. One way to move to a more culturally responsive pedagogy is to gain knowledge about the impact of spiritual and culturally responsive material as part of social work curriculum

Purpose of this Study

Social work literature discusses a few ways to increase cultural responsiveness and address spirituality in the classroom. However, many of these discussions take a “cookbook” approach and do not delve into the deeper issues of cultural responsiveness such as White privilege, racism, power and oppression, and structural inequality. In addition, they do not address spirituality in the sense of a mind-body-spirit connection. Adult education literature provides a much stronger discourse with which to employ culturally responsive pedagogy into a curriculum. This study then, uses an action research approach to develop and implement a project to address cultural responsiveness and spirituality from a critical perspective, making it

possible for students in the social work program to begin to explore and uncover their worldview related to culture, race, class, gender, positionality, and spirituality.

In particular, the purpose of this action research study is to gain knowledge about the impact of spiritual and culturally responsive material presented during the course of a social work class. A second goal seeks to identify and assess student perceptions and awareness of their worldview in relation to culture, race, gender, positionality, and spirituality. Using a social constructivist approach, students will have a frame from which they can look at knowledge construction in their own lives in terms of oppression and privilege (Lee & Greene, 1999). In addition, the importance of helping students explore their culture and develop ingenuousness for cultural and spiritual realities will serve to increase the cultural responsiveness of student social work majors and lead to increasing the cultural competence of social work practitioners.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework is based on poststructural and intersectional feminist perspectives that attend to gender and the intersecting identities of race, class, sexual orientation, age and disability (Mann & Huffman, 2005). The poststructural and intersectional paradigms offer the context for this project, specifically the themes related to teaching and learning: knowledge construction, giving voice, authority, shifting identity, and positionality (Hays & Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). The intersectional feminist perspective addresses structural power relations through an understanding of multiple systems of oppression, and foregrounds cultural awareness of self, as well as gender and giving voice, an important caveat to this project since most participants will be women. The aspects of feminist poststructural pedagogy that address the rational-affective deconstruction and belief in the reality of the learner's truth are relevant to social work education and provide a basis for social work students to connect this

work to content of other courses, especially practice skills classes. While most social work education encourages students to look at oppression and social structures, it is not in the frame of looking at self as the oppressor or perpetrator of the social structures. Students are not aware of positionality, and the way their race, class, and gender affect interactions with clients (as well as all interactions). In addition, poststructural and intersectional feminist pedagogies foreground the intersection of gender, oppression, and privilege as it affects knowledge construction. Many social work students at this Christian college have little awareness of their oppression as women, as seen by discussions about submission and reverence to biblical interpretations by which women are expected to abide. For this reason, feminist pedagogy and the attention to giving voice and shifting identity is relevant to the project.

Poststructural and intersectional feminist perspectives relate to critical theory and provide the basis for social change and emancipation through the view that knowing about human experience is a means to change the world (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). The discourse on challenging power relations, especially in relation to race, gender, and class (Tisdell, 2003) both in the classroom and in practice supports the social change/social transformation aspect of the project, and the need for the change/transformation to take place within the context of social work education. Habermas focuses on practical and emancipatory forms of knowledge and the political and social tenets of education (as cited in Elias & Merriam, 1995). This focus underscores how the rational aspects of culturally responsive teaching and social work education mesh and comprehensively provide social work students with the means to develop a culturally responsive worldview. Through the aspect of critically questioning and assessing assumptions in the process of knowledge construction, social work students can gain a sense of empowerment, by realizing the ability to change themselves as well as social and power structures with which

they may interact (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Along with feminist pedagogy, the theoretical underpinnings for the proposed action research project has a basis that attends to analyzing power relations and oppression, giving voice, social change, emancipation, social connectedness and transformation, and developing a culturally responsive worldview.

This research is also grounded in the cultural perspectives on spirituality and their role in higher education and social work. These feminist and cultural theoretical underpinnings speak to the individual as well as social structures. These theories address self-awareness, connectedness, and transformation for the individual, and social structural changes within the institution through identifying and assessing central elements of resistance and challenging systems of power that are currently in place. The literature addresses spiritual influences on students and educators in social work education, but the degree of a religious/non-religious spiritual worldview must be critically examined to create an awareness of how social work teaching and practice is informed by spirituality.

Significance of the Study

The research literature addressing the issue of spirituality and culture in social work education typically does not address spirituality in the context of culture. It often does not place an emphasis on students' understanding of exploring their spiritual and cultural development in order to be effective practitioners. This study will contribute to the knowledge base in social work by not only looking at the outcome of implementing specific strategies in the classroom, but also by providing a context of deeper meaning by recognizing issues of privilege, racism, power, oppression, and structural inequality. The findings from this study will serve to enhance the social work research literature by offering outcomes situated in social work, rather than relying on current studies based more within a counseling and psychology perspective.

To the field of adult education, this study foregrounds culturally responsive teaching and situating spirituality in the context of culture (Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). By introducing pedagogical strategies into the curriculum to increase student awareness of their cultural and spiritual lens, this study can validate the assumptions about culturally responsive teaching offered by several authors in adult education literature. The findings from this research will contribute to the knowledge base in adult education by offering experiences in the classroom to strengthen and broaden perspectives of culturally responsive education.

Personally, this study will serve to enhance my teaching and support my belief in the importance of culturally relevant education. As a social work educator and practitioner, I continually face the reality of being a White woman working with diverse populations and the need to understand and identify my culturally and socially constructed beliefs and behaviors that demonstrate racism, prejudice, oppression, and bias. In addition, I recognize the deficiencies in my own social work education and the perpetuation of those deficiencies today. By conducting this study, I hope to contribute to changing the face of social work education in my institution, and take a step toward offering research findings that will serve to assist other social work educators to do the same.

Overview of Methodology

Action research has a philosophical basis in critical theory and constructivist paradigms (DePoy et al., 1999; Jacobson, 1998; McNicoll, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999), thereby offering a method to understand experiences and produce knowledge through interaction, reflection, and interpretation (Jacobson, 1998). Also described as a “systematic gathering of information by people who are both affected by a problem and want to solve the problem” (Wagner, 1991, p. 477), action research focuses on linking research with action for social

change. It provides a method, in this case, to query into my teaching practice in order to make changes and evaluate the outcomes of the changes in order to increase the level of culturally relevant education in the social work program curriculum. I promote the action research approach largely for its focus on encouraging the researcher to experience the problem and engage in accessing data in “real time” (Cunningham, 1993, p. 5). In addition, the flexibility of the action research design in terms of ability to change as the research progresses supports the desirability of research done *with* a group instead of *on* a group. Another argument is the relatively informal nature of action research (rather than the formal structures of control and experimental procedures) in which the role of the researcher is to serve as a facilitator and catalyst between the research findings and the individuals benefiting or taking action from the findings (Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Patton, 2002). The researcher’s knowledge and understanding contribute to the construction and identification of meaning, while being responsive to the context of human experience (Jacobson, 1998), which lends itself to a classroom situation and the goal of increasing culturally responsive teaching and learning.

This action research study will be conducted at a small (2870 students) Christian liberal arts college. The specific context is a social work course that meets for 75 minutes two times a week during a 15-week fall semester. The course is required for all social work majors, and is usually taken during fall of the third year in the social work program. This course is listed as SOW 372: Social Work Practice with Groups, and is described in the college course catalog (College Catalog, 2004) as

... The third class in a series of practice courses in Social Work. The course examines the dynamics of the small group. Different theoretical conceptualizations of the role of the Social Worker in the group are discussed. Concepts such as group dynamics, norms, and

roles are examined. Group leadership skills for planning, facilitating, and evaluating groups will be developed and practiced. Content will include identifying and implementing group related empirically based interventions and services designed to achieve client and community goals. There is also a focus on the interplay between Social Work and community groups. Limited to Social Work majors or permission of the instructor. Prerequisites: SOW 204 Helping Processes II: Practice with Families

The participants in the study will include all students enrolled in the fall, 2005 semester of the course. The composition of the class will be predominantly female, Caucasian, Christian students, which is representative of the student population of the college. This course focusing on group dynamics and skills to work with groups in a social work setting provides a very relevant context for exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy in social work education. As McNicoll (1999) points out, attention to group dynamics is crucial to successful action research. The group work skills of the teacher (researcher) come into play as well, since the participants in the study function as a small group during the research process (McNicoll, 1999). The stages of group development tend to parallel the way the group of participants will respond to the construction of knowledge and meaning making throughout the action research process. Therefore, the expectation is that the student participants will learn experientially about group dynamics and development as they move through this action research study, thereby creating a dichotomy of learning enhanced by the focus on culturally responsive education.

The action research project will consist of several phases. In the planning phase, I will conduct an extensive literature review to identify specific classroom techniques and strategies in order to develop a framework designed to encourage students to begin to critically reflect on their spiritual, religious, and cultural beliefs. Course design will include session topics, small

group activities, small group projects, videos, reflective journaling, and asynchronous communication to begin to assist students with identifying their cultural roots. In addition, I will use the cognitive, affective/relational, and symbolic areas of knowing as ways to explore and construct knowledge. The second phase, the action phase, includes implementation of the research plan and recording and observing results. This phase will occur during a 15-week session of a social work class. Lastly, the third phase called the observation phase consists of evaluating results and reflection of the research action.

Definition of Terms

Culture – There are varied definitions of culture in the literature. In the context of this study, culture refers to attempts by a social group to interpret, give meaning to, and function within shared beliefs, values, behaviors, language, and circumstances (Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Tisdell, 2003).

Cultural competence – All aspects of society are shaped by culture and social constructs, and education is often the vehicle influencing and defining cultural values (Guy, 1999). For the purpose of this study, cultural competence is defined as the ability to develop knowledge, concepts and techniques specific to a particular cultural group (Lee & Greene, 1999).

Culturally responsive education – Guy (1999a) and Tisdell (2003) discuss culturally relevant education (now referred to as culturally responsive education, Gay, 2000) as the need for adult educators to understand the culture of the learners they are teaching, increase their own cultural self-awareness, and employ teaching approaches that are inclusive and “challenge power relations” in the classroom (Tisdell, 2003, p. 41). In addition, it is important for educators to evaluate traditional educational processes and goals to determine what changes are needed in order to “assist learners whose individual and group identities are most at risk in terms of the

dominant culture's definition of success" (Guy, 1999a, p. 12-13). Culturally responsive education, in the context of this study, takes into account the cultural identity of educator, the cultural identity of the learner, the power structures (positionality in relation to the dominant culture based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation) and the dominant cultural norms that are typically embedded in the classroom structure.

Intersectionality Theory – First called Black Feminist thought, this discourse was developed by women of color and ethnicity and refers to the simultaneous and multiple oppressions faced by women of color and foregrounds positionality in relation to race, class and the power imbalances that result from the intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2000; Mann & Huffman, 2005).

Religion – An organized community composed of formal doctrines, codes, beliefs, and practices, and rituals that can be observed. Often the doctrines are written, institutionally prescribed ways of being that serve to regulate behavior (Canda, 1989; Shahjahan, 2004; Sherwood, 1998; Tisdell, 2003). Expected behaviors often include participation in worship practices, acceptance of a particular set of beliefs and ethics, and denominational affiliation (Cascio, 1998; Pellebon & Anderson, 1999).

Spirituality –There is a lack of consensus in the literature among authors as to the definition of this term. Some authors feel that use of the term spirituality minimizes religious faith (Vogel, 2000), and others shy away from the term because it "carries the weight of unredeemable, patriarchal religions" (Bean, 2000, p. 70). Some authors attempt to present a description of their spiritual lens and clarify what spirituality is to them. For the purpose of this study, spirituality refers to a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life, having a moral framework, while engaging in particular beliefs and behaviors (Canda & Furman, 1999).

Organization and Overview

Chapter One outlined the rationale and historical basis underlying the purpose of the study, as well as identified the significance of the study to social work and adult education. Critical terms were defined, and a brief introduction to the methodology was included. The next chapter provides a summary and analysis of the relevant literature pertaining to culturally responsive education, theoretical underpinnings of the study, and pedagogical discourses of spirituality and culture in social work and higher education. Chapter Three details the methodological procedures and rationale for the action research project and firmly establishes the frame of the study. In Chapter Four, the findings and data collected are considered in relation to the stages of action research: planning, acting, observing and reflecting, as well as a presentation of the overall themes of learning through the context of critical reflection of the data. Chapter Five provides a rich discussion of the relevance of the findings, and offers conclusions as to the knowledge constructed through the action research study, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This action research study focuses on providing culturally responsive education in a social work classroom of a small Christian College. Culturally responsive education and turning out social work practitioners with increased cultural competence who are capable of working with clients different from themselves is a mandate from the accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education,(CSWE) and a belief widely held by the social work profession (CSWE, 1992) and this author. As a foundation for the study, it is important to examine the bodies of literature that guide the study and offer theoretical underpinnings, philosophical frameworks, and discourse critical to understanding culturally responsive teaching in adult and social work education. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary and analysis of the literature in both social work and adult education as it relates to this study. Since there are many in the field of adult education who explore the subject of culturally responsive teaching through discourses of multicultural education, anti-racist education, and critical multiculturalism, I will explore literature in those areas. The context of a small, Christian college campus on which this study takes place compels a discussion of the philosophies in adult and higher education that most inform the study. Therefore, I provide an explanation and analysis of the relationship of the critical and liberal philosophies informing this study.

Attention to spirituality has recently begun to appear in adult education literature (English & Gillen, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2003). Social work practice has experienced a re-emergence of the topics of religion and spirituality in the past decade (Cascio, 1998). In addition, several authors in adult education and sociology discuss spirituality in relation to cultural responsiveness (Tisdell, 2003; Wuthnow, 1998; Shahjahan, 2004) which is especially significant to a study situated on a Christian college campus. The importance of

constructing knowledge through making meaning as spiritual beings in the context of culture (Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003) offers a discourse that “reclaims...our sense of place and sense of spirit” (Glazer, 1999, p. 3.). Tisdell (2003) in her book *Exploring Spirituality and Culture*, makes the direct link between spirituality and culture as she describes the connection to culturally responsive education as “the powerful ways [people] create meaning through their cultural, symbolic, and spiritual experience” (p. 42). Therefore, literature on spirituality and religion is presented through social work and adult education perspectives to support the premise that culturally responsive education involves attention to spirituality as an inherent aspect of culture and a way students make meaning.

I have organized this chapter in three sections. Section I gives an overview of feminist perspectives in education or feminist pedagogies, highlighting the poststructural and/or intersectional aspects of feminist perspectives, a theoretical framework central to this study. Specific attention is given to five elements of feminist pedagogy in relation to culturally responsive education. The elements of knowledge construction, voice, authority, positionality and identity in relation to the intersections of race, gender, class, sexual orientation and religion as structures of power are discussed by several authors who talk about feminist perspectives in education (hooks, 1994; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Sheared, 1994; Tisdell, 2000). In addition, I review the literature outlining feminist perspectives in social work, foregrounding the historical development of feminism in social work and the relevance of poststructural and/or intersectional feminist perspectives to social work education. Section II reviews the pedagogical discourses dealing with cultural difference described in the adult education literature, thereby providing a basis through which the context and importance of the study to social work and adult education knowledge base is understood. These discourses include multicultural education, antiracist

education, and critical multiculturalism. Section II ends with a brief analysis of the relationship between culturally responsive education on a Christian college campus and the philosophical foundations that inform this study.

Section III begins by presenting the literature on spirituality and religion in adult and higher education, and the relationship to culturally responsive education contextualized throughout adult education discourse. The latter part of section III reviews the literature pertaining to social work education and its attention to spirituality and religion. A central theme in this section is the emphasis on meaning making and defining religion and spirituality in adult education and the social work profession. Further, this section demonstrates the difficulty that social work authors and researchers have discerning the nuances between religion and spirituality, that often leads to avoiding the issue.

Theoretical Framework

The discussion of the theoretical framework for this study first begins with an overview of feminism from a historical context before moving toward the specific aspects of a poststructural feminist framework, and then to a consideration of such a framework in social work education.

Historical Perspectives of Feminist Theory

Foundational to the feminist perspectives of the 1960's and 1970's is a paradigm that focused on gender and oppression but largely ignored differences of race, class, age and sexual orientation (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Feminist thought in the 1960's and 1970's was grounded in a liberal perspective that emphasized individual rights and how patriarchy as a social structure affected women. In the 1980's with the publication of Carol Gilligan's (1982) book *In a Different Voice*, more of an emphasis, particularly in academic circles, was placed on a

psychological perspective. Belenky et al. (1986) foregrounded the concept of women finding their voice and identity through connectedness with each other, as well as identifying structural aspects of a patriarchal society that served to silence women (Tisdell, 1998). The concept of structural discourses in feminist pedagogy stem from Freire's writings that focus on class and oppression, and bring to light the issue of power relations and privilege based on race, gender, class and sexual orientation (Tisdell, 1998). Structural feminist pedagogy is influenced by bell hooks's writing about critical feminist pedagogy and "coming to voice" in an environment where women "may be afraid or see themselves at risk" (hooks, 1984, p. 53). Structural perspectives begin to look at social structures and the political nature of knowledge giving. They address the issue of what is "real" knowledge and who decides what knowledge to impart (Tisdell, 1998). Unlike psychological models, structural models do not focus on the individual, but on the systemic or formal social structures (race, gender, and class) that perpetuate power and privilege (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

However, Nicholson (1990), in the introduction to her edited book, and hooks (2000), in her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, point out that early feminist theory reflected thinking of predominately White, middle class women and was about gender differences rather than differences among and between women. This thinking continued to marginalize women whose experiences and differences did not fit with the generalized ideology of the privileged, White, middle class woman (hooks, 2000). In addition, women of color were beginning to deconstruct the notions of the dominant feminist groups and find their voice in the emerging conversation (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000).

Currently, feminist thought in general addresses the issues of voice, authority, positionality, knowledge construction, (Maher & Tetreault, 1994) and identity (Tisdell, 2003),

and identifies the concept that knowledge is relational, evolving, contextual, and political (Luke & Gore, 1992; Ropers-Huilman, 1998). The idea of knowledge construction and giving voice was originally conceptualized by Gilligan (1982), and further studied by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986). More recently, this perception of voice focuses on marginalized groups who “have been silenced” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 157). It also foregrounds the importance of creating a classroom environment responsive to diversity that creates a space where women and other marginalized groups can begin to view themselves as having a voice (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003; Tisdell, 1998) or helping to construct their own knowledge through relationships and connections with others (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Maher and Tetreault (2001) discuss the concept of voice as “the ability to speak for themselves” (p. 18) that is, connecting personal experience to learning in a way that does not require marginalized groups to give up the importance of those experiences. Orner (1992) discusses the importance of deconstructing the “power hierarchies” that contributed to perpetuating silence and needing to further “make use of the voice” once it is heard (p. 76). These power hierarchies greatly affect knowledge construction as well as what is considered valid knowledge or truth (Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Tisdell, 1998). Further, Maher and Tetreault (2001) find the classroom as a place where culture influences the way students construct concepts of “other” as well as contextualize how they develop identity. hooks (1994) also cautions educators to be aware of further marginalizing women by emotionally isolating and alienating women of color on the basis of class.

Another element underlying feminist theory is authority and the inherent power structures embedded therein, specifically those played out in the classroom and institutional setting. Of central importance is recognizing the authority of teachers, researchers, and the need to negotiate

“giv[ing] up” aspects of authority. Also important is our understanding authority and examining how we construct our understanding of authority through relationships with students and the institution (Maher & Tetreault, 2001, p. 20). Embedded in the element of authority is the issue of power, not only power relations among students, but also the multiple identities that exist between the teacher and learner and the importance of how they manifest in the classroom (Orner, 1992). The chasm that can exist between the intellectual (teacher) and the lived experience of the student further marginalizes, foregrounding the importance of recognizing power and authority and inclusion of all voices (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003). The authority of the teacher and how that authority is negotiated plays a fundamental role in deconstructing power relations in the classroom, and awareness of the structures in which the negotiating takes place is necessary so those with less power are not simply conceding to the dominate authority (Mojab, 1997).

Positionality as a central concept validates knowledge construction through the learner’s contextual position as defined by gender, race, class, sexual orientation and other cultural factors (Brown, 2001; Maher & Tetreault, 2001). Tisdell (1998) discusses the importance of dealing with the positionality of the educator, and how choices about what is considered valid knowledge are made. Positionality affects the implementation of pedagogical strategies in the classroom; therefore attention to positionality of the *learner* as well as the teacher is a common thread through the other four elements described here. Maher and Tetreault (2001) carry this theme further to point out that position is the factor that most affects knowledge construction, by making meaning of the continuously “evolving and relational” realities (p. 24).

The discussion of positionality leads to the final element, identity. Identity is described as “the de-centering and fragmentation” of the concept of self and significance of the “other”

(Bloland, 1995, p. 526), and as “multiple” and “layered” (Ropers-Huilman, 1998, p. 27). In reference to teaching, the identity of the educator influences the teaching situation on multiple levels, including politically and culturally (Ropers-Huilman, 1998).

Intersectional and Poststructuralist Feminist Thought

Most current feminisms are concerned with issues of gender in relation to the construction of knowledge, voice, authority, positionality, and address issues related to identity in some form. However, both intersectional feminisms and poststructural feminisms deal with these themes in relation to the intersecting identities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and dis/ability (Mann & Huffman, 2005).

Intersectional feminisms (which emphasize the intersections of gender with race, class, sexual orientation, etc) are historically rooted in Black Feminist thought, and emerged in reaction to the assumptions underlying some feminist thinking that all “women” were White (Tisdell, 2001, p.274), and that women of color faced “multiple oppressions” (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 59). Black feminists acknowledged the oppression of White women, but pointed out that privilege associated with their White status granted them opportunities unavailable to their Black female counterparts. This foregrounded positionality in relation to race, class and resulting power imbalances, and challenged the structural issues resulting from intersecting oppressions (Brown, 2001; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Brown (2001) notes that African American educators who, upon entering the classroom, are often perceived as incompetent, and often not given the authority a White counterpart would receive.

Black feminist thought foregrounded the needs of Black women, and ultimately other feminists began to emphasize the intersections of gender with multiple systems of privilege and oppression. Some now refer to this discourse as intersectionality theory (Anderson & Collins,

1992; Mann & Huffman, 2005). Essentially, intersectionality theory addresses structural power relations and the disempowerment of specific groups of women resulting from “intersectional paradigms” (Collins, 2000, p. 227), and highlights the connection between structural systems (specifically privilege and oppression) and interaction of those systems in the lives of marginalized groups (Brown, 2001). The concept of intersectionality offers a way to conceptualize power and oppression through an understanding that many systems of oppression (race, class, gender, sexuality) simultaneously serve to influence Black women’s experiences, and are controlled by the structural patterns that are socially constructed (Collins, 2000).

Poststructural feminist thought also emphasizes these multiple intersecting systems of privilege and oppression, but is grounded in the work of French philosophers Foucault, Lucan, and Derrida, and problematizes the subjectivity of women as a category (Alcoff, 1997). Foucault foregrounds the influence of social discourses on the construction of social reality, thereby promoting deconstruction of societal structures in order to support individual goals (Alcoff, 1997). Poststructural feminist perspective seeks to challenge the assumption of a common experience shared by all women because of their gender, includes all marginalized voices, and empowers women to establish connections that move beyond prejudices and previously held assumptions (Bryson & Bennet- Anyikwa, 2003; Dietz, 2000).

There are some differences between intersectional feminisms and poststructural feminist thought. However, these are based mostly in their historical roots and the degree to which they emphasize the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity. However, because they are so similar, in the remainder of this dissertation I will refer to the feminisms that emphasize these multiple intersections as poststructural feminist thought.

It is important to address the concept of identity in the context of poststructural feminist thought. Tisdell (2003) characterizes identity as “constantly shifting and developing” (p. 207). In this way, learners and educators are not static, but continuously moving; evolving and changing through a process of collaboration and interaction as knowledge is constructed (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003). Orner (1992), points out that feminist poststructuralist discourse addresses the identity issue by attempting to deconstruct the “contradictions” between the many dynamics present that play a part in identity development and construction (e.g. class gender, sexuality, history, language, life experience). As knowledge is constructed identities move and shift, and are shaped by relationships and interpretations of experiences, all aspects of the ongoing process that is part of seeking authenticity, or an authentic self, that shows consistency between values, actions, and genuineness (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Orner, 1992). Likewise, social constructs that shape a person’s identity are considered as poststructural feminists recognize the differences within and among women, rather than lumping all females into a single category (Ropers-Huilman, 1998). The premise that identity is constructed and continually shifting based on social, political, and cultural influences serves as a point of convergence of all the elements discussed as pieces of poststructural feminist theory. Authority, voice, knowledge construction, and positionality all emanate from and are intricately bound within the identity of the educator. Identifying systems of power and understanding power and oppression as a critical lens by which relationships are viewed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) provides some explanation and way of making meaning of the authority theme in poststructuralist feminist thought.

The intersectional and poststructural feminist perspectives are especially relevant to social work practice and education. Because these feminisms discuss the intersections of identity based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and power, they pertain to men as well

as women. Given the disproportionate representation of women in the social work field, this perspective serves to contextualize the discussion of creating an inclusive classroom environment to validate the diverse population of women in the social work classroom. In addition, intersectional and poststructural feminist perspectives provide a means to understand the experience of women social work students as they become practitioners (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003).

Feminist Theory in Social Work

In 1986, Nan Van Den Bergh and Lynn Cooper wrote in their groundbreaking book: At its base, social work is supposed to share many of the fundamental concerns of feminism, particularly the relationship between individual and community, between individually and socially defined needs, as well as the concern with human dignity and the right to self-determination. Similarly, feminism has been described as a theory of individuality that recognizes the importance of the individual within the social collectivity. Feminist principles specifically relevant to social work education and practice include eliminating false dichotomies and artificial separations, reconceptualizing power, valuing process as equally important as product, validating renaming and believing that the personal is political. (p. 3-4)

This marked the beginning of social work recognizing and taking on the issue of feminist practice (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986). There is no mention of postmodernism, poststructuralism, or critical feminist theory in Van Den Bergh and Cooper's (1986) book. In Bricker-Jenkins, Hooyman and Gotlieb's (1991) edited book *Feminist Social Work Practice in Clinical Settings*, they state that no one learns feminist social work practice through social work formal education, rather, it is an evolution brought about by feminists practicing social work who

attempt to integrate feminist principles with existing social work theories. There is no mention of the concept of power or positionality. However, more recently Van Den Bergh (1995) directly addressed and explained feminist practice in the context of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, thus foregrounding the movement of the social work profession in nine short years from feminist infancy to a much greater understanding of the connection between social work practice and feminist theory.

In her revised edition, Van Den Bergh (1995) offers a re-tooling of the feminist principles described in the quote above. In light of the message of poststructural feminism, four principles (called standpoints) emerge: knowing, connecting, caring, and diversity (Van Den Bergh, 1995). She identifies several themes within each standpoint that appear to be similar to the five elements of poststructural feminist perspective discussed in the adult education literature. For example, *knowing* involves construction of knowledge, and the notion of valuing knowledge as a process rather than a product. Also supported is the assumption that knowledge construction is contextual and situational, grounded in one's specific reality (Van Den Bergh, 1995). The standpoint *connecting* addresses collaboration and community and foregrounds the importance of social work practitioners' awareness of how a client's "cultural context affects all aspects of problem assessment" (Van Den Bergh, 1995, p. xvii). This standpoint speaks to the issue of giving voice by looking at clients as the "experts" of their lives.

The themes underlying the standpoint of *caring* are mutuality, empathy, and responsibility. This relates closely to identity and the roles of women, and is especially critical to social work. Browne (1994) explains that an "undervaluing of caretaking" in traditional feminist theory led to the devaluation of caretaking functions through association with traditional female roles and "women's work." Since social work is a profession grounded in caring, helping, and

empowering, the importance of poststructural feminist perspective and valuing identity and women's experiences is fundamental to the practitioner. *Diversity*, the final standpoint, addresses difference. It appears from Van Den Bergh's (1995) writing that diversity is considered in terms of cultural differences, and differences in women's experiences and ways of knowing based on those differences. Power is not recognized as a theme within these four standpoints, although Van Den Bergh and other authors critically examine the importance of power and authority in the therapeutic relationship.

One way power is addressed by social work poststructuralist feminist literature is the dichotomy that exists within the concept of therapeutic relationship. Traditionally, much emphasis was placed on equality between the practitioner and the client, thus assuming equal power. Poststructuralist feminist thought recognizes the power relation and makes explicit the power imbalance that exists between the social worker and the client so as not to replicate dominant and subordinated systems of interaction (Dietz, 2000, p. 503). Social work addresses this by renaming the relationship a partnership, thereby de-constructing the inherent assumption, and focusing on co-creation of meaning (Van Den Bergh, 1995). In addition, the issue of culture is foregrounded and the concept of giving voice addressed by seeing clients as the "experts" and contextualizing their experiences as "feminist issues" (Van Den Bergh, 1995, p. xvii). For example, by understanding social issues of addiction and physical abuse as feminist issues that cut across the lines of gender, ethnicity, and class, the educator and practitioner seek to co-create meaning and knowledge that in turn can effect social change (Van Den Bergh, 1995). Recognition of the cultural context during the phase of problem identification with clients and the addition of a cultural aspect (bio-psycho-social-cultural) to the "bio-psycho-social"

perspective greatly enlarges the lens by which social workers view the client relationship (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001, p.19).

Further, taking on the issue of knowledge construction by applying a constructivist lens (reality is socially constructed) has underscored the notion that the “personal is political” and supports giving voice to marginalized populations and encouraging them to “name their reality” (Van Den Bergh, 1995, p. xxi). This concept also serves as the building block to the emphasis on empowerment theory, a pedagogical model taught in social work programs that enables and engages clients to be co-creators in partnership with social workers, deconstructing the model of powerlessness previously imposed on the client population (Carr, 2003). Empowerment, according to Carr (2003), is a process not an outcome. Empowerment in this context does not refer to power as given by someone in power to someone who is powerless; rather it is through intensive self-reflection and becoming aware of the sociopolitical structures that influence personal problems that a person experiences empowerment (Carr, 2003). Therefore, empowerment as a developmental construct promotes increased understanding of sociopolitical forces, problem solving, and an increased ability to have control over one’s environment (Carr, 2003). This understanding of empowerment aligns with feminist thought as it deals with voice and identity, although the structural approach underlying empowerment theory does not address positionality or the intersection of race, class, gender, age or sexual orientation.

The perspective of the profession that clients’ problems are not contextually situated in the personal history and “life space” of the client is consistent with the poststructuralist approach that externalizes client problems and foregrounds client strengths and capabilities (Van Den Bergh, 1995, p. xx). Also consistent is the “person-in-environment” perspective that emphasizes the holistic view, and the concept of “dual perspective” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001, p.

112). Dual perspective explains the tensions experienced by marginalized groups based on adaptation and interaction between two environments, the “nurturing” environment (family and community) and the “sustaining” environment (dominant culture) (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001, p. 113). The level of congruence between the two environments determines the amount of difficulty people experience, which is a central focus for social workers as they attempt to help groups negotiate barriers in their lives (DuBois & Miley, 2005).

Despite the plethora of literature that exists about feminism in social work and feminist social work practice, significantly less social work literature can be found taking a poststructuralist feminist perspective. Van Den Bergh’s attempt to bring feminist social work into the 21st century by renaming earlier principles through a poststructural lens frames the conversation for social work, but few seemed to explore poststructural feminist thought further to examine important issues. Thus, the issues of power and authority, identity, and positionality are scant in the social work literature. This realization further supports the need for social work education to use poststructural feminist theory as a basis for teaching social work. By offering students a model in the classroom and educating from a poststructural perspective, social work education can create the culture from which social workers will begin to practice. This action research study will offer a contribution to the conversation by addressing those issues in the social work classroom.

Therefore, because attending to issues of culture need to be addressed directly in culturally responsive social work education, the next section looks at culturally responsive education and the discourses embedded therein. I examine the connection of spirituality and culture to provide a framework for this action research study.

Discourses of Culturally Responsive Education

In her 1992 book, *Working and Educating for Life*, Hart discusses assumptions that promote the belief in “politically neutral processes” when referring to adult education (p. 9). She proposes the need to examine the existing approach and promotes critical reflection on the powerful “taboos” present in adult education that are “patriarchal, class based and individualistic” (p. 9). She questions the morality and implications brought about by avoiding these taboos, and the need to address the embeddedness of these issues in the context of adult education. Her analysis and examination brings to light the need for adult education to address cultural issues in the context of adult education, rather than exist in the status quo that serves to stagnate the educational process for educators and students (Hart, 1992).

Culturally relevant education, now often referred to as “culturally responsive education” (Gay, 2000, p. 29) relies on recognition of the important role culture and privilege play in marginalizing educators and learners in the educational process (Guy, 1999a). The prior experiences of the learner and educator create the frame of reference through which knowledge is constructed (Gay, 2000). Through gaining an understanding of the ways traditional adult education strategies serve to marginalize learners, adult educators can begin to deconstruct conventional ways of teaching and learning and develop strategies that promote inclusion and positive cultural identity in a holistic manner (Gay, 2000; Guy, 1999a). This concept is most important for learners who risk loss of identity based on the dominant culture’s view of what constitutes success in the context of education (Guy, 1999a).

Sheared (1999) supports the concept of constructing learning environments where adult learners can feel validated within their beliefs, values, and experiences in order to achieve their goals. In a discussion of African American adult learners, she coins the term “polyrhythmic

realities” to describe the lived experiences of learners in the context of race, gender and class (Sheared, 1999, p. 36). In addition to lived experiences of the learners, the experiences, race, class, gender, privilege, and positionality of adult educators are central to creating culturally responsive learning environments (Guy, 1999b; Sheared, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). The assumptions of educators in terms of values and beliefs about the culture of learners greatly influence the educational process, foregrounding the importance of examining and challenging these beliefs as well as existing social and power structures, (Gay, 2000; Guy, 1999b; Tisdell, 2003). Culturally responsive education, then, takes into account the educator’s cultural self-awareness, the knowledge of the learner’s cultural background, the power structures (positionality in relation to the dominant culture based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation) and the dominant cultural norms that are typically embedded in the classroom structure (Guy, 1999a; Tisdell, 2003). If educators do not examine their own cultural biases and racism, they serve to perpetuate the social and structural inequality that exists in education and disadvantage the learner (Guy, 1999b).

The process of critical self-reflection by the educator is a method to encourage attention to these issues and therefore begin to make meaning of the lived experiences, values, perceptions, and power bases inherent in adult education classrooms (Sheared, 1999). This serves to take the learner outside the personal to the political arena, and although there continues to be a personal aspect, the larger whole becomes apparent and important in order for learning to be fully culturally relevant. As Palmer (1998) reflects, “good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). The following discussions center on specific discourses found in the literature that inform the culturally responsive education paradigm.

Multicultural Education

Embedded in culturally responsive education is the broad body of multicultural education literature. Historically, the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's and 1970's was the beginning of the movement toward recognition of the need for more "equitable" education for marginalized groups (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, p. 421). Early attempts at multicultural education focused on "Teaching the Culturally Different" (an approach developed by Sleeter and Grant), designed to "bring students of color into the cultural mainstream" (Sleeter & Grant, 1987. p. 422). The initial underlying philosophy and a claim of multicultural education was that by learning about the culture of others as well as one's own, greater understanding would lead to new ways of thinking, and cultural harmony through the interaction among people of different cultures (May, 1999; Rose, 2000). This ideology gained ground and began to focus on race and ethnicity, but differences of gender, class, and disability. Although this ideology became more inclusive, there was still no recognition of the intersection of power and privilege (Sleeter, 1996).

Banks (2002) outlines several assumptions that underlie a multicultural education perspective. Multicultural education holds that race, ethnicity, culture and class are significant and non-compromising parts of society that offer much enrichment to individuals and society as a whole. In addition, educational practices in schools, colleges, and universities reinforce the racial and ethnic stereotypes and discriminatory practices found in society. Although there are many definitions of multicultural education in the literature, a major premise of multicultural education proposes increasing inclusivity and educational equity for learners through attention to the values and beliefs of all cultures (Banks & Banks, 1997). Multicultural education in the broad sense, addresses educator awareness about issues of difference, and encourages teachers to

modify all aspects of the teaching environment, including curriculum, to assist learners in experiencing equal status (Banks, 1996b, 2002).

Multicultural influences on higher education have increased significantly since the 1970's (Banks, 1996b). The reform movement of multicultural education, targeting changing "content and process" within schools has resulted in programs to address multicultural issues in education (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, p. 421). These changes have resulted in more conferences, policies, staff development workshops, and curriculum modification trainings throughout the academy, including large research institutions (e.g. University of California, Pennsylvania State University, Stanford University) (Banks, 1996b).

A concern of some definitions of multicultural education is that they often overlook the intersection of race, class and gender, thus eclipsing power differences that privilege one group over others, leading to continued marginalization (Sheared, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). Other forms of multicultural education, such as critical multiculturalism and antiracist education more strongly address the issue of power and privilege and encourage challenging power relations.

Critical Multiculturalism

The second discourse related to culturally responsive education is critical multiculturalism. Drawing on critical theory, this discourse differs from multicultural education in its attention to power relations and social structures. A central philosophy of critical theory is that knowledge is socially constructed, and the construction of knowledge is not neutral, but subjective based on the experiences and biases of the knower (Hillis, 1996). May (1999) argues that a weakness of multicultural education is the inattention to structural inequalities and the influences on education, and identifies three principles central to critical multicultural education. First, deconstructing an essentialist (the neutralization of cultural values and the belief that

cultural values and practices are universal) notion of cultural difference. Essentialism, according to May (1999), serves to promote group based identities, thus isolating and silencing groups by invoking an undifferentiated view of cultural identity. Second, there is a need to situate culture in the context of power. Rather than focusing primarily on how to educate those that are culturally different, critical multiculturalism foregrounds unequal power relations and the social structures that shape society (May, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). The third principle incorporates aspects of foregrounding lived experiences and giving voice (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003; May, 1999). May (1999) points out the importance of recognizing the learners' need to speak from their experiences, cultures, and histories without being bounded by those positions, thus encouraging critical engagement (of the learner) with all cultures and backgrounds. In addition, it is important to understand that construction of knowledge and social practices is in relation to power and positionality and not presume that homogeneity exists within any culture or diverse group (McLaren, 1995). Further, this concept of homogeneity is reinforced by looking at the discontinuity and confusion faced by cultural groups when educators assume sameness within a particular cultural group (May, 1999). By acknowledging cultural heterogeneity within a group as well as between groups, and identifying cultural distinctions, educators are able to deconstruct the processes that serve to reproduce essentialist hegemony, rather than moving to assimilate cultural groups into the mainstream (May, 1999). In addition, critical multicultural discourse supports the premise that educators must consider the influence of mainstream thought on their own racism and biases, and the impact their positionality as a member of a cultural group has on the learners (McLaren & Torres, 1999).

The critical multicultural discourse has some similarities to feminist pedagogy, and warrants further discussion in light of the poststructural feminist and intersectional theoretical

underpinnings of this study. The concepts that race, class, and gender are the result of a broader social picture, and the issue of difference as situated in perspectives of culture and power aligns the critical multicultural view with the poststructuralist view of meaning making (McLaren, 1995). The emphasis in critical multicultural education and feminist pedagogy on power relations, social structures, and the impact on learning is clearly comparable. Both discourses have influences from Derridean thought and both advocate foregrounding a commitment to social action and social change (McLaren & Torres, 1999). The notions of knowledge construction, the fundamental political nature of education and non-neutral knowledge are also similar (Nieto, 1999), since learners are encouraged to take control of their learning and to “challenge the way knowledge has been defined, constructed, and disseminated” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 209).

Critical multiculturalism emphasizes the importance of giving voice and listening to the voices of members of marginalized communities. Learners’ involvement in their educational process through encouragement to interpret experiences within the lens of marginalization due to race, ethnicity, culture, language, class contextualizes the conversation of critical multiculturalism and feminist pedagogy (Nieto, 1999). Similarly, the poststructuralist feminist perspective does not adhere to a belief in one truth, but multiple versions of truth as determined by the learners’ reality. In addition, poststructural feminisms privilege awareness of the learner of the effect of social systems on their identity, and the potential for identity to change as they gain control over their lives (Flannery, 2000). Therefore, by attending to the “sociopolitical context” (the larger social and political forces that affect the learner) and the lived experiences of the learner, the nexus of critical multicultural education is power (Nieto, 1999, p. 192). This

perspective clearly builds and helps situate culturally responsive education by its holistic and comprehensive way to look at social systems as well as individuals.

However, differences lie in the lack of attention critical multiculturalism gives gender and positionality. Although this approach addresses oppression and difference, feminist thought problematizes the fact that the concept of gender in critical multiculturalism is largely under-theorized (Luke, 1992). Most critical multicultural theorists do not “seriously or constructively” deal with feminist theory or the issue of gender, which serves to undermine feminism’s contribution to critical and cultural theory (Luke, 1992, p. 40). Rather, they tend to offer a comparative perspective that examines power relations of multiple groups with strategies for social change and give less attention the positionality or authority of the educator. In contrast, in poststructural feminist pedagogies, the manifestation of the educator’s positionality in the classroom is a central point (Tisdell, 2000). Some authors offer approaches to operationalize a critical multicultural perspective in the classroom. Grant and Sleeter (2003) offer a perspective of multicultural education that aligns closely with critical multiculturalism. This approach views knowledge as political, and encourages learners to challenge the construction of identity and dissemination of knowledge (Tisdell, 2003). Called “education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist,” this approach deals with oppression and the inequalities of social structures based on race, class, gender and disability (Grant & Sleeter, 2003, p. 195). Based in part on critical theory and cognitive development theory, this model advocates that learners understand how their social group and culture impact oppression in order to help them develop skills to work collaboratively toward social justice. Somewhat similar to Grant and Sleeter is an approach described by Banks (1994) that parallels critical multiculturalism but also teaches learners to critically analyze social systems and structures. The transformative approach advocates structural

changes to the curriculum to assist learners in constructing knowledge by bringing content about marginalized groups to the center. This approach promotes a constructionist view foregrounding learners' experiences, values, and perspectives, while recognizing the political nature of education (Banks, 1994).

In addition to multicultural education and critical multiculturalism, the discourse on antiracist education offers another view informing the discussion of culturally relevant education.

Antiracist Education

The discourse of antiracist education presented in the literature is situated in the context of multicultural education, although there are significant differences in ideology. Some writers feel that traditional multicultural education has perpetuated and intensified racism in education by the emphasis on difference (Cole, 1998; Short & Carrington, 1996). Other writers point out that multicultural education does not “automatically [take] care of racism” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 13). In the foreground of the divergence between antiracist education (ARE) and multicultural education (previously defined) is attention to challenging power relations, empowerment of minority groups, and whiteness as a system of privilege (McIntyre, 1997; Morelli & Spencer, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). The major goals of ARE are to help end (or at least ameliorate) individual and institutional racism through confronting prejudices and recognizing how dominant values are imposed on marginalized cultures who have little hope of gaining power within the current system. In addition, ARE also works to challenge the distribution of power in society (McIntyre, 1997; Morelli & Spencer, 2000). These goals are accomplished through evidence of changed attitudes, decreased ethnocentrism and authoritarianism, and increased belief and commitment to social justice and empathic response to marginalized groups (Morelli & Spencer, 2000).

In order to understand antiracist education, one must begin with an identification of the effects of racism, and the importance of antiracist education to adult and higher education. According to Cummins (1986), racism often manifests institutionally in education in covert forms such as culturally influenced testing, segregation, and curricula bias. In addition, power relations between educators and learners, as well as higher education institutions and ethnic minority communities serve to disempower marginalized groups (Morelli & Spencer, 2000). Cole (1998), McLaren and Torres (1999) and Miles (1993) take another approach to explaining racism. They explicate ‘race’ as a social construct produced historically and politically, and argue that the construct of ‘race’ as a biologically defined category serves to perpetuate ‘race’ as a causal factor in the social conditions affecting groups of people, thereby, in a sense, blaming the victim. They purport that to address this we must problematize ‘race’ and deconstruct racism (Cole, 1998; McLaren & Torres, 1999). If we consider that racism is the ideology that produces ‘race,’ rather than the existence of ‘race’ that produces racism, then we can move to addressing ‘racisms’ from a pluralistic perspective by understanding the underpinnings of the “complex relationships of exploitation and resistance grounded in differences of class, ethnicity and gender” (McLaren & Torres, 1999, p. 48). Alcoff (1997) supports this notion, and proposes the need to foreground ‘race’ as a lived experience to effectively combat racisms. Antiracist education, then, closely aligns with the tenets of Alcoff (1997), Cole (1998), McLaren & Torres (1999), and Miller (1993) in that ARE assumes 1) racism is a sociopolitical principle situated in power networks of society that reinforce powerlessness of dominated groups (McIntyre, 1997) and 2) racism is a function of white ethnocentrism and the exploitation of historically oppressed groups (Morelli & Spencer, 2000).

Antiracist education discourse is both psychological and structural in perspective. Several approaches defined in the literature promote antiracist education. These approaches are largely relational and foreground individual responsibility of the learner to carry out the suggested practices. It is important to use caution when presenting these approaches in that the psychological-relational context may in fact work antithetical to the notion of power and positionality as an important aspect of antiracist education. Educators grounded in poststructural feminist and intersectionality theory can contextualize attention to power and positionality when incorporating these strategies.

Sue (2003) acknowledges the difficulty of achieving the goals of antiracist education in a system politically and socially entrenched in racist attitudes and behavior. He purports the need for antiracist education to include seven principles focused on creating conditions that, when operating in harmony, would provide a structure to reduce racism and encourage a multicultural worldview (Sue, 2003). These seven conditions focus largely on relational aspects and promoting collaboration between and among individuals and social groups, as well as awareness of unequal authority and a need for information that is nonbiased and accurate. This strategy foregrounds a comparative approach working with multiple structures and groups, encouraging the learner to view their particular group to be central rather than marginal thereby raising the status of the group and decreasing the stratification (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Sue, 2003; Tisdell, 2003).

Sleeter and Grant's (2003) single-group studies approach to multicultural education identifies closely with antiracist education perspective and the principles suggested by Sue (2003). Supporting the non-neutrality of education, Sleeter and Grant (2003) corroborate the importance that "knowledge is power" and learners must have accurate knowledge about not

only “other” groups but also their social group as well (p. 120). They contextualize their approaches in the historical roots of racism and advocate using gained knowledge to work toward structural social change, including removing (or reducing) institutional barriers and decreasing the belief that dominant social structures and values are just (Morelli & Spencer, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Sue, 2003).

The above approaches point out the major divergence between feminist pedagogy and antiracist education discourses. Women (as a social group), in antiracist education, are not in the foreground, except as connected by color (Black women, Women of color). In addition, antiracist education emphasizes positionality of groups but not individuals, resulting in a pluralistic approach that can obscure individual learners (Tisdell, 2003). Feminist pedagogy would assert that this disempowers individuals by not allowing them to claim their individual voice and have equality.

The discourses of multicultural education discussed in this section provide the basis for culturally responsive education. Critical multiculturalism and antiracist education bring the perspective of race, class, and ethnicity and attention to power, authority, and positionality in the higher education setting. In addition, the political nature of education as well as the context of culture as an important aspect of education serves to explain further critical areas of intersection for this research study.

Philosophical Foundations

The philosophies inherent in poststructural feminist thought and culturally responsive education ground this study. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the study will take place in the particular context of a Christian college, and look at how the philosophical underpinnings relate to the dominant teaching philosophy of this context.

Elias and Merriam (1995) discuss several approaches to adult education philosophy that can lend insight here. They note that these philosophies help give the profession of adult education a “sense of purpose, cohesive set of aims, [and] coherent framework of beliefs” and provide a valid foundation from which to construct meaning and further learning and knowledge (p. ix). As they point out, historically these philosophies grew from the religious and patriarchal societal structures that resulted in male driven assumptions and values that are most representative of the “liberal tradition” of American higher education. Many educators, from those who are rooted in Dewey’s progressive school of educational thought, to feminists and educators who have followed Freire’s (1970) educational thought, have collectively been part of a movement attending to class, culture, and gender in higher education. As noted above, the critical and feminist philosophies are most informative to this study. However, because the study is situated at a college historically grounded in the liberal tradition and liberal philosophy of higher education, it is important to consider the liberal philosophy that is a part of the campus culture. Given that the feminist philosophy and perspectives that inform this study have already been discussed, in the following sections I will discuss the liberal and critical philosophies, central aspects of each philosophy, and its connection to culturally responsive education and this action research study.

Liberal Philosophy

Liberal philosophy of adult education springs from the concept of liberal arts education (Elias & Merriam, 1995). This philosophy carries a strong emphasis on intellect and recognizes the importance of knowledge constructed not only of facts, but also aspects of the whole person, as a spiritual (religious), moral, ethical, and rational being (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Many liberal arts colleges exist today and still hold this philosophy central to

their mission. Within this philosophy, the purpose of education is to give, or transmit knowledge that is “educationally worthwhile” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 34). The role of the educator is to decide what knowledge is worthwhile to transmit, while the role of student is to seek to develop moral, religious, and ethical character by applying theory to life situations (Elias & Merriam, 1995).

Liberal philosophy and subsequent educational programs were originally reputed to be elitist, and perceived as only for those who had idle time and could leisurely engage in education for education’s sake (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Liberal education often weaves with religious education, and sees itself “enriched” by the Christian church (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 15). As a result, many faith-based higher education institutions base their mission on liberal philosophy and Christian thought (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Liberal philosophy considers little of the student’s (learner) culture, gender or class orientation (Tisdell & Taylor, 2000). One finds liberal orientation in adult education programs such as extension programs, community education and Elderhostel, which extends the focus on education for its own sake. However, Tisdell and Taylor (2000) point out, adult educators largely do not see themselves as the expert that imparts knowledge, rather a “co-constructor” of knowledge with learners having expertise through life experiences (p. 7).

Because of the inclusion of Christian thought in liberal philosophy, one may assume that spirituality is an inherent component. Some authors of liberal philosophy are strong advocates of a spiritual/religious component, but not all adult educators focus on this aspect (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Since one of the main tenets of liberal philosophy is rationality, it seems antithetical to presuppose religious or non-religious spirituality to be a part of the belief system. On the other hand, looking back at the historical origins of liberal philosophy, the early elitist

focus came hand in hand with Judeo-Christian values and Protestant work ethic, and the idea that the affluent deserved to be educated and would in turn, give to the poor and deserving (Day, 2000). The settlement house movement that began with Arnold Toynbee was liberal philosophy at work (Elias & Merriam, 1995), and the unwitting beginning of professional social work. Jane Addams, credited as the first social worker in America, modeled Hull House in Chicago after Toynbee Hall (Day, 2000), thus liberal philosophy was a springboard for social work practice. Therefore, there is evidence that spirituality is present in the liberal philosophy, at least in a religious sense.

Critical Philosophy

Paulo Freire gave birth to this philosophy as it applies to adult education when he turned the adult educators' attention to social action and political consciousness (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Freire focused on radical social change and the transformative nature of adult education through empowerment and raising the consciousness of society, specifically through community based educational programs (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Having deep anarchist and Marxist roots, this philosophy was originally seen as "outside the mainstream" of traditional educational philosophy, largely due to the belief that profound changes are necessary for society to change (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 139).

The purpose of education within this philosophy is to bring to light oppression of society, forces that control our lives, and social responsibility. This is markedly different from the liberal philosophy focus on transmitting knowledge. The role of the teacher is to help students recognize these forces, and empower them to do something for the betterment of society (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Tisdell & Taylor, 2000). Freire points out how this concept is vastly different from the traditional teacher role (as described by liberal philosophy). The traditional teacher role,

according to Freire “mirrors oppressive society as a whole” by assuming that 1) teachers are the holders of knowledge and students the recipients, 2) “the teacher knows all and the student knows nothing,” and 3) “the teacher talks and the students listen” (as cited in Merriam, 1995, p. 139). According to critical philosophy, the role of the teacher is to liberate the learner, and the learner’s role is to learn about societal inequalities and take action. This philosophy focuses on the premise that education is the precursor to action, i.e. if people are educated as to political and economic forces that oppress and marginalize, the process of education will liberate them and facilitate social action (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Tisdell & Taylor, 2000).

This philosophy clearly addresses societal constructs of class difference and marginalization in a socioeconomic sense, but does not talk specifically about gender or racial/ethnic marginalization (Tisdell & Taylor, 2000). This philosophy does not address spirituality or religiosity directly, though Freire was a deeply religious man heavily influenced by the liberation theology movement of Latin America (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Freire and his followers deal with the concept of power as related to institutional structures rather than a higher being. However, the issue of social justice and freeing the oppressed is certainly a Biblical belief, and taking personal responsibility for others in society stems from Christian teachings. Underlying this philosophical approach to liberation seems to be a spiritual (at least in terms of religion) component that belies the rationality and focus on an ideal culture bereft of social, economic, and political oppression.

Spirituality and Religion in Adult Education and Social Work

Shahjahan (2004) states “spirituality, [in the context of teaching and learning] cannot be left on the margins and must be brought to the center of discussion in the academy” (p. 295). Adult educators are slowly recognizing the marginalization of spirituality in adult and higher

education and bringing spirituality to the center is beginning to gain attention in the literature (Astin, 2004; English, 2000; Fenwick, 2001; Glazer, 1999; Lauzon, 2001; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2000; Vogel, 2000). In addition, a few authors establish a connection and situate spirituality in a cultural context to promote a holistic approach to teaching and learning (hooks, 2003; Glazer, 1999; Palmer, 1998; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). As Glazer (1999) points out “education...must engage and nurture the spirit...and acknowledge the centrality of the place of the spirit...in our lives, our classrooms, our culture” (p. 5). Tisdell (2000, 2003) takes the connection between spirituality and culture further to examine these aspects as they inform teaching in the context of emancipatory education and teaching for social change. Similarly, Shahjahan (2004) discusses the presence of the mind, body, and spirit when teaching and engaging students in conversation about social justice issues. He relates activities designed to help students be aware of the sacredness of cultural and the powerful impact these activities had on learners.

Looking at spirituality and culture through this lens begins to situate the discussion within the poststructural feminist theory base addressed in this study. Although poststructural feminisms and intersectionality theory do not directly address spirituality per se, they foreground the themes of giving voice and shifting identity in relation to the intersection of race, class, age, gender, and sexual orientation, as presented earlier in this chapter (Mann & Huffman, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). This attention to voice and identity in poststructural feminist perspective posits identity as shifting and changing based on social, political, and cultural influences as knowledge is constructed, and the learner and educator seek to find authenticity and wholeness (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Orner, 1992; Tisdell, 2003). Giving voice, according to poststructural feminist thought, includes hearing the perspectives of all

marginalized groups, thereby deconstructing the assumption of common experiences (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003). In discussions of spirituality, several authors make the case for spirituality as a part of identity that cannot be separate or distinct from the knower (Fenwick, 2001, English & Gillen, 2000). In addition, the identity of the educator, according to Shahjahan (2004) is inextricably bound in the spiritual experience of teaching. Integrating spirituality in teaching comes from the core of the educator, from actual experiences and practices and the need to center our work on what is sacred (Glazer, 1999; Palmer, 1999; Shahjahan, 2004). By seeking authenticity, educators can bring their identity to the classroom and honor their spirituality through culturally responsive teaching. Similarly, by foregrounding the lived experiences of the learner and constructing an environment that gives voice to the learner, the educator can help students center their spirituality (Shahjahan, 2004), thereby embodying the aspects of poststructural feminist perspective in relation to identity and voice.

The following discussions review the adult education and social work literature related to spirituality and religion, with attention to specific discourses inherent in each body of literature. I will highlight the issues of definition of spirituality and religion, ethical considerations of integrating spirituality and teaching, and challenges of implementing integration of spirituality in the classroom. I will also address how adult education and social work view the connection of spirituality in the context of culture.

Adult Education

Any discussion about spirituality and religion in adult education commonly addresses the issue of definition. Described as an “elusive concept” that is often difficult to illustrate, spirituality is an important aspect of our meaning making and helps shape many aspects of our lives (Cascio, 1998; Lauzon, 2001, p. 4). English and Gillen (2000) raise the issue of the lack of

consensus among adult educators about a definition and describe how, paradoxically, authors' point out the difficulty of defining spirituality, but go on to present a description of their spiritual lens and clarify what spirituality is to them, thus making a case for their own definition. It seems this lack of agreement about definition is a metaphor for the ambiguity of the entire issue of spirituality in adult education. Authors seem to dance around the issue, possibly to avoid "stepping on toes" with the religious community.

For example, Vogel (2000) suggests that use of the term spirituality minimizes religious faith, but at the same time may be preferable because it does not underscore a specific theological content. She proposes a concept of spirituality that stresses connectedness and relationship with our historical past. Bean (2000) talks about the vagueness of the term spirituality and the vast number of conflicting interpretations ranging from individualistic disconnect to collective passivity. He also purports that some adult educators may shy away from the term because it invokes thoughts of patriarchal attitudes commonly found in the context of religious communities. Harris (2001) talks about a spiritual learning community, and discusses spirituality as trust, caring, and a "greater sense of purpose" (p. 22). Tisdell (2003) states, "spirituality is *not* about pushing a religious agenda", and moves away from the religious focus toward a meaning of connection and wholeness situated in a cultural dimension by describing several assumptions used as a basis for her writings about spirituality (p. xi). The variations present in these examples are a representation of the ways authors attempt to address the subjective issue of definition, and the disclaimer by which they set the context for their writing.

Despite the differences in definition, there emerge points of convergence. Many authors that write about spirituality agree that spirituality is about meaning making and an evolving understanding of ourselves and our experiences (Astin, 2004; Bean, 2000; English, 2000;

Lauzon, 2001; Meraviglia, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). On the affective level, as spiritual beings we strive to gain a sense of who we are and our purpose in life as part of an ongoing process that varies greatly from person to person, and is grounded in our personal experiences (Astin, 2004; Bean, 2000; English, 2000; Gillen & English, 2000; Lauzon, 2001; Love & Talbot, 1999; Meraviglia, 1999; Palmer, 1998; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003; Vogel, 2000). In addition, emphasis is placed on the educator's self-awareness of his or her own spiritual journey as the basis for facilitating spirituality in the classroom (Fenwick, 2001; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003; Vogel, 2000).

Defining spirituality is only one area discussed in the literature. Also prevalent in adult education literature is the question of whether adult education has responsibility to discuss spirituality in its discourse, and whether spirituality can or should be nurtured and facilitated in the classroom (Astin, 2004; Fenwick, 2001; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004; Lauzon, 2001; Love & Talbot, 1999; Shahjahan, 2004; Vogel, 2000). This raises ethical questions regarding pedagogical intent, knowledge and credibility of the educator in the area of spiritual issues, and ability to create a safe environment for students to delve into spiritual thoughts and feelings (Fenwick, 2001). Despite the ethical issues, many authors make strong arguments for addressing spirituality in adult education classrooms. Predominant discourse holds that spirituality is part of all beings, and cannot be separated or left out of any area of life (Fenwick, 2001; Gillen & English, 2000; Harris, 2001; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004; Lauzon, 2001; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). Similarly, several authors acknowledge that spirituality is present in the learning environment, and address the challenge and struggle of bringing spirituality into classroom activities and creating an environment that nurtures and allows creativity and sharing of self-expression (Hunt, 2001; Lauzon, 2001; Tisdell, 2003). Much

hinges, however, on the educator's critical examination of his or her own spiritual beliefs and the ability to effectively nurture the spirituality present in the classroom (Astin, 2004, Lauzon, 2001, Tisdell, 2003, Vella, 2000).

Clearly one of the most perplexing questions conveyed in the literature concerning spirituality in adult education manifests in implementing the facilitation and nurturing of spirituality in the classroom. Educators must be willing to create an inclusive learning environment, address rather than avoiding spirituality, be receptive to differing spiritual beliefs of students, help students make connections, and foster spiritual development (Fenwick, 2001; Love & Talbot, 1999; Lauzon, 2001; Palmer, 1999; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2001; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2001). Educators' comfort level with these issues affects how they perceive spirituality in the classroom and thus how they address or avoid dealing with spiritual challenges (Lauzon, 2001). Much of the writing focuses on growth and meaning making of the learner and educator. Situated in a transformative orientation (Dirkx, 2001), much emphasis is on the personal nature of spirituality, engaging educators and learners in their personal journey, and how individuals experience learning and ways of knowing through the spiritual dimension (Bean, 2000; Fenwick, 2001; Vogel, 2000).

Not many researchers conduct empirical studies, however, on the outcomes or influence of spirituality on the teacher or learner in the classroom. One qualitative study conducted with 16 women adult educators looked at how their spirituality informed their teaching (Tisdell, 2000). This study focused on how the educators developed spiritually and how teaching from an informed spiritual perspective impacts teaching for social change. It did not address the spiritual awareness of students in the classroom and whether attention to and recognition of spirituality in the classroom environment helps or hinders learning. The current action research study

addressed in this paper will further address this issue and contribute to the current literature on culturally and spiritually responsive teaching.

Social work literature addresses spiritual issues largely from a practice perspective. The next discussion looks at how the social work profession defines spirituality, attention to spirituality in social work education, and the tensions between religious and secular discourses related to social work practice and education.

Social Work

The profession of social work is rooted in religious tradition (Day, 2001, Miller, 2001). Historically, Christianity was the basis of social work practice (Cascio, 1998). In the early 1900's, social work began a movement away from its religious roots in order to legitimize itself as a profession (Cnaan, 1999). For many years, the role of spirituality (in a religious sense) was downplayed, and a move toward scientific rationality secularized the social work profession (Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994). During this time, social work ignored the spiritual undercurrents that continued as part of the practitioner and client belief systems. Over the past 15 years, the social work field experienced (and continues to experience) a resurgence of attention to spirituality and religion as salient factors in the provision of services and work with clients (Canda, Nakashima, & Furman, 2004; Cascio, 1998; Hodge, 2003; Pellebon & Anderson, 1999; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994). Articles, books, and conference workshops abound advocating the importance of spirituality in social work education and practice for the client, practitioner, and educator (Cascio, 1998; Coholic, 2003; Pellebon & Anderson, 1999).

Similar to the field of adult education, social work literature struggles with the issue of defining spirituality. Cascio (1998) suggests one reason social work practitioners may hesitate to address spiritual matters with clients is the confusion between spirituality and religion. As in

adult education, the term spirituality connotes to some the patriarchal rigidity of formalized religious traditions (Cascio, 1998). The most widely held definition of spirituality in social work literature seems parallel to adult education with attention to connectedness, sense of purpose and well-being, and an individualized and holistic approach to meaning making (Cascio, 1998; Coholic, 1999; Hodge, 2001; Pellebon, 1999; Sherwood, 1998). Also parallel to adult education is the definition of religion in social work literature. Religion is most often referred to as a set of beliefs, ethics, rituals, and practices, systematically organized around a doctrine or dogma and shared by a group of people (Cascio, 1998; Coholic, 2003; Hodge, 2001; Sherwood, 1998; Van Hook, Huguenot, & Aguilar, 2001). This characterization, although easily found in social work literature, still fails to overarch the misconceptions and confusion in the practice community regarding the nuances of religion and spirituality resulting in the current confusion and perceived resistance surrounding issues of spirituality (Carroll, 1998; Cascio, 1998).

Social work discourse does not spend as much time with the question of appropriateness when it comes to issues of spirituality. Instead, many in the profession currently consider spirituality to be at the “heart” of practice, largely due to the religious origins of social work (Canda & Furman, 2001; xv). Evidence of this is the inclusion of spirituality in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2004) and the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2004). Interestingly, within the literature, there appears to be an abundance of writing from a Christian perspective. This may suggest possible bias toward a preponderance of Christianity as the ideal when discussing spirituality in social work, and could be a result of a disproportionate number of social work professionals identifying Christianity as their frame of reference and personal worldview. One study addressing social work faculty views regarding inclusion of spiritual and religious content in the social work curriculum revealed the largest

response category of respondents identified themselves as Christian (Sheridan et al. 1994). A professional association dedicated to Christian social workers, the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW), publishes numerous books and publications focused on Christianity and social work (NACSW, 2005), thereby perpetuating the Christian ethic in social work. Also of interest is that several of the foremost authors in social work literature regarding spirituality publish through the NACSW Press (Hodge, 2003; Sherwood, 1998). However, more recently, these very authors are addressing “spiritual diversity” and moving away from strictly Christian beliefs as the basis for incorporating religion and spirituality in practice, and leading the field in looking at religious traditions inclusively as well as “non-sectarian” spirituality (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 155; Hodge, 2003; Sheridan, 2001). Clearly the most recent literature advances the social work profession in the way of culturally and spiritually responsive practice through research and writing about “spiritual competence” (Canda, 1998, p. 100), and “spiritually sensitive practice” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 188).

Several research studies foreground the attention of the social work profession to discerning spiritual beliefs of practitioners and educators, the influence of spiritual and religious beliefs on clients, and the inclusion of spirituality content in social work curriculum. A quantitative study conducted to address the issue of spiritual diversity in social work practice looked at the spiritual worldviews held by social work educators and practitioners and compared those findings to the spiritual worldviews of the general population (Hodge, 2003). Hodge (2003) raises concern with the findings that show a divergence between practitioners and educators’ responses that indicate a largely non-theistic personal belief and worldview. This is antithetical to data from the general population that indicates a higher percentage of people hold a theistic worldview (Hodge, 2003). Conclusions from this study were corroborated with

previous studies from social work and psychology (Shafranske, 2001 as cited in Hodge, 2003), where similar findings were equally concerning. These findings would indicate a lack of fit for social work within the general population that makes up the client base, and further support the need for spiritually based content in social work curriculum to create student awareness of the importance of identifying spiritual worldviews in order to be spiritually competent and sensitive practitioners.

In a study conducted by Sheridan et al. (1994), 280 social work educators surveyed responded to questions designed to understand their views about inclusion of spiritual and religious content in social work curriculum. Twenty-two percent indicated spiritual and religious content in their curriculum, and only nine percent had a separate course on spirituality and religion in social work (Sheridan et al., 1994). The majority of respondents indicated agreement with including content on the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice, although they themselves had little training during their social work educational programs (Sheridan et al., 1994). The demographic landscape of this sample showed a high number of respondents (62.6%) identifying as Christian (Sheridan et al., 1994). These research studies show attempts by some factions of the social work profession to determine direction and guide the profession in the area of spiritual and cultural responsiveness. The recognition of the importance of spirituality in social work practice has led to examination of social work education and the need for content on spirituality in social work curriculum (Russel, 1998). To date, studies have shown little inclusion of spiritual content in the educational programs of educators and practitioners currently in practice. In addition to the study by Sheridan (1994), a study done by Derezotes (1995) that surveyed NASW members and another by Dudley and Helfgott (1990) reported that while a large number of practitioners and faculty felt content on spirituality was important, they rarely

presented content in their courses. In these studies, a significant number of respondents (76% and 75% respectively) indicated they integrate spiritual issues in practice, but a much smaller percentage had formal training on integration of spirituality in practice (Russel, 1998).

Post-millennium social work literature about spirituality shows a shift toward including culture in the conversation. Only a few articles before 2000 began to address spiritual diversity, and articles about culture (discussed in a later section) did not mention spirituality. Often authors describe spirituality as either religious or “non-religious” (Sheridan, 1998, p. 84), and a typology offered by Ressler (1998) illustrated four categories of people in terms of worldview. His description of “spiritual and non-religious,” “religious and dispirited,” “dispirited and non-religious,” and spiritual and religious” were offered as a way to conceptualize and work with clients (Ressler, 1998, p. 168-169). However, as mentioned previously, more authors are including attention to various religious perspectives (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Shamanism) in discussions (Van Hook, Huguen, & Aguila, 2001) as well as “non-sectarian” spirituality (Canda & Furman, 2001, p. 155,) in an attempt to broaden the discussion of inclusive practice.

Canda and Furman (2001) take on the issue of inclusiveness vs. exclusivist as one of the greatest challenges to social work (Canda & Furman, 2001) and culturally responsive practice. This discussion raises the issue of truth, and the ability of social workers to do more than respect differences in personal beliefs, but be knowledgeable and open to learning, appreciating, and engaging in dialogue with others’ views (Canda, 1998; Canda & Furman, 2001). Recognition of the dilemma that exists and the difficult questions raised when navigating the issue of spiritual diversity foregrounds the need for social workers to engage in critical reflection of their own beliefs and achieve a clear understanding of their worldview and spiritual journey (Canda, 1998;

Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). Schools of social work can contribute to this process by encouraging students to gain cultural awareness and examine their spiritual worldviews.

Summary

This chapter firmly grounds this qualitative action research study by reviewing and critically analyzing discourses relevant to the overarching goal of the study, which is addressing culturally responsive education in social work education to assist students in moving toward becoming culturally competent social work practitioners. I reviewed the literature pertaining to several areas of adult education and social work. First, I reviewed feminist perspectives with attention to poststructural and intersectional aspects of feminist perspectives and how these perspectives are interpreted in adult education and social work literature. Next, I presented discourses in multicultural education, specifically the discourses of critical multiculturalism and antiracist education which are grounded in critical theory and address race, ethnicity, gender, class, positionality, power, and privilege. Third, I reviewed the bodies of literature in adult education and social work education that deal with the discussion of spirituality as it is present in each discipline. Creating the framework for the study required situating spirituality in the context of culture, a discussion significantly lacking in the adult education and social work literature, and therefore a contribution this research study can make to the knowledge base.

The literature reviewed in this chapter, foregrounding the theoretical underpinnings, educational discourses and philosophies, and presenting the discourses of spirituality in adult and social work, served to provide an arena for the research study that looked at culturally responsive education in a social work classroom of a Christian liberal arts college. The next chapter provides a detailed explanation and rationale of the qualitative action research paradigm through which this study took place.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This purpose of this study was to examine the impact of culturally responsive pedagogical strategies implemented in the classroom of a social work program at a small, Christian, liberal arts college. The study focused on providing culturally responsive education to increase student awareness of their cultural and spiritual worldview in relation to working with clients different from themselves in social work practice. The study draws on spirituality and cultural awareness to address the issue of producing social work practitioners with increased culturally competence. This qualitative action research study intended to address the lack of literature regarding issues of spirituality and culture in social work education. The focus of this research through the lens of poststructural feminist perspective and intersectionality theory critically examined students' views of culture and spirituality as a worldview and the impact of intentional and specific strategies imposed through the action research design.

A two-fold purpose guided this action research study:

1. To develop and implement pedagogical strategies designed to increase student self-awareness and self-reflection of cultural and spiritual issues in a social work class taught in a Christian based higher education setting in order to increase the cultural competence of social work practitioners.
2. To assess empirically how these strategies affected students' learning about cultural and spiritual issues, particularly in relation to those who are very different from themselves.

This chapter presents an overview of qualitative research paradigm and the action research design. In addition, I present a discussion of critical action research and consider how these research approaches inform and relate to this study. The chapter also includes data collection and data analysis methods, and examines issues central to qualitative research such as validity and

reliability. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the limitations of the methodology used for this study.

Qualitative Research

Typically, authors differentiate qualitative research from other types of research design (e.g. quantitative) by its concern for meaning and interactionist qualities (Mason, 2002). It is research concerned with how the world is interpreted and experienced, grounded in the “lived experiences” of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). Sometimes referred to as naturalistic inquiry, a characteristic of qualitative research is the natural setting in which the research takes place, as well as its humanistic and interactive focus that “fosters pragmatism” in using a multiple method approach to collect data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 3; Mason, 2002). Practiced for many years by anthropologists in the form of ethnographic research, qualitative methodologies are now finding their way into sociological, psychological, and social work disciplines as a way to address social interactions and the meanings people attribute to these interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mason, 2002; Morse & Richards, 2002).

Rossman and Rallis describe qualitative research according to several principles (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999). First, the qualitative paradigm views social phenomena holistically. Qualitative research takes into account not only the person or thing, but also the environments in which the phenomenon exists and the influences present that play a part in the experience. Second, qualitative research methodologies look for researchers to reflect on their role in the research process. This requires the researcher to practice “critical self-scrutiny” and systematically reflect on the research process and the effect on the study because of the researcher’s beliefs, actions, and biases (Mason, 2002, p. 7). This principle also assumes that the researcher is not neutral or objective in the research process, but plays an integral part.

The third principle addresses the “emergent and evolving” characteristic of qualitative design (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). This speaks to the interpretist nature of qualitative research that allows the shaping of the study by the participants according to the context of the situation (Mason, 2002). Since qualitative research takes place in the natural setting (where the phenomena is taking place), data is collected through observation, interview, document analysis, and participant observation (Patton, 2002). This allows the researcher the flexibility to make decisions to change the strategy based on insight garnered in the course of the research process, thereby increasing the uniqueness of each study (Mason, 2002). However, this flexibility also contributes to the fact that qualitative research often has limited generalizability (although themes often emerge that can be further scrutinized) beyond the study at hand (Mason, 2002). A more thorough discussion of generalizability occurs later in this chapter.

The naturalistic attribute of qualitative design greatly contributes to the applicability of qualitative research to the current study due to the contextual focus and attention to the importance of the natural setting. Typically, the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the participants, or influence the study, but rather takes a discovery approach where the participant is able to claim his or her own “voice” in the process (Patton, 2002, p. 41). A form of qualitative research known as action research, lends itself to understanding experiences and producing knowledge through interaction, reflection, and interpretation (Jacobson, 1998), and is chosen to guide this study.

Action Research: A Form of Qualitative Research

Kurt Lewin first introduced action research with the premise “in order to gain insight into a process, the researcher must create a change and then observe the effects” (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 122). He described a non-linear spiral of planning, acting, observing, and

evaluating to bring about an improvement or change (McTaggart, 1991). Since that time, action research has evolved due to the need to address difficulties in using traditional scientific research and find solutions that are practical and timely (Cunningham, 1993). This is not to say that action research replaces traditional research. Action research offers an alternative when it is desirable to change behavior and observe how and why the behavior changed by the group whose behavior is targeted (McNicoll, 1999).

Assumptions of Action Research

Action research provides an interpretation based on social change and solving practical problems through developing skills and applying those skills in the classroom or practice setting (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Rather than traditional, positivist (assumes knowledge is objective and independent; search for one “truth”) paradigms that value validity through external methods of control, qualitative action research utilizes relationships between the individual and sociocultural aspects of the environment (Jacobson, 1998). Action research differs from other forms of qualitative research that typically try to find out participants’ perceptions of a phenomenon without direct intervention from the researcher. However, the specific purpose of action research is the improvement of practice. Action research embraces non-neutral, non-objective discourse and assumes a more collaborative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This highlights the relatively informal nature of action research and gives little attention to formal structures of control and experimental procedures (Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Patton, 2002).

In action research, the role of the researcher is to facilitate problem solving and provide direction to the participants of the research project (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, Stringer, 1996). A central facet of the researcher role is accepting and respecting the participants’ views and ideas as valid, as well as negotiating the relationships and dynamics of the participants while

conducting the research (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003). Since the focus of action research is to solve problems in practice, the researcher is the primary source of data collection (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The researcher can facilitate the process of defining and re-defining the research design based on the collective understanding and meaning making of the participants, thereby adjusting the research process as the project progresses (Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Stringer, 1996).

A qualitative action research paradigm encourages inductive study, and is especially applicable for evaluating and improving practice by engaging participants in the study of their own problem and becoming part of the change process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Sometimes called practitioner research, action research is often used by professionals (e.g. practitioners in education, social work, business, and community development) to query into their own practice in order to make changes and evaluate outcomes of the changes (Jacobson, 1998; McNicoll, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In social work education, this approach is especially relevant so students can understand the complex and unique issues of the diverse client populations with whom they work (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). The qualitative action research paradigm provides an ideal fit for this research study. It addresses the research purposes of evaluating culturally responsive pedagogy in teaching, and attempting to change student attitudes and behavior toward more culturally and spiritually responsive practice that can ultimately increase the quality of serving clients.

However, there are several limitations to using an action research paradigm. First, it does not address the issue of power, status, and influence (McTaggart, 1991). The researcher working with a group of students, clients, or marginalized participants whether in the classroom, community, or workplace brings a dynamic of power that is a concern to the research process

and foregrounds the subjectivity and value-laden aspects of constructivist approaches (Jacobson, 1998; McTaggart, 1991). Nonetheless, the action approach to research offers a group centered process that focuses on the problems found in social constructs and everyday life (Zeigler, 2001).

Critical Action Research

Action research described in the literature has developed since its inception by Lewin to take on a more emancipatory purpose. Because of the limitations of some forms of action research noted above, many authors now write about specific types of action research. These types are collaborative, participatory, and critical action research, all terms that emphasize inclusion of stakeholders in a problem, equity of participants, and the social action component of the action research model (DePoy et al., 1999; Hansson, 2003; Jacobson, 1998; McIntyre, 1997; McTaggart, 1991).

Critical action research in the context of this study attempts to bring about social change, particularly for those not well served by education and other societal institutions, such as minorities, women, and people of color. Education for social justice is an idea that has been most influenced by Paulo Freire (McIntyre, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Major assumptions underlying critical action research stress action against oppression and the participatory role through positionality as researchers in development of critical consciousness, through which Freire foregrounds taking part in the process of transformation and knowledge creation (McIntyre, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These assumptions promote the aspects of critical action research paramount to this study. Engaging students in developing critical consciousness is a major goal of culturally responsive education, and generates knowledge for and about the participants (the students) by the participants (Jacobson, 1998).

The action research principle of knowledge production focuses primarily on shared understanding of knowledge developed by the group (McTaggart, 1991). Based on a constructivist and poststructuralist paradigm, knowledge is socially constructed, inseparable from the knower, non-neutral, culture and context dependent, and based on the premise that there is not one single truth (Jacobson, 1998). The researcher's knowledge and understanding contribute to the construction and identification of meaning, while being responsive to the context of human experience (Jacobson, 1998). In the context of this study, as the instructor in the classroom, I was an integral part of the research, and directly affected the action through initiating identification of the problem, and constructing the strategies through the pedagogical design implemented to address the problem.

All types of action research, including critical action research, prescribe procedures to conduct the research. Carried out through stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, action research takes on a unique design in which flexibility to change as the research progresses is vital (DePoy et al., 1999). The reflective component of the critical action research paradigm weighs heavily in the process, along with an emphasis on lived experiences (of the students and the researcher), a commitment to social change, and attention to power differential (McIntyre, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Critical action research recognizes status and power differentials between participants and researcher, and prioritizes the need to attend to these issues (McTaggart, 1991). In this study, I focused on empowering the students by sharing power through deconstructing interactions and relationships representative of the dominant power sources in the group, along with recognition of the participants (students) as social beings, in order not to create further exploitation of marginalized and oppressed people (McNicoll, 1999;

McTaggart, 1991). The degree to which this was accomplished is discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

The theoretical framework for this study is feminist poststructural perspective and intersectionality theory. Discussed comprehensively in the previous chapter, this discourse serves as a theoretical lens for this study based on its attention to positionality and the intersection of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Maher & Tetreault, 1994). In addition, this perspective foregrounds awareness of the learner of the effect of social systems on identity. Also foregrounded is the potential for identity to change as learners begin to deconstruct the rational-affective and embrace the emotional and rational as a motivation to move toward new ways of thinking (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 1998). Critical action research, with its involvement of the student in the design, attempts to empower the student participants (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). As students in this study moved through the action phase of the research, they gained a greater understanding of the implications brought about by the powerful awareness of oppression and the inequalities of social structures in their lives, as demonstrated later in the discussion.

Study Participants and Context of the Study

The context for the study was a social work course required for all social work majors that focused on teaching group dynamics and skills for working with groups in social work practice. The course commenced in the fall semester, and was open to all social work majors who completed the required prerequisites. The catalog lists the course as Helping Processes III: Social Work Practice with Groups (Messiah College, 2005). The catalog description states:

This is the third class in a series of practice courses in Social Work. The course examines the dynamics of the small group. Different theoretical conceptualizations of the role of the Social Worker in the group are discussed. Concepts such as group dynamics, norms,

and roles are examined. Group leadership skills for planning, facilitating, and evaluating groups will be developed and practiced. Content will include identifying and implementing group related empirically based interventions and services designed to achieve client and community goals. There is also a focus on the interplay between Social Work and community groups. Limited to Social Work majors or permission of the instructor. Prerequisites: SOW 204 Helping Processes II: Practice with Families

Criterion for inclusion in the study was enrollment in the course during the fall 2005 semester. Nine students enrolled in the class and were participants in the study. Gender make-up was eight females and one male, a typical representation of the social work major and social work practice in general. This purposeful sampling method situated the study in this specific class focused on group process and dynamics for several reasons. First, the grade level of the student meeting the prerequisites for this course typically is third year status; thereby the sample consists of students with several years' knowledge of social work terms, skills, and field practice. This population should be developmentally ready to address issues of culture and spirituality at a level described by Bank's (1996a) transformative dimension. Second, action research strongly associates with attention to group dynamics (McNicoll, 1999). Situating the study in a social work class aimed at teaching student knowledge and skills to work with groups appropriately contextualizes action research and affords the participants an experiential approach to learning about group dynamics and group development. The next section discusses aspects of social work practice with groups to provide a context for this action research study and demonstrates how conducting the study in this particular course mutually benefited the participants and the study. For the purpose of this study, the discussion of group work focuses on aspects of treatment

groups based on the assumption that the group of participants in this study will comprise a group reflecting the process and dynamics of a treatment group as defined in social work literature.

Background of Group Practice in Social Work

Group work in social work practice provides a method by which practitioners can use intervention strategies and the power of group process to enhance work with individuals, groups, and communities in accomplishing their goals (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Group work in social work is based on the premise that groups affect all aspects of people's lives and provide the structure on which society is built (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). More importantly, groups serve as the manner in which we form and carry out relationships (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Lewin (1938), who developed a model of action research guiding this study, conducted research on working with groups (as cited in Toseland & Rivas, 2005). His findings relating to leadership and power in group work provided early groundwork for current group work theories. Groups formed to help people increase social functioning are an accepted form of social work practice in providing the following benefits to clients in clinical settings: a feeling of belonging, a means to test reality, mutual aid, and a source of empowerment (Reid, 1997). Groups consisting of eight to ten clients meeting face-to-face enable members to enhance their problem-solving capabilities through establishing trust, acceptance and respect for each other, and utilize the power of support and feedback (Reid, 1997). In addition, group members are encouraged to deconstruct the life strategies that have kept them functioning at their current level and begin to make new meaning and resolve problems and cope effectively with their lives (Corey, 2000b; Reid, 1997). This premise ties closely with action research as well as culturally responsive education in terms of constructing new knowledge concerning racism, power, and oppression in the lives of the participants.

Group Dynamics

The discussion of group dynamics begins by clarifying the terms group dynamics and group process. Social work literature describes group dynamics as the forces that shape and change what members do in a group (Anderson, 1997; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Group process encompasses all the dynamics that occur from the first meeting of the group to the last, and how these dynamics interrelate and result in progressive change (Anderson, 1997; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Toseland and Rivas (2005) identify four dimensions of group dynamics to promote understanding of the importance of attending to group dynamics when working with groups, an important aspect of this action research study. First, communication and interaction patterns of group members (verbally and non-verbally) are a process whereby group members communicate with each other in a reciprocal manner. Attention to communication and interaction patterns is critical in group work to ensure that the group meets the members' socioemotional needs, and to provide proper intervention when needed. Group workers realize the importance of recognizing that all communication has meaning and purpose, and the need to identify and change errant communication patterns in a group. The second dimension identified by Toseland and Rivas (2005) is cohesion. Group members' need for belonging and socializing often attracts them to the groups and serves to increase the effectiveness of group functioning. Third, the dimension of social integration is a dynamic that incorporates norms, roles, and status, which help members "fit together" as a group (Toseland & Rivas, 2005, p. 78). A high level of social integration is necessary for groups to meet the needs of members effectively. The fourth dimension takes into account group culture, which refers to the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of the individual group members and the group as a whole. The culture of the group is a powerful factor in the growth and development of the group. The makeup of the group in terms of race,

ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability of members foregrounds the stereotypes and biases inherent in the group thereby influencing the groups' development (Corey, 2000b; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Attention to this dimension of group dynamics is parallel to the premise of culturally responsive education, and especially relevant in this study.

Stages of Group Development

Stages of group development are often described as sequential, however there is also a cyclical nature in that groups can (and do) cycle back to earlier stages, or remain stagnant at a particular stage during the group process (Anderson, 1997). Each stage involves certain functions requiring the implementation and use of particular practice skills (Shulman, 1999). In addition, variations that occur to the group membership, environment, goals of the group, and leadership affect stages of group development (Anderson, 1997; Shulman, 1992; Toseland & Rivas, 2005).

Although various authors describe multiple stages in group development, most can be synthesized to three or four stages: beginning, or initial stage, middle (transition and work), and ending (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). The beginning stage is characterized by member introductions, clarifying the purpose of the group, addressing ambivalence and resistance, and setting goals. The general focus for this stage is establishing trust, a concept foundational to the work of the group (Shulman, 1999). This is the most important time in the life of the group, since it sets the tone for the group experience (Corey & Corey, 2002). In order for the group to become cohesive and promote movement toward its goal, members must be able to openly share with one another. Through the interactions in the beginning stage, members find their place in the group as norms develop and relationships are formed (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). During this stage, the group leader more directly provides structure for the group while at the same time encouraging member-to-member interaction rather than leader centered interaction (Corey & Corey, 2002;

Shulman, 1999; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). This stage is similar to the planning stage of action research where attention to establishing the goals of the group and building trust among participants are a central focus.

Corey & Corey (2002) define the second stage of group development, considered the middle stage, through two sub stages: the transition stage and the work stage. Characteristics of the middle stage are testing the leader and other members, and conflict and resistance, followed by increased independence and ownership of the group by the members. The conflict and resistance occur in the transition part of this stage and result from members challenging power (of the leader and other members) and dealing with fears associated with confronting life issues they bring to the group (Corey & Corey, 2002). The challenge to the group leader during this stage is to recognize and negotiate the conflict and resistance so the group can move forward. One group theorist calls this stage “storming” due to the nature of the heightened resistance and conflict (Tuckman, 1963 as cited in Toseland & Rivas, 2005, p. 87). The second part of the middle stage, sometimes called the work stage, comes when members successfully deal with the conflict and resistance, and feel committed to explore their problems having worked through their fears and struggle for power (Corey & Corey, 2002). Typically a high level of trust characterizes the work stage, as well as increased group cohesion, higher level of self-disclosure, less leader imposed structure, and high productivity of group members toward their goal. The group leader seeks to empower the members by providing support, encouragement, challenge, and feedback. The acting stage of action research most closely parallels the work stage, during which participants in this study were faced with looking at many areas in a new light (e.g. racism, white privilege), further exemplifying the dynamics of the middle stage of group development.

The final stage of group development is the ending stage. This stage is critical in the life of the group, since the members address the consolidation of learning and identifying ongoing support. The group leader helps members make connections between what they learned in the group and how the member will apply the learning to life situations (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). The leader also helps members plan for the future by identifying meaningful relationships and systems to assist them in further work. It is vital that the leader encourage the members to make meaning of their experience in the group, connect their learning, and plan for the future (Corey & Corey, 2002; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). The reflecting stage of action research dovetails with the ending stage of the group in this study. The final focus group (discussed in detail later) embodied aspects of ending the group and learning for purposes of the research study.

The discussion of group development and group dynamics in social work contextualizes this action research study carried out in a social work course focused on teaching skills for working with groups in a clinical social work setting. As the researcher, teacher, and a social work practitioner, I addressed the multiple aspects of the research using the knowledge and skills of group practice. This contributed positively to the design and flow of the research, and the parallel nature of group development and action research manifested in this study is presented in the next chapters as the findings of the study are considered in detail. Next, I continue the overview of the study design in light of the four-stage action research process of plan, act, observe, and reflect.

Stages of Data Collection and Analysis

In social work classes in a small, Christian college social work program, I find students are often very concrete in their thinking with a very conservative bias. For example, I hear students comment about right and wrong (especially on issues of abortion, sexual orientation,

and gender roles), with no room for exploration of where their values are based and why, or how they will apply these strong beliefs in practice. Students will often cite parental influence and their religious upbringing as their value orientation, and often identify those strong roots as part of them and do not see a reason to look further. The accrediting body for social work education requires provision of an educational experience that teaches students to move toward cultural competence as practitioners. Realistically, they will be working with diverse populations in the community, so increasing cultural competence is necessary for students to become effective practitioners when working with clients.

In addition, students express little awareness of issues of spirituality other than religious Christian beliefs. They are reticent to look beyond their Christian faith to embrace other areas of spirituality or other types of religious practice, other than to acknowledge they exist. They clearly do not recognize any other belief system as valid, and characterize difference as “the other.” The problem for the purpose of this critical action research is the need for social work curriculum to provide ways students can become more culturally and spiritually responsive in order to be effective practitioners.

The research method determines the types of data collection procedures. The purpose of data collection and analysis is to attempt to answer the research questions by comparing the data collected through the research process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). In action research, data is obtained about the creation of knowledge, awareness and understanding of problems, and progress toward social change (McTaggart, 1991).

This section provides a detailed picture of the design of this qualitative action research study conducted on a small (2870 students) campus of a Christian liberal arts college. The four-

stage plan-act-observe-reflect action research design frames the discussion along with the assumptions and research questions situated in the context of critical theory.

Planning

A multi-step process identified by Alrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt (2002) characterizes action research. Similar to Lewin's model to plan, act, observe, and evaluate (McTaggart, 1991), the process used in the current study involved four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Alrichter et al., 2002). These four stages served as the framework for the study. The following section delineates the stages and activities involved to conduct the current critical action research study.

The first stage, identified as planning, is characterized by stating the problem, identifying participants, defining data collection procedures, and carrying out initial planning activities as part of the participatory nature of action research design (McTaggart, 1991; Tomal, 2003). Tomal (2003) suggests a "who, what, where, and when" approach whereby the problem is further delineated by conducting interviews with participants, needs assessment (interview questionnaire), and focus groups (p. 15). The purpose of the planning stage is to ensure the participants' (in this case, the students') authentic participation in deciding the focus of the action plan.

In this study, I initiated the planning stage by first reviewing the literature in order to gain an understanding of the problem and the theoretical underpinnings, and identify potential strategies to encourage cultural and spiritual responsiveness based on what is presented in the literature. The first step in the planning stage that involved students was informing the students that the study was taking place in their class by mailing a letter of recruitment (see Appendix A) and gaining informed consent. Since research conducted in a class is not a usual occurrence, I

discussed the process with the students during the first week of class. Due to the unique circumstance and my position of authority as the teacher as well as the researcher, any specific questions related to participation in the research were directed to the dissertation faculty advisor. I then conducted focus groups with students who were eligible to participate in the study. Conducting a focus group with students in the first weeks of the class helped participants gain an understanding and provide a forum to begin the process of mutual ownership in the research. In addition, use of focus groups to facilitate sharing of ideas between and among participants generated discussion about spirituality and culture using a group dynamics process. A questionnaire administered during the initial focus group and at the end of the semester further assessed participant cultural competencies (see Appendix B). Throughout the study, I used individual and large and small group methods to gather information and promote ownership in the research process, which follows closely with the principles of action research (Stringer, 1996).

According to action research principles, participants are involved in the construction of the project from conceptualization to disseminating results (McTaggart, 1991). Participants working together in all parts of the project can result in mutual benefits through an “authentic participation” whereby members take ownership in the production of the knowledge and the changes that result (Cunningham, 1993; McTaggart, 1991, p. 171). To be “authentic,” the participants are part of setting the agenda of the project, collection and analysis of the data, and have control over the outcomes and process (McTaggart, 1991, p. 171). It is important that the researcher is hearing and considering participants’ voices, not creating the “illusion of participation” (McTaggart, 1991, p. 171). The researcher is not the expert, but a co-learner that is willing to learn from others in the group (McNicoll, 1999).

Caveat to the methodology: A modification of Critical Action Research. In this study, the institutional constraints of higher education precluded a critical action research approach in the purest sense. It was critical action research in the sense that the participants' voices were heard during the project through giving feedback and actively constructing knowledge. I planned sessions based on data analysis of previous sessions, and in response to student feedback and the ongoing reflection occurring throughout the semester. In addition, my awareness of positionality and sharing power throughout the study enabled meaning making and student participation as much as possible given the setting of an undergraduate course conducted in a higher education setting. However, it is important to clarify that this study represents a modification of the critical action research process in that participants did not take part in designing the study or planning all aspects of the course. This was largely due to the responsibility of the teacher-researcher to ensure coverage of curriculum content and learning objectives of the course, and the need to work within the systemic structure of higher education, which often (and in this case) works against teaching from a perspective that values feminist principles (Ropers-Huilman, 1998), which underlie culturally responsive education. This study followed a critical action research model in that it was intended to assist students to understand the importance of challenging power relations (based on race, ethnicity, class, and culture) both in the classroom and in social work practice. In addition, this study intended to increase students' social consciousness and help them move toward becoming culturally responsive practitioners. This modification to the critical action research model resulted from the limitations of a higher education institutional setting, where the expectations for me as the teacher were to assign grades and satisfy the curricular requirements of the institution. Gore (1997), refers to this as the "institutionalisation [sic] of pedagogy" (p. 215), in that the imposition of power in an institutional setting is "inescapable" (p.

218), thereby hindering the degree to which critical action research could take place. The following sections describe the research process and the steps taken to conduct the action research study according to action research principles and assumptions.

Focus groups. I conducted focus groups with the students during the first two weeks of the fall semester. Since the group of participants was small, only nine, all participants were included in one group. The purpose of small group interaction was to create space for participants to express points of view, attitudes, and generate ideas in a guided discussion (Rubin & Babbie, 2001). Use of focus groups in this study corresponds with the action research principle of developing critical consciousness and sharing understanding of knowledge development by the group (Jacobsen, 1998; McTaggart, 1991). The purpose of the focus group was three-fold: 1) to determine the students' perception of spirituality and the role of cultural awareness in their practice as social workers through a multicultural needs assessment, 2) to gain an understanding of what the participants identify as their worldview, and 3) to find out participants' understanding of culturally responsive education. Addressing these purposes helped determine where to begin the process of incorporating strategies in the curriculum that further uncover students' self-awareness of their spiritual and cultural lens. Since the role of the researcher in action research is not to impose, but to facilitate and participate (McNicoll, 1999; Stringer, 1994), I was most interested to hear the participants' voice during the discussions, which required an understanding and self-awareness of my own spiritual and cultural lens. As the researcher as well as the teacher, I was cognizant of my positionality in terms of authority, race, ethnicity, and class. My identity and positionality in terms of gender, however, was less clear to me, as will be discussed in detail in later chapters. My beliefs and bias concerning the students on the campus of this Christian college (which are stated throughout this and previous

chapters) played a role in this research process, and it is from my self-awareness of many of these issues that I could attempt to authentically participate and carry out the steps of the action research process.

Questionnaires. The focus groups allowed participants to begin to articulate their spiritual and cultural lens and share ideas and feelings regarding the research process and their role. To gain additional specific data, questionnaires are often used to elicit information about the research question (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Completing a questionnaire during the initial focus group helped gain a baseline to assess awareness of competencies regarding culture in practice (Corey, 2000) and gave the participant and the researcher some information about strengths and needs related to cultural awareness for culturally competent practice. The questionnaire used for this study was short answer, geared to give substantive information to participants and researcher regarding specific needs and strengths relative to cultural awareness for group counseling (see Appendix B). The final focus group and questionnaire again at the end of the semester provided further information about meaning making after the intervention strategies, discussion, and knowledge construction were completed. However, the questionnaires were not a major aspect of the data collection for this study, and gave minimal information about the participants' awareness of cultural competence.

It was important to keep in mind during the planning process the critical perspective contextualizing this study. Critical action research foregrounds a critical theoretical framework that embodies a focus on social change, understanding human experience, belief that knowledge is power, and values multiple ways of knowing as constantly changing and influenced by the sociopolitical environment (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). Continuous awareness of this foundation kept the focus of the study by synthesizing action research and critical theory to

foreground the power imbalance between the students (participants) and the teacher (researcher). This concept parallels social work praxis in terms of the client/practitioner relationship and group process.

Acting

The second stage of action research involves developing and implementing the plan flowing from the data analysis of the initial focus group discussions and questionnaires. The class met twice a week for 15 weeks, so implementation of strategies to encourage participants to increase awareness of spiritual and cultural competence commenced for approximately 10-12 weeks. The plan was implemented during the 150 minutes of class time each week, as well as out of class asynchronous discussions. The actual plan evolved from the information collected from the participants. I applied the information to the initial framework of possible activities and assignments proposed during the planning stage, based on strategies and assignments identified in the literature designed to increase cultural and spiritual competence and awareness in education curriculum. In addition, I continuously searched for strategies to meet the needs of the participants, as they became known. One potential strategy involved observing and interacting with a community-based support, education or therapeutic group where members are identified as different (related to age, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation). Students were asked to observe a group fitting the criteria for four to six sessions, keep a journal of their impressions, and then synthesize their observations through writing a paper incorporating observations with aspects of cultural and spiritual issues and group work theory. However, identifying community groups fitting these criteria who were willing to allow students to participate proved prohibitive, and the strategy was not operationalized. Another strategy used was forming a “mentoring community” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 221) consisting of small groups within the class created to offer

support as difficult areas are explored, a concept supported by Van Soest, Cannon, and Grant (2000) when they state that the process of confronting one's beliefs can be "overwhelming and create debilitating anxiety" (p. 465). In addition, I presented selected topics on race, gender, and cultural competency in the class through multiple modalities including a video, small and large group discussion, readings, and experiential activities (Sevig & Etxkorn, 2001). These topics have the dual purpose of helping students develop "cross cultural empathy" (listening genuinely, tolerating uncertainty and ambiguity, and being receptive to others) while gaining insight into their cultural lens (Dyche & Zayas, 2001, p. 246). The findings and further detail of these activities follow in Chapter Four.

A strategy of foremost importance to this study was use of technology to encourage interaction through asynchronous communication. Participants used the web-based Blackboard Learning System to discuss, comment, challenge, question, and support each other through the course of the semester. According to Van Soest et al. (2000), this method can be useful in discussing sensitive topics and issues that students may otherwise be reluctant to bring up in class. During the action research study, I assigned participants to groups to carry out their discussions related to topics that flowed from the readings and activities presented in class. Additional data was gathered from the student reflective journals, online conversations, and researcher's observational field notes.

Observing

This stage occurs as students are involved in interaction with each other and sharing observations and information about what they are learning. During this stage, participants are encouraged to place their learning into the larger context of the college community and social work practice. The purpose of observing is for participants to begin to make meaning of their

experiences in terms of the broader picture. This stage also serves to contextualize the ongoing participatory nature of action research in which the participants and the researcher are part of the action and knowledge construction, so continuous dialogue is required in order to encourage shared understanding of development of a critical consciousness (McTaggart, 1991).

Personal reflective journals. Participants kept personal reflective journals (online) to record their observations, assumptions, feelings, and ideas about the interactions, activities, learning, and application to practice. Use of journaling and personal narratives offers participants a way to express “authentic identity” and construct knowledge through producing their personal “truths” (May, 2002, p. 56). Three times throughout the semester, I provided writing prompts to encourage reflection and consideration of specific touch points in narrative form. In addition, participants engaged in online, asynchronous discussion of the touch points.

Participants also used Blackboard to discuss their impressions, feelings, questions, and reflections on what they are learning about themselves, others, and social work practice during the process of this study. I asked participants to write an entry in their journal online at least once per week. The journal entries were a dialogue between the student and me, and were not visible by other participants. I responded to each student to encourage more reflection, answer questions, and facilitate dialogue.

Field notes. The researcher generates additional forms of data collection. Field notes provide a venue for researcher reflection and contextual accounts from direct observations of the research process (May, 2002; Tomal, 2003). They consist of personal impression of feelings, reactions, concerns, along with subjective and objective narratives of the research process (May, 2002). Field notes guide the process of self-reflection of the researcher and assist in forming ideas, goals, and interpretation of the research experience (McIntyre, 1997). Through

observations of the classroom activities, focus groups, and asynchronous communication, I observed and noted what is happening at a given point in time and place (Grady, 1998). During observations, I could make note of communication that is verbal as well as non-verbal, which serves to capture a more holistic view of the process. The field notes provided both factual and subjective information from an affective (emotional) and cognitive perspective, thus creating a context to situate the participants' (and my own) meaning making throughout the study process. In addition, through the process of keeping notes of classroom observations, activities, focus groups, and transcriptions of asynchronous communications, I was able to clearly document and provide rich description of the critical reflection process of the participants and researcher.

Audiotaping. In addition to written field notes, I audiotaped the face-to-face discussions to ensure accuracy of the participants' voices, and contribute to the thick, rich description when describing the findings. At first I was not audiotaping the discussions due to the difficulty involved if any student declined to participate and the data would need removed. However, after the first focus group, I realized that the small size of the group would provide easy recognition of voices if audiotaped, so after gaining permission, I collected data through audiotape, which allowed me to participate in the group without having to try to write every word. This permitted me to focus on the discussion and field notes rather than intense writing. The participants adapted to the tape recorder in the center of the table and it did not appear to hinder conversation.

Reflecting and Ongoing Data Analysis

A strategy central to the purpose of this study is critical self-reflection. Encouraging participants to critically reflect on their own culture and spirituality, as well as reflecting on the *process* of self-reflection and what it means to them can be a powerful method used in culturally responsive education (Schmitz, Stakeman, & Sisneros, 2001). To facilitate this, participants

completed a critical incident questionnaire (CIQ) weekly to provide feedback regarding their sense of engagement in the class, and what they felt was helpful or not helpful to their learning (see Appendix C), and kept an online personal reflective journal, as discussed previously.

The fourth stage involves reflection on the research process and evaluation of the intervention. While reflection is occurring throughout the research process, through field notes and student reflections, this final stage helps participants bring together the activities, events, and learning over the entire semester. This stage culminates in a discussion of the research question, “how did the strategies affect students’ learning about cultural and spiritual issues, particularly in relation to those who are very different from themselves.” Ideally, the information gathered during the action, observation, and reflection stages contextualizes and contributes to future re-planning and implementation of the action research cycle. McTaggart (1991) sees action research as a cyclical rather than linear process, although for the purpose of this study it appears to be linear due to time constraints of a 15-week semester. In reality, the planning and reflecting stages occur concurrently with the acting stage, allowing for flexibility based on participants’ ongoing dialogue and knowledge construction. Central to this stage is analyzing the data collected by the researcher from focus groups, audio tapes, asynchronous communication, field notes, and journals.

Data analysis in qualitative research is a procedure that requires a simultaneous process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Grinnell, 2001). As the action research study unfolds, data is collected from focus groups, observations, and field notes, then read and re-read as it is collected to identify patterns and themes that encapsulate the experiences and meaning making of the participants (Grady, 1998; Grinnell, 2001). A method of data analysis known as constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to compare units of data with each other,

looking for themes that can be placed into categories, thereby providing a means to make meaning of the vast amounts of data generated by the data collection methods employed in this study (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Merriam and Simpson (1995) explain constant comparative analysis further as consisting of four stages. This method, developed by Glaser and Strauss, is a grounded theory approach used as a means to develop theory by linking categories and forming hypothesis (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). In this action research study, the purpose was not to form a hypothesis or create a theory, but to situate the analysis of the data in the participants' meaning making. Constant comparative analysis affords the researcher a way to interpret the data by describing, conceptualizing, and classifying the events into themes then comparing them to the original research questions (McIntyre, 1997; Patton, 2002). The first stage involves coding and comparing the units of data with each other to generate categories. Second, categories are constantly compared to the emerging data to find connections between and among the categories. In the third stage, the researcher reduces similar categories into fewer, more highly conceptual categories, developing an overall framework (Merriam & Associates, 2002, Merriam & Simpson, 1995). In the fourth stage, after determining saturation (when no additional categories of data are found), the researcher describes the themes from the coded data and responds to the original research questions (Patton, 2002).

The various data collection methods were coded using topic and analytic coding procedures to reflect on patterns of responses, and to describe data in order to develop categories. Morse and Richards (2002) describe topic coding as a way to identify and interpret material collected on a particular topic in order to describe or categorize it. Analytic coding involves further synthesizing the categories to compare evolving data to abstract new categories and

themes. These coding procedures provide a fit for almost all qualitative research methods, providing a way to link categories to the larger body of data (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Identifying themes in the coded data will involve keeping notes or memos as the data is coded. Memos are documenting ideas as they emerge during the coding process and recording changes in order to keep track of the intended use of the category or concept (Morse & Richards, 2002).

The constant comparative analysis method begins with analyzing the focus groups, field notes, transcriptions, and journals. First, I transcribed the audio tapes and field notes for ease of coding. Online journals and CIQ's were easily coded since they were in written form. I analyzed the initial focus group during the planning process for themes related to participants' spiritual and cultural awareness and belief systems. The nature of action research dictates ongoing, continuous analysis throughout the study, including analyzing field notes of classroom observations and my participatory role in the process (McIntyre, 1997). As the semester progressed, coding of the class discussions, asynchronous communication transcripts, and classroom observations further identified themes emerging from the interactions. Finally, analysis of the final focus group, field notes, journals, and transcripts addressed the categories and themes generated throughout the research process.

Issues of Dependability

The purpose of action research is solving problems in the context of the problem or situation where the problem takes place and producing "context-centered" knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p. 97). The validity of the results of the research study lies in the degree to which the solution to the problem is tangible to the participants (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Therefore, in qualitative action research, the participants' willingness to make meaning and create change serves as the measure of validity, and reliability (Greenwood & Levin, 2000).

The issue of trustworthiness or soundness of the study is important to establish in qualitative action research. However, the constructs attributed to conventional quantitative research designs (validity, reliability, objectivity) are positivist; thereby they do not lend themselves well to naturalistic inquiry due to the changing and evolving nature of action research design (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Action researchers must take into account the fact that knowledge and meaning making is non-neutral and subject to the power relations and positionality of the participants and researcher, thereby privileging some aspects of knowledge over others (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Many authors discuss a renaming of the positivist concepts attributed to the scientific, quantitative model (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mason, 2002; Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002). Therefore, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research study, I will discuss the considerations central to this qualitative research design. These considerations are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Credibility of the study refers to accurate description and identification of the problem in the context of the audience and intended purpose of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002). The question to answer when relating to credibility is “with what perspectives and by what criteria will [the] work be judged?” (Patton, 2002, p. 543). The criteria used to judge the quality of the research varies from one audience to another, based on the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). Therefore, clearly stating the purpose of the inquiry, along with theoretical perspective and philosophical framework sets the stage for establishing accurate criteria to bound the study by setting up relevant parameters (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) states, “people viewing qualitative findings through different paradigmatic lenses will react differently” (p. 543).

Two elements present in qualitative action research speak to credibility. The first deals with the need for rigor in the methods chosen for data generation in order to show how the methods produce relevant data used in constructing knowledge about the problem (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). The second area addresses the credibility of the researcher, and speaks to a common assumption of qualitative research, i.e. wariness that researcher bias shaped the findings (Morse & Richards, 2002). This assumption is present because the researcher is the main instrument of data collection (Merriam & Simpson, 1995), thereby at the center of the data generation process (Morse & Richards, 2002). To counter this assumption, proactive planning and “making the implicit explicit” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 170) by clearly stating researcher assumptions and bias and identifying the subjectivity of the researcher problematizes this issue.

In this action research study, I confronted these areas through several approaches. First, I prepared by thoroughly reviewing the literature to determine what is known about the subject of the research study. In addition, I have clearly stated in Chapter Two the theoretical underpinnings and philosophical framework of the study. Most importantly, I clarified and reported my underlying assumptions and biases through a process of self-assessment, and recorded these at the beginning of the study and through field notes throughout the study. In reporting the findings of this study, I will demonstrate how I reached my interpretations, and will be aware of not claiming universal truth, rather making transparent the methodology, observations, interpretations and allowing the reader to make meaning of the research.

The second consideration in this qualitative action research study is transferability. Described by Marshall and Rossman (1999), this term refers to the generalizability of the study in terms of applicability to a context other than the one in which the research study is conducted. The term transferability is used to nuance the issue of how the findings are useful to others in

similar situations, rather than assuming the study can be replicated, a tenet of generalizability (Patton, 2002). As discussed later in this chapter, generalizability in qualitative research is often not the main concern of the research as is the case in quantitative research design (Morse & Richards, 2002). The degree of transferability from one context to another is a “function of the similarity between the two contexts.” Therefore, attention to the contextual boundedness of naturalistic inquiry is crucial (Patton, 2002, p. 584). In qualitative research design, the burden of showing transferability of the findings to another context lies with the reader who must interpret the findings and decide applicability to his or her circumstance (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

I addressed transferability of this action research study through use of triangulation and providing thick, rich description of the observations, audio tape transcriptions, journals, and focus groups (Morse & Richards, 2002). Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple methods to counter bias and validate the findings (Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Patton, 2002). Data from various sources can “corroborate, illuminate, and elaborate” the research, further contributing to the usefulness of the research study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The purpose of triangulation is to “test the consistency” of different data sources, and inquiry approaches, not to verify that they yield the same result (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Uncovering inconsistencies in the findings through triangulation offers the researcher an opportunity to further interpret the findings and offer insight into the reason for the inconsistencies, thereby strengthening the credibility and transferability of the research (Patton, 2002).

Triangulation in the context of the current study involves triangulation of methods and data triangulation. Methods triangulation compares and integrates the data collected through the various data collection methods. In this action research study, I used data collected through

questionnaires, focus groups, observations, asynchronous communications, field notes, and online journals to look at the research question from different “angles” or positions (Mason, 2002, p. 190). Mason (2002) cautions use of this method is not to “compare products” of each data collection source; to do so would imply there is one “right” view of the phenomenon (p. 190). Instead, she suggests using triangulation in this way to show that the research question has more than one dimension, and by using various methods to collect the data, the multiple dimensions are uncovered (Mason, 2002). Data triangulation refers to comparing the consistency of information from different data sources at various points of time during the study.

Determining when and if there are differences between what participants say during journaling and what participants reveal during focus groups, for example, leads the researcher to try to understand the reasons for the inconsistencies. Triangulating data for the purpose of this study meant comparing classroom observations with audio tape transcripts, checking for consistency of what participants say during asynchronous communications and in focus groups, and comparing classroom observations, asynchronous communications and field notes to identify overall patterns.

Another way to address transferability is by using thick, rich, description when processing transcripts, field notes, focus groups, and asynchronous communications. Thick, rich description contextualizes the findings by helping the reader experience the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) purports that thick, rich description “forms the bedrock of qualitative reporting” by offering concrete description and taking the person who may use the findings “into” the experience (p. 438). An important aspect of thick description is the diligent separation of description from interpretation. Description must come before interpretation, although a common error of

researchers is to rush into interpreting before illuminating the phenomenon (Patton, 2002) by describing the experiences of the participants through “summarizing, synthesizing, and extracting essential characteristics” of the situation (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 150). This action research study affords many opportunities for thick, rich description as I describe the experiences of the participants through their eyes. I depended heavily on accurate field notes, journals, and transcripts of asynchronous communication and audiotapes to ensure richness of the descriptive aspects of the study, as is evident in the next chapters. Attention to describing the phenomenon through the words of the participants contributes greatly to the reader’s ability to determine how closely their situation corresponds to the current research, and assess transferability of the study (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

Dependability is the third consideration necessary to address this study. Since a premise of action research is defining and redefining the problem throughout the research process and adjusting the research design (Merriam & Simpson, 1995), it is important that the researcher accounts for the changing conditions during the course of the research study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Dependability speaks to the interpretive assumption of qualitative research, which posits that knowledge is constructed and shaped by the process of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Therefore, to respond to the need for dependability, the researcher must explain the changes encountered during the research study by defining the setting and carefully chronicling the process to note changes as the study progresses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). One way to evidence these changes is through audit trails (Morse & Richards, 2002). Audit trails are used to document the research process in a way that can be substantiated by someone external to the research study (Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002). For this research study, the dissertation chair and committee audit the research by reviewing and analyzing the research

process and the findings. In addition, my field notes play a critical role in tracking (providing a trail) the evolving research process, making it imperative that I am accurate in the content of the notes.

In this study, one change that occurred was the use of audiotaping after the first few weeks of the semester. Initially, audiotaping was not identified as a data collection method and participants were not asked for informed consent. The reason for the change to request consent for audiotaping was to ensure accuracy of the thick, rich description of the participants' knowledge construction, and to allow me to focus my attention on the group, rather than taking copious notes. Therefore, during the third week of the study, I amended the application to the IRB to include audiotaping, and secured the informed consent of the participants by repeating the procedure implemented in the beginning of the study.

Lastly, confirmability answers the question "can the findings of the study be confirmed by another?" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 194). Confirmability addresses the issue of objectivity, which in qualitative research is problematized by the importance of the researcher's subjectivity during the research process. However, to attempt to enhance objectivity, the concept of confirmability takes the responsibility from the researcher and places it on the data, therefore the question becomes "do the data help confirm the findings and lead to the implications?" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 194). Confirmability, as with credibility, again responds to concerns that the bias of the researcher shapes the study and findings. The researcher can contribute to the confirmability of the study by strategizing to limit bias when interpreting the data and rigorously describing the phenomenon to affirm what the researcher observes and experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In this study, my bias in terms of my identity and

positionality clearly influenced the study, and will be discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

Two methods previously discussed address confirmability. Triangulation and audit trails serve to increase the confirmability by encouraging in-depth understanding of the problem (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), looking at the problem from multiple areas to describe inconsistencies, and externally auditing to verify the process of data collection and research strategies (Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002). In addition, Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest two strategies to increase confirmability: member checks and searching for negative instances. According to Merriam and Simpson (1995), member checks involve taking interpretation of data collected from participants back to them and asking for verification (does the data “ring true”?) (p. 102). Documentation of member checks allows the researcher to demonstrate attempts to report the data accurately and affords the reader a venue to adjudicate confirmability of the study. Similarly, searching for negative instances provides researchers a method to show they interpreted the data in a way not solely based on positive aspects. Instead, the researcher is willing to disclose negative aspects of the study, even if it opposes the researcher’s assumptions. I used member checks frequently to confirm my interpretation of data collected during observations and focus groups by verifying with participants (often by email) that my field notes and transcripts reflected their story. In times of discrepancy, I made appropriate changes and again referred back to the participant. In addition, maintaining an awareness of negative instances and reporting those instances as a way to increase the likelihood that I accurately described the research process contributed to the confirmability and credibility of the study.

The considerations of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability respond to the concern for valid and reliable research conducted in naturalistic settings. By keeping thorough field notes and recording the decisions and rationale that refine the design of the research upholds the qualitative research paradigm as a rigorous and trustworthy form of research. In addition, keeping well-organized data that is available to external sources for future analysis further strengthens the utility of the research project (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Marshall and Rossman (1999) provide additional suggestions for ensuring a trustworthy research project that I made every effort to adhere to when conducting my action research project. They advocate for explicitly detailed design and method of the research, clearly stated research questions, situating the study in a scholarly context, and practical application of the research. Keeping these standards contributes further to the trustworthiness of the study, thus enabling critical assessment of the value of the qualitative research process.

Limitations of the Research Design

There are several identified limitations to using a qualitative action research paradigm. First, generalizability of results is limited to the specific group or circumstances in which the research was conducted (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Generalizability in qualitative research does not fit the traditional view that values replicating the study as a way to establish credibility. In qualitative research, generalizability is reconceptualizes to allow individual meaning and interpretation by the reader (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This supports the true contribution of qualitative research by foregrounding the human element and personalizing the findings of the study and the lived experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The findings from this study are applicable to the students participating in the social work class and give the faculty an indication of the feasibility of the pedagogical strategies and the implications for use in other

social work classes. Since part of the purpose of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base and reduce the lack of literature on this topic, the issue of generalizability is of lesser concern.

The research findings in this study can be used to contextualize further discussion and implementation of pedagogical methods in social work curriculum, and contribute to the conversation about culturally responsive education in the adult education literature.

A second limitation identified in the literature states that action research design does not address the issue of power, status, and influence (McTaggart, 1991). In fact, a criticism of action research per se is the inattention to power relations and the propensity to create further exploitation of marginalized and oppressed people (McNicoll, 1999). The researcher working with a group of students, clients, or marginalized participants whether in the classroom, community, or workplace brings a dynamic of power that is a concern to the research process and foregrounds the subjectivity and value-laden aspects of constructivist approaches (Jacobson, 1998; McTaggart, 1991). The poststructuralist feminist perspective incorporated in the research framework attempts to address this issue. By using this method of inquiry and gaining the perspectives of the students through critical self-reflection while intentionally addressing the power issues and positionality, inherent researcher bias can serve to deconstruct the idea that a “unitary truth” exists and create a higher awareness for students (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). Awareness of my position of authority in the classroom, the resulting power and evaluative responsibilities was a way to influence the process of self-reflection by creating a safe space and affecting students’ feelings of uninhibited expression.

Third, change or attempt to change can lead to considerable tension between the group (the class) and the institutional culture of the group in terms of language, patterns of interaction, and relationships (McTaggart, 1991). Resistance met by the researcher’s attempting to change

their practice is typically a result of the conflict between the new practice and the accepted practices of the institution. By acting politically the researcher can analyze and work to overcome the resistance (McTaggart, 1991). This was true in several instances during the research process and is discussed in later chapters. Despite these limitations, the action approach to research offered a group centered process that focused on the problems found in social constructs and everyday life (Zeigler, 2001) which is essential to culturally relevant education and developing culturally and spiritually competent social work practitioners.

Summary

The qualitative action research paradigm chosen for this study supported the focus of this study that addressed culturally responsive education in the social work classroom of a small, private, Christian college. This study attempted to introduce strategies designed to increase student self-awareness and reflection of cultural and spiritual issues, and assessed how these strategies affected student learning about cultural and spiritual issues. The study used focus groups, asynchronous communication, observations, audiotaping, field notes, and student and researcher journals to collect the data. In addition, triangulation, member checks, audit trails and thick, rich, description contributed to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the action research study. Limitations of the methodology included limited generalizability, need to address issues of power and positionality in the classroom, and difficulty of the change process. The rationale for the research design, considerations to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations identified provided the perspective necessary to rigorously carry out this research and consider the findings discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Culturally responsive education incorporates approaches and educational processes that are inclusive, challenge power relations between the educator and the learners, and connect spirituality to culture for increasing cultural and spiritual self-awareness (Gay, 2000; Guy, 1999a; Tisdell, 2003). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of culturally responsive pedagogical strategies implemented in the classroom of a social work program at a small, Christian, liberal arts college, with the intent to increase participants' social consciousness and prepare them to advocate for social change and move toward cultural competence as social work practitioners. The primary assumption of the study is that culturally responsive education is necessary for social work students to begin to become culturally competent social work practitioners. A second assumption identifies the issue of predominantly White students in a Christian college setting, and the researcher's observation that these students see primarily through the lens of Christianity rather than through embracing spirituality in a global sense. The design of this action research study was based on these assumptions and involved students in a social work class focused on teaching skills for social work practice working with small groups.

This chapter presents the findings of the action research study as it unfolded, in light of the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages of action research. In this chapter, I first introduce the student participants in the study to provide background so the reader can begin to understand how the participants define themselves in terms of their culture and spirituality. Second, I describe the findings from data collected during the study by delineating the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages of the action research process and activities generating the data. I present these stages in three sections: planning, acting, and observing. The reflecting stage of action research is not considered separately since reflection is discussed

comprehensively throughout the presentation of the findings, as analysis of the data generated by the pedagogical strategies is presented. Since the context of the study was a class for teaching skills to work with groups, I also highlight the parallel nature of the stages of action research and the stages of group development. Lastly, I provide a summary and final reflection of the four-stage critical action research process.

The participant and researcher reflection on the activities and events throughout the semester culminates in this chapter through a discussion of the research question “how did the strategies affect students’ learning about cultural and spiritual issues, particularly in relation to those who are very different from themselves?” Through culturally responsive education, participants learned to explore their spiritual and cultural worldview, place spirituality in the context of culture, and recognize racism and White privilege. The meaning making of the participants and researcher is situated in the theoretical framework of the study and reflects the five areas described by current feminist perspectives: knowledge construction, voice, authority, positionality, and identity (Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Tisdell, 2003). As participants moved through the semester, the model of culturally responsive education created space for them to begin to deconstruct categories of race, ethnicity, and class, and look at spirituality, oppression, and social structures in the frame of White privilege. The following sections of this chapter attempt to present the findings of this critical action research study through the stages of the action research process in the context of small group development.

Description of Participants

Participants for this action research study were the members of a required course in the social work program at a small Christian college. The course focused on learning about group

dynamics and skills for facilitating groups in social work practice. Nine students enrolled in the class and participated in the study.

The students were all White, Euro-American, ages 20-21, and were social work majors in the third or fourth year of their educational program. Eight students were female and one was a male. All participants self identified as Christian, with variation in denominational affiliation (described in detail later). Participants chose their pseudonyms during the last few weeks of the study. They were asked to choose a name they felt represented them; no additional stipulations were imposed. Descriptions of each participant, identified by pseudonyms, portray the students as they define their religious and cultural backgrounds. Table 1 on the following page provides a summary of the participants as they describe their race, ethnicity, religious background, class, and environment.

Chloe

Chloe is a 21-year-old third year student living with her father, mother, and 17-year-old sister when she is not at school. She has a strong relationship with her mother and sister and feels she depends on them for support and advice. She grew up in an upper middle class area, and has lived there for 18 years. She describes her religious tradition as conservative and Christian, although non-denominational, and talks about the “stiffness” of her church and that “things are done by the book,” which she does not feel comfortable with and expresses that she would like to worship somewhere “more charismatic.” Chloe describes herself as a person that gains energy from deep relationships with others. She appeared quiet in many group discussions, but was attentive and obviously processing what others said. When she spoke, she would demonstrate her thoughtful contribution to the discussion.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Religious Background	Class/ Environment	Age/ Year
Chloe	White	Non-denominational	Upper middle/Rural, mostly White	21/Jr
Dorcas	White/ German, Italian, French, Irish, Scotch	Raised Catholic, now attends Mennonite church	Upper middle/ suburban, mostly White	21/Jr
Lily	White/ German, Swiss	Mennonite family, Now attends Evangelical Free church	Lower Middle/Rural, mostly White	21/Jr
Lydia	White/ German, Swiss	Mennonite	Middle/suburban, mostly White	20/Jr
Marilyn	White/ German, Scottish, French	Baptist	Middle/ affluent suburban, mostly White	20/Jr
Nicolas	White/ Scottish and German ancestors	Evangelical Free, currently attends Brethren in Christ church	Upper middle/urban area in Lima, Peru	20/Sr
Nicole	White/ethnicity unknown	Catholic, now non- denominational	Lower middle class/ rural, mostly White	20/Jr
Rae	White/ Italian (Sicily), German & Ukrainian	Catholic, Jewish	Lower middle/ Racially diverse	20/Jr
Rosemarie	White/German, Irish, Native American, Welsh	Presbyterian	Lower middle/ suburban, racially diverse	21/Jr

Dorcas

Dorcas turned 21 during the course of the study, and grew up in an upper middle class family in an affluent suburban setting. She lives with her mother and father and has two older brothers who are grown and live in another state. Dorcas describes herself as a “spiritual mutt,” having been raised in a Roman Catholic family but “breaking away” to attend a nearby

Assemblies of God church when she was in high school. Now, upon coming to college, she attends a “very diverse” Mennonite church, which she characterizes as embracing people from many traditions and ethnicities “worshiping alongside one another.” She speaks clearly about the role of Jesus in her life, and her “personal relationship with God.” She describes her decision to break away from the traditions of the Catholic Church a “major struggle,” but feels comfortable with her eclectic spiritual background and the role the Catholic, Charismatic, and Anabaptist traditions played in her life. Dorcas double majors in social work and Christian ministry.

Lily

Lily is 21 and lives with her mother, father, and 17 year-old sister when not at school. Her family is currently experiencing difficulties in that her father who is “the main provider of the family” became disabled last year and the family income dropped significantly. Lily describes her cultural background as Mennonite and the church her family attended as being significant in “forming [her] own personal beliefs,” although she does not feel she “holds to a lot of the Mennonite values.” Lily now attends an Evangelical Free church, but credits her Mennonite upbringing for the strong relationships she has with friends. She feels she is able to “lean” on those relationships during the recent “hard times” her family is experiencing. Lily describes her family as very close and enjoys being together. Lily often chooses spending time with her family over being with her friends when she is home on breaks and values the strong relationships with her immediate and extended family. She identifies her family’s strong Mennonite culture, and is able to trace their Anabaptist roots to before the Reformation. She says, “it’s almost by default that I would be Mennonite too.”

Lydia

Lydia is 20 and lives with her father, mother, and two sisters. She grew up in a small suburban town in a middle class family. Her father is pastor of a medium sized Mennonite church and her mother is a teacher aide in a special education setting classroom. Lydia describes this time in her life as a period of “searching for [her] own definitions and conceptions of what [she] believes” and seeking a “different perspective” by putting some distance between herself and her childhood faith community. She feels she is currently questioning the “limiting and sheltering” of her Christian culture and does not want to just “blindly follow traditions” of her family, although she readily acknowledges the positive cultural influences of her “traditional Christian” family. Lydia will travel to Costa Rica for the spring semester where she will live with a native family in San Jose and study Spanish and Latin American politics. She is eager to experience a different culture and “have an adventure.”

Marilyn

Marilyn is a 20-year-old living with her mother, father, and brother in an affluent east coast area when she is not at school. She describes an “open relationship” with her parents characterized by a strong spiritual component in family interactions. She shares that the family often had devotionals and would “share prayer concerns.” She describes her socioeconomic status as middle class, and faith was “integrated in daily life.” Marilyn credits her parents’ “high expectations” and sense of trust in her as the reason for her current closeness to her family. Marilyn is engaged and will be married during the summer following this school year. She and her husband plan to live in campus housing for married students and continue their last year of college together. She currently lives in student housing off campus in an inner city area.

Nicolas

Nicolas is 20 years old and was raised in Peru where his parents are missionaries. Although his parents are both of Euro-American descent, he describes himself as bi-cultural. Nicolas explains that he feels the “the concept of what it means to be Latino/Hispanic... encompasses many different types of people. Because of this reason and because in my heart I feel myself to be Latin I consider myself one.” He often relates to his experiences in Peru and displays a very perceptive cultural awareness he credits to growing up with other missionary children and dealing with cultural differences daily. In Peru, he describes his family’s socioeconomic status as upper-middle class, but feels if they lived in the United States, they would be seen as less affluent. Nicolas has two younger sisters who live with his parents in Peru. Nicolas grew up in a “mainline protestant evangelical church” that he describes as “missions oriented and conservative.” The Latin American church he grew up in was “lively, but not charismatic.” He feels that he was “consistently spiritually nurtured” growing up in a missionary family and had a solid spiritual upbringing, but feels he has distanced himself from the church of his youth. Nicolas feels since coming to college he has learned more of the “teachings of Jesus about the poor and oppressed” and gained “social justice perspectives” never taught by his church. He is considering entering the Teach for America program when he graduates in the spring.

Nicole

Nicole, at age 20, is the oldest of six children. Her brothers and sisters range in age from 19 to 10 years of age. Her family lives on a farm outside of a small town close to the college. She characterizes her family’s socioeconomic status as “lower middle class.” She attended a private Catholic school until third grade, at which time her “parents became saved” and sent her

and her siblings to public school. She and her family stopped attending Catholic Church at that time and began attending a non-denominational church that they still attend today. Nicole identifies the many cultural aspects defining her Catholic origins and the clear differences she observed when moving to a church that did not display the many rituals she experienced in the Catholic Church. She describes herself as currently exploring questions about what she believes, and feels all her experiences have influenced her path.

Rae

Rae is a 20-year-old female in her third year of college. Originally a psychology major, she transferred into the social work major in her sophomore year. Rae was raised in an urban area where she attended a diverse public school where she and her five siblings “were the only White kids on the block.” Her family later moved to a rural community where she lived until recently when the family moved back to the city. She is the second oldest child in her family, with an older sibling who is 21, and four younger siblings including six year-old twins. Rae describes her spiritual background as “mixed,” in that her parents come from Catholic and Jewish backgrounds. She describes her spiritual tradition as “charismatic,” a term she began using after she came to college and experienced religious practices within the college community. Rae describes her family as “caught between a strong Catholic and strong Jewish background,” celebrating both Christian and Jewish holidays. She describes her family as “poor white people living in a rural area.” Rae is extremely articulate and was very willing to express her opinions during group discussions.

Rosemarie

Rosemarie is a 21-year-old living with her mother, stepfather and 18 year-old stepbrother. Her parents are divorced and she describes her relationship with her biological father as

“strained.” He lives in another state and her contact with him is limited to occasional phone conversations and visits about four times a year. Since the divorce, Rosemarie feels her current blended family “dances with the poverty line,” which is a change in socioeconomic status from when her parents were married. Rosemarie describes her spiritual upbringing as unremarkable. She remembers going to church every Sunday, and celebrating “Easter, Christmas, and other Christian holidays.” She feels her parents raised her to have the “freedom and opportunity to explore faith and religion” independently, and that this encouraged her to make her own decisions. Rosemarie describes her family culture as defined by their lower, working class status. While she finds the struggle for “making ends meet” difficult, she has grown to appreciate the opportunity to work with her stepfather’s construction business, which contributes, to the family’s financial and emotional needs.

In the next major section of this chapter, I present the findings from the study in the context of the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages of the action research process. This study reflects action research as a non-linear, ongoing spiral that unfolds as strategies are planned and presented. The cyclical pattern of knowledge construction, observation of the new knowledge, and then reflection upon the observations foregrounds the informal nature of action research through defining and redefining the research design based on the meaning making of the participants (Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Stringer, 1996). As I (as the researcher and teacher) analyzed the data following each class session, I could identify specific learning needs, or if participants indicated they wanted more information, I implemented pedagogical strategies and group discussions to address the need or issue. In addition, participants engaged in spontaneous discussion as knowledge production occurred. This informal, evolving design was also consistent with stages of group development, an interesting caveat to the research study. As McNicoll

(1999) points out, attention to group dynamics is crucial to successful action research. Therefore, I incorporate in the discussion of the findings a discussion of the stages of group development to illustrate the parallel between group formation, group dynamics, and the significance of conducting this study in a class focused on teaching skills to work with groups in social work practice. A data display of findings of the phases of this action research study appears on the next page. The next sections describe each stage of the action research process, the characteristics of each stage, activities during each stage, and the findings from the data generated in each stage.

Stage One: Planning

The planning stage is characterized by stating the problem, identifying the participants, and insuring the participants' authentic participation in the action plan, including setting the agenda for the research process. In addition, identifying and developing strategies to promote culturally responsive teaching occurred during this planning stage. The unique nature of this research project, in that the researcher was also the teacher, provided additional challenges since the participants in the study were not revealed until the end of the semester. Therefore, all students were considered participants and data collected would be purged if any student elected not to participate in the study. For this reason, I did not interview students individually since it would require meeting outside of class time, possibly evoking hardship on a non-participant.

A focus group was the first step as the study began. The focus group served as a vehicle to include participants in determining what they perceived to be important and necessary to address during the semester in order to contribute to knowledge production and meaning making in achieving increased cultural competence as social workers. The focus group also provided additional data to determine useful strategies to facilitate culturally responsive education based

DATA DISPLAY: Stages of Critical Action Research Study

- A. Stage One: Planning
 - a. Initial understanding of cultural competence
 - i. Prejudice and stereotyping
 - ii. Asking whose voice is heard
 - b. Focus on “the other” with limited sense of their own culture
 - i. Problematizing difference
 - ii. Naming White privilege
 - c. Initially framing spirituality as religion
 - i. Enthusiastically sharing religious traditions
 - ii. Discussing spirituality as within and beyond the family
 - iii. Connecting spirituality and culture
- B. Stage Two: Acting
 - a. Weeks 1-3: Constructing the Learning Environment
 - i. Using student experience as a jumping of point
 - ii. Focusing on culture and race more than gender
 - b. Weeks 4-7: Confronting Racism and Power Relations
 - i. Introducing power relations
 - ii. Expressing more emotion online than face-to-face
 - iii. Reacting to issues of gender at the intersection of race
 - iv. Questioning racist attitudes
 - v. Acknowledging and resisting White privilege
 - vi. Exploring the intersections of systems of privilege
 - vii. Moving from guilt to concern with social action
 - viii. Researcher reflections: sharing power with students
 - c. Weeks 8-11: Expanding Awareness of Spirituality
 - i. Finding new meaning about culture and spirituality through sharing symbols
 - ii. Broadening understanding through spiritual expression
 - iii. Researcher reflections: limitations of sharing power in higher education
 - d. Weeks 12-15: Making Connections to Social Work Practice
 - i. Critically examining the author’s frame of reference
 - ii. Engaging the author’s ideas in light of lived experience
- C. Stage Three: Observing
 - a. Moving Beyond Christianity
 - i. Framing spirituality in new ways
 - ii. Viewing spirituality in the context of culture
 - b. New Learning about Cultural Competence for Social Work Practice
 - i. Connecting learning about spirituality to social work practice
 - ii. Limited consideration of the gendered dimension of culture in the social work profession
 - iii. Seeing the effects of culture and White privilege through lived experiences
 - c. Culturally Responsive Education as Drawing on the Multiple Domains of Learning
- D. Chapter Summary and Final Reflections

on analysis of where participants were in terms of their understanding of cultural competence and spiritual awareness.

I conducted two focus groups during the first five weeks of the semester. First, I conducted a focus group with all nine participants face-to-face over two consecutive class sessions (two class sessions were necessary due to the time limitation of the 75-minute class period). The sessions occurred in the second and third weeks of class. The purpose of the initial focus group was to address issues of culture and the students' awareness of cultural competence using several guiding questions (see Appendix D). In addition, a short questionnaire called the *Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey* (MAKSS) by D'Andrea, Daniels, and Heck (1991) displayed in Appendix B was administered to provide information related to the level of cultural competence students' currently felt in working with clients in the social work field. I conducted a second focus group to address questions related to spiritual awareness and participants' spiritual traditions during the fifth week of class. This second focus group was an online, asynchronous discussion where participants were prompted to respond to the questions related to spirituality (see Appendix D). For this focus group, I assigned participants to two smaller groups for easier management of the online discussion. In a small group format, participants responded to others in their group rather than to eight other participants. This allowed for deeper, richer discussion and easier management of the online interactions.

The decision to separate culture and spirituality came from my realization that addressing both aspects (culture and spirituality) at the same time would likely be confusing, since typically participants' perceived culture and spirituality as separate entities. Encouraging a shift in thinking would require a learning process based on the assumptions that participants' had limited knowledge of cultural competence, especially in relation to race and White privilege, and

regarded spirituality only in terms of Christian religiosity. I decided to address one topic at a time so they would not have too many new concepts to deal with simultaneously. Therefore, in the initial focus group during the second and third weeks of class, students addressed questions related to understanding culturally competent social work practice, and their perception of the importance of understanding cultural heritage to be a competent social work practitioner. In the second focus group, held online during the fifth week of class, participants responded to questions regarding spirituality and their awareness of their spiritual worldview and spiritual traditions.

I collected and analyzed the data from the focus groups to help determine where students were in relation to their cultural and spiritual awareness and understanding of culturally competent practice. I tabulated the results from the questionnaires to see where students felt their current knowledge was in relation to their awareness of cultural competence in practice (see Appendix B). As discussed in Chapter Three, data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis as a way to interpret the data by classifying the events into themes (McIntyre, 1997; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). The discussions from the focus group uncovered three themes related to participant understanding of cultural competence. These themes reflect participants' self-awareness of their spiritual and cultural heritage and sense of "the other" in relation to race, ethnicity and class (and in some cases gender), and awareness of spirituality. These initial findings served to situate the study by providing a basis to begin introducing activities to enhance participants learning about culture and spirituality. Keep in mind that the planning stage, although presented here in terms of the beginning of the action research study, was ongoing throughout the semester as data was analyzed, reflection occurred and new knowledge constructed. I present the initial findings from the focus group in the following

discussion of the three themes labeled: initial understanding of cultural competence, focus on “the other” with limited sense of their own culture, and initial framing of spirituality as religion.

Initial Understanding of Cultural Competence

In the initial stages of this study, participants shared an understanding of what cultural competence means to them. Their understanding came through on varying levels. Initially, some participants shared “textbook” definitions from other classes. Most of them focused largely on cultural competence as issues of dealing with prejudice and the dangers of stereotyping, though a few did begin to ask questions about whose voice is heard. Next, I discuss how each of these manifested during the first few weeks of the semester.

Prejudice and stereotyping. The participants expressed a basic understanding of awareness of bias and stereotypes when working with people of other cultures. Nicole was the first to respond to the question “what is your understanding of culturally competent social work practice” by saying:

It’s how you treat others and not being prejudiced. My definition is adjusting methods of practice based on culture. For example, Native Americans are more reserved. We think they shouldn’t be, and we must be aware of that [our thinking] and adjust our practice.

We can’t pass judgment on a person based because of their race or ethnicity.

Many participants used the words stereotype and categorize, and discussed the need to recognize that people do not fit into categories. Chloe, Rosemarie and Marilyn added the dimension of awareness of bias and the stereotypes often held. Chloe stated “we need to be aware of our own biases...we must be aware of our stereotypes, we’re not supposed to have those. Sometimes people live up to their stereotypes.” Rosemarie referred to the role of communication within the

same culture and between cultures. She perceives cultural competence as the “need to respect people.” She goes on to say:

We’re so often led to believe that everyone’s the same. It goes along with realizing that people don’t fit into categories. Along with respecting people, we need to realize what goes along with that respect, and practice it.

Marilyn pointed out how she conceptualized cultural competence:

Stereotypes are a self-fulfilling prophecy. We need to be careful to recognize if that is happening in our practice. We must be intentional about getting knowledge. We should read books, do research about cultures. Don’t assume that if they are White, they have the same culture. You can’t assume meeting people will tell everything.

Dorcas and Rae tended to problematize cultural competence in the context of stereotyping. Rae related:

We make assumptions about others; we stereotype White and African American cultures. My family is White and we do not fit stereotypes. Culturally competent practice puts people into categories. We can’t make general statements and can’t make assumptions.

Similarly, Dorcas shared:

It’s important to know social stereotypes but recognize differences. Just because you know a few people from a culture, doesn’t mean you know the culture. I think it’s dangerous to think you’re culturally competent. Cultures vary, and maybe you never know if you are culturally competent.

Asking whose voice is heard. Several participants looked beyond the issue of stereotype and categorization to recognizing voice and began to touch on White privilege, although no one used the term at this point. Several participants seemed to struggle with the issue of voice and

their role as White persons working with people from non-dominant cultures. This struggle appears in the context of discussing cultural competence and develops more fully later under the theme addressing “the other.” Dorcas and Nicolas, bring this out most prominently. Dorcas is the first to address the subject of voice and privilege when she expresses her frustration with this issue. She says:

We hear people say “who speaks for the Black church,” but we would not ask “who speaks for the White church.” We recognize White culture more readily. Whites have many voices. It’s about knowing the stereotypes and not just because you know a few people from a culture. It’s offensive to people you are with. I will always be the “middle class White chick;” I’m the dominant culture coming to help you; I’m here because my history slaughtered your ancestors. I don’t know, is there a way to not come across this way? I want to, I don’t know how.

Dorcas’ powerful statement about wanting to be culturally competent, but not knowing how foregrounds the importance of culturally responsive education. In this case, her raising the issue of learning how to be responsive to those who are different in a culturally appropriate way illustrates the need for participants to have more information and gain understanding of how power and privilege play out in their lives. Dorcas asked this question early in the semester indicating her deeper level of understanding; other participants began asking these questions much later, as discussed later in this chapter.

Nicolas recognizes the importance of hearing the voices of those from other cultures. His understanding of culture from his self-described “bi-cultural” background (even though his parents are Euro-American) often comes through and his perspective is often on a deeper level than other participants. He also has the perspective of being the only male, so the issue of voice

is prominent in his experiences, since he is often the only male in social work classes. This dichotomy of gender and voice carries significant weight for him. In the focus group discussion, he contributed a major turning point when he said:

Unfortunately, we don't have Black people in this class. When I was at [a different college] in Philadelphia, it was different. We heard perspectives from other students who were minorities. We didn't have to guess what they thought, they could tell us.

This statement caused the focus group discussion to move from participants predominantly looking at cultural competence as unrelated to their lives, to looking at how their own experiences come into play. At this point, the second theme became more apparent.

Focus on "the Other" with Limited Sense of Their Own Culture

At the outset of the study, the participants had little sense of their own culture, and tended to focus on "the other." This became obvious when Nicolas shifted the discussion to looking at self, which segued into the focus question "how will you know what you need to know to be culturally competent?" This prompted discussion related to awareness of cultural heritage. Few participants were able to discuss the culture they identify with in terms of ethnicity. They were, however, able to discuss their experiences with people they perceive as different. Much of the initial discussion focused on the environment where participants grew up, which for most participants, is still where they most closely identify. It was also evident that a few participants were beginning to connect their understanding of cultural heritage and the issue of stereotypes and bias. Nicole and Chloe most closely associate their biases and stereotypes with what they experienced growing up. Chloe relates:

My knowledge base is Pittsburgh. I'm aware of how African Americans interact can be completely different from what I saw. My biases come from where I grew up. I realize

it's different from other areas. I think a good way to learn is to spend time in an area and get a feel for the place, the people, and the culture.

Nicole continues to relate on a level more rudimentary than the others. She expresses concern that she is largely unaware of her ethnic heritage. As others relate their ancestry throughout the discussions, she becomes increasingly more conscious of this deficit in understanding her background. She stated (more than once):

I don't know who my ancestors are, I have no idea. I have nothing to draw upon. I don't know where my roots are. My family has not made this an issue. It's like not having, or losing, my identity. I grew up in a predominantly White area. When I hear the word criminal, I think White. Most people think Black. Because of where I grew up, and my experiences, this is what I immediately think of. I genuinely want to know about people who are from different cities and grew up in different ways than I did.

Interestingly, however, she shared an incident that clearly shows that ethnicity *was* an issue for her family, but she did not recognize the connection: "My grandma married someone from Columbia. Everyone in the family pushed him aside. It was terrible, the way they treated him, and just because he was different."

Problematizing difference. In addition, Nicole contextualizes her understanding of culture in terms of race and consistently expresses the belief that we "need to keep color out of it" when working with people of difference. As she relates a story about a work experience this past summer, her struggle is clear. She states:

At the daycare center, there was a mix of races. There was an African American four-year old with many behavioral issues. She was a problem child. I didn't know how to approach her. I didn't want to see her as a "color." I feel it wasn't her culture, but rather

lack of attention from her parents [that caused the behaviors]. I worked intensely with her to encourage her. I was able to work with her; race was not a part of it. I always had her background in mind. I kept thinking about how I interacted with her. I was so afraid I would be seen as a racist. But I really believe that color had nothing to do with how I worked with her.

Rae also exhibited a sense of frustration with the subject of cultural heritage. Although she (along with Nicolas) is more aware of her cultural and racial/ethnic heritage, she seemed to resist any suggestion that these factors play a part in working with others. Consistently throughout the semester she expressed her frustration that people “make a huge deal” of race and culture. Her awareness of the environment in which she grew up (“we were the only White kids on the block”) and her insistence that “difference is not an issue, people are just people,” at times seem antithesis to each other. Her awareness of “the other” appears to have been present in her family and during her growing up; however, she problematizes the issue when asked to look at the connection to her worldview. She related:

People from [this college] come from White suburban areas. I resent the way [this college] gears everything toward cultural awareness. [A student at another college] and I grew up together. She is Black, and I never felt awkward. Now I do. I resent that my thoughts have changed and I think differently. I would never think that way before [I came here]. I don’t want it to change my relationship with people. If you say you’re White, people assume you have no culture. Race is socially constructed. We are being trained to think of each other based on skin color.

Nicole responded to Rae after this statement in typical fashion given her frame of reference:

You [meaning Rae] don't see colors. Sometimes you have to look at races a certain way.

If you are working in an inner city, they don't know your background [that you were raised in a diverse setting]. They may shut down and not respond to you because you are White. It's all part of holistic learning, looking at the whole picture.

Marilyn's awareness of her cultural heritage was also closely related to her sense of "the other."

She knows her ethnic heritage is German and feels strongly that "owning our own culture" is part of knowing our identity. She adamantly stated:

Instead of knowing about cultures, I want to know the person. Instead of knowing about barriers, I want to know the people, not just about them. I get offended, why isn't it OK to say 'we're White'? We're losing our identity in this whole thing. We need to own our own culture first.

Naming White privilege. Lily's cultural awareness also became clear to her when she was in a situation where "the other" was presented. In this case, she was the ethnic minority in an unfamiliar culture. She gives the example:

I grew up in a White area. There were a few Hispanics and two Blacks. What I knew about them was that they were very poor, and worked on the mushroom farms. My boyfriend is Mexican. His Dad was born in Mexico but looks American. This summer I went to Mexico to meet his family. I was the minority. We stayed with wealthier people in Mexico. I was shocked by what people had [did not have]. I will never look at Mexican people the same way again.

Lydia was very quiet during most of the focus group discussion. She spoke up after Lily shared her story and explained how she was processing the discussion:

It's interesting to hear people's experiences. I want to keep interacting with "difference" that will teach me more than class learning. In class, we process these experiences. It's a safe place to get practical information about what is offensive, when to bring up difference, when to say "we're just people." Sometimes we have good intentions, but we need to learn practical things.

Lydia did not explain during these initial discussions her awareness of cultural heritage. She seemed to be contemplating where she was with the question. Rosemarie also was not able to articulate her awareness of cultural heritage at this point. She listened and seemed engaged in the discussion, but remained unresponsive.

Nicolas's understanding of cultural awareness on a deeper level served as a catalyst on several occasions. He could relate to Lily and Lydia, in this instance, and use his experiences as a minority in another culture to clarify and affirm what other participants said. He shared:

Yeah, when you experience different cultures, you are like a different person. We put ourselves in uncomfortable situations. It's been a process of "sticking my foot in my mouth" many times. I learned from that. It counts for something.

Nicolas also brought up White privilege at the end of the focus group discussion. He was the first to name what some participants alluded to earlier in the focus group. He again took on the role of moving the group forward to another level and challenging other participants to "say it like it is." He said:

These uncomfortable situations we put ourselves in, I identify with all of you. But we have White privilege, even though no one wants to talk about it. My role as being White in a different culture has been important and taught me a lot. Ninety percent of my friends are Peruvian. Aspects of being White definitely help you.

It was clear from the discussion that most participants had difficulty expressing their awareness of cultural heritage, but were more adept at discussing culture in relation to their experiences with difference. This became clearer when asked to share a cultural symbol with the group (presented in a later section of this chapter). At that point, their increased understanding to cultural heritage was apparent. Additionally, the discussion of religion and spirituality revealed much about the participants' ethnic/cultural heritage, although they did not realize the connection when in the context of a discussion about religion.

Initially Framing Spirituality as Religion

As described previously, a second focus group was held online, asynchronously, and addressed the topic of spirituality and spiritual awareness. Since the participants are students at a Christian college, they constantly discuss the topic of religion. I was interested in how the group would respond to the questions regarding spirituality and spirituality traditions, especially when linked to culture. The focus group discussion occurred in an asynchronous format, where participants responded to several questions (see Appendix D) in small groups. The small group format allowed participants to respond to each other in groups of four and five during the online discussion, which provided richer discussion and easier management of the interactions as they responded to the questions and to each other.

Unlike the discussion of cultural awareness, the participants were very articulate about their spiritual traditions. Although I intentionally used the term "spiritual," all participants responded in relation to religion, specifically Christianity. After a class discussion of definitions of spirituality and religion as a large group (following the focus group), any subsequent conversations shifted to include more language related to spirituality. The participants enthusiastically discussed their Christian religious traditions and it was obvious how comfortable

they felt sharing and relating their stories. I was not surprised at the difference between this discussion and the culture discussion given the assumptions going into this study.

The findings within this theme are best described by further delineation into three distinct areas: enthusiastically sharing religious traditions, discussing spirituality as within and beyond the family, and connecting spirituality and culture. I share the participants' responses in the following sections using the above-mentioned labels.

Enthusiastically sharing religious traditions. Participants responded to the question “Briefly describe the spiritual tradition you grew up in” passionately by writing responses asynchronously and reacting to each other through asking for clarification, commenting, affirming and probing. All participants discussed their spiritual traditions in terms of their religious denomination including where they attended church, how often, and whether they liked or disliked the experience. Dorcas, Marilyn, Nicole, Rosemarie, Lydia, and Nicolas described parental requirements to attend church regularly when they were young; a practice they seemed to take for granted and feel influenced their present practice of church attendance. Chloe and Nicolas describe their religions traditions as “conservative.” Nicolas felt his church was missions oriented with a “strong focus on using the Bible as the only source of knowledge and revelation from God about salvation,” and said he found Latin American churches to be “very lively, but not charismatic.” Concerning her religious traditions Chloe states:

I grew up going to a small, rural, all White, non-denominational church, the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Only men were allowed to be ordained and in high leadership positions. We did not have modern music during any of the services.

Participants who were raised Catholic were the most verbal about their religious traditions.

Dorcas, Nicole, and Rae were very specific in describing their Catholic traditions, citing Catholic practices that stood out to them as Nicole represented:

My early memories of the Catholic Church services included repeated prayers, communion, standing, sitting, kneeling, and I vividly remember saying prayers such as the Hail Mary, the Our Father, and the Rosary. The first four years of school, I was in a private Catholic school.

Dorcas described her memories of receiving the Sacraments and “going to Mass every Sunday, no matter what, even when we were out of town.” She also attended Catholic school during elementary and middle school. Rae was raised both Catholic and Jewish and describes her religious background as “very mixed.” She cites Catholic and Jewish practices as part of her religious upbringing:

We always celebrate Passover and the Feast of Booths, but my siblings and I also have Godparents and we were christened during an infant baptism where all of my Catholic relatives stood as witnesses.

Two participants described their religious traditions as Mennonite. Lydia and Lily were surprised to find out that they had Anabaptist roots in common and highlighted the stereotypes that both experienced growing up Mennonite in their communities. Lydia’s father is a Mennonite pastor, and she describes her experiences with stereotypes:

When I tell people I am Mennonite they often ask if I drive a horse and buggy and wonder what it is like to live without electricity. That makes me laugh. There are some Mennonites who are very conservative, but I am not one of them. Being Mennonite for me isn’t obvious from the outside, but there are differences that make subtle appearances

in my lifestyle today. I am a pacifist, very frugal, interested in missions, and family oriented. I also can't dance because we weren't allowed to growing up.

Lily echoed Lydia's story and the experiences of stereotyping. She also went on to discuss why she identifies with the Mennonite religious tradition:

I describe my background as being Mennonite because I attended the Mennonite church when I was really beginning to understand my faith. My faith grew while at that church. I think I identify with the Mennonite church the most because I attended there longest and during a time in my life when I was really defining my faith.

In addition to their clear descriptions of religious denomination and traditions, the participants often referred to their family's role in their spiritual experiences.

Discussing spirituality as within and beyond the family. Participants also responded to the questions "what personal spiritual experiences (and/or practices) stood out to you during your years at home? What made these experiences special?" Invariably, in response to these questions, the participants talked about their family. Some referred to the level of religious commitment modeled by their parents; others described how the expectations of the family influenced their level of religious participation, and to what degree religious practices were apparent in their home. Dorcas, Marilyn, Lily, Nicole, Rosemarie, Lydia, and Rae all describe events that involved their family, specifically their parents, in their spiritual traditions and influenced how they view spirituality today. Rosemarie shared:

I think the way my family raised me in our faith gave me the freedom and opportunity to explore my faith and religion on my own. No one said "this is what is right so don't question it," instead my family nurtured questions and in doing so helped me grow and make my own decisions.

Marilyn felt that going to church was not a choice, but regular attendance at worship and activities was expected. She explained how she makes meaning of her family's role in her spirituality:

I am very thankful that my parents did not let me sleep in or skip activities. I gained spiritual growth, close, long-lasting Christian friendships, Christian mentors, and much more by attending church regularly. My faith was integrated into my family's life, definitely. It was a neat thing. Sometimes my dad and mom would gather my brother and me to have a family devotional. We have always been very open with each other. This means that my mom and dad would always share prayer concerns with us, and we would pray. I treasure that open relationship today.

Rae's family, she feels, tried to "fuse aspects of [Catholic and Jewish] backgrounds and to integrate a Protestant background" by raising her and her siblings in a variety of different churches. She points out that "in high school I was highly involved with the music ministries of four different denominations ranging from non-denominational to four square gospel." She sees this as a disadvantage in her life, and states "to this day I have pathetically little knowledge of denominations and theology."

Several participants expanded the discussion of the changing role of spirituality in relation to (and sometimes in opposition to) the religious beliefs and practices of their family. This appeared throughout the focus group discussions, and sometimes a sense of conflict came through as the participants shared their stories of spiritual development, especially since coming to college. This is not unusual, as Fowler (1981) points out in his stages of faith development. In addition to Lydia's experience, Dorcas and Nicole discuss leaving the Catholic tradition of their early life to move toward a religious practice they found more applicable to their beliefs. Dorcas

admits she “did not go about leaving in the most Christ-like, loving way, but I certainly stuck with what I believed in.” She identifies her decision to leave as sparked by questioning what she was taught growing up such as “what’s up with revering Mary so much? Does the Bible say the Eucharist becomes the body and blood of Christ?” She felt the Catholic Church “was not giving me adequate answers,” and decided to go to a church where she felt she could “have a personal relationship with God.” Nicole, likewise, remembers leaving the Catholic Church to go to a non-denominational church, where she still attends today. In her case, she feels that “every experience, good and bad, has shaped what I have come to believe now and even how I continue to explore the questions about what I do believe in regard to my faith.”

Lydia and Nicolas observe that “growing up as a Pastor’s kid” played a strong role in the family and influenced their religious path as children. Nicolas said he was “consistently being spiritually nurtured,” and Lydia felt that it “made church a normal part of my life.” However, Lydia feels she is now at a point in her life where she is moving away from the “faith of my church and community in search of my own definitions and conceptions of what I believe.” Rae makes meaning of this and responded to Lydia with these thoughts:

I find it really interesting that you’re trying to establish your own spiritual “identity” instead of latching on to your family’s. I think it is really easy for people who have grown up in a Christian home with a strong religious background to accept the theology and religious beliefs of the family because it is so much easier than branching out and trying to figure things out for themselves.

Lily expresses experiences similar to the other participants when she talks about the moves her parents made as she was growing up and how she eventually moved away from the church her parents attended:

When I was little, my family attended a Lutheran church but we left that church when I was still young. I remember very little about that church. The next church we attended I also remember very little about. My family left that church and started attending Mennonite church when I was in 5th grade. It was a small church; and I became very involved in the youth group. This was when I formed many of my own personal beliefs. When I was in high school, I started attending an Evangelical Free church and I really enjoyed going there.

During the focus group conducted through an online asynchronous discussion, participants addressed questions about spirituality in terms of their Christian religiosity. Following the focus group on spirituality, a class discussion occurred where definitions of spirituality and religion helped participants began to look at and delineate differences between their religious beliefs and experiences, and the term spirituality in a more global sense. During this discussion most participants easily shifted from viewing spirituality as Christianity to seeing experiences as being spiritual when they did not involve church per se. Nicolas responded to the question “What do you feel are spiritual experiences?” by saying “I think it’s a sense of meaning. Most people wouldn’t say there was nothing spiritual in their life.” Rae pointed out that to her, spirituality is “what gets people out of bed, what finds them meaning.” She also pointed out that she feels her spiritual experiences “have changed from church experiences to life experiences.” Following this face-to-face discussion, subsequent online asynchronous discussions began to show more attention to spirituality in relation to culture. One participant brought up the phrase “family culture” in describing religion and spirituality. The next section depicts how some participants were able to view their spiritual/religious experiences as related to their culture.

Connecting spirituality and culture. Lily was one of the first to make the connection between spirituality and culture when she described her Mennonite background as her culture more than her religion:

Being Mennonite is part of my culture. My grandparents are Mennonite, my great grandparents were Mennonite, and my father's family has been Mennonite/Anabaptist since before the Reformation, which is why they came to the United States. It's almost by default that I would be Mennonite too.

Lydia was able to make a strong connection to Christianity as a culture that influences her in many ways. She pointed to "norms, taboos, acceptable practices, common forms of punishment and language" as a culture she was most influenced by as a child. However, she also made the realization that:

The older I get and the farther I get away from my home experience, the more I wonder about how limiting and sheltering that Christian culture can be in some ways. As with any culture, it is easy to become ethnocentric, it is easy to blindly follow traditions, and it is far too easy to forget what is really important. With a Christian family culture, many other aspects of the world can be shut out, like people who live very different lifestyles, things people struggle with, and even non-traditional Christianity. I in no way oppose a Christian upbringing, just for me, in some ways, it has become a barrier rather than an asset.

Lydia's revelation was a significant point in the discussion. She clearly was moving beyond the others in her understanding of the influence of cultural heritage on her worldview. The only other participant who was moving in this direction so clearly was Rae. She rarely spoke without some mention of the cultural aspects of her family in relation to spiritual experiences. As she continued

to question the issue of race and the relevance of cultural competence, she contextualized spirituality and religion in her Jewish/Catholic culture. It seemed she was verbalizing the concept without realizing that she was making the connection. In later sessions, it became more apparent how she was making meaning of her religious traditions in relation to her culture. At one point, she shared:

Most of my family members will say they're Jewish. But they don't go to Temple or Shoal on a regular basis. But they will tell you it is not a culture it is a religion. You can't separate the culture from the religion. All cultural aspects are directly related to religion.

These findings from the focus groups early in the action research study gave information about where the participants were in terms of their cultural and spiritual awareness and understanding of cultural competence. Reflection on this data generated during the early planning stage provided the basis for introducing strategies to help students look beyond their Christian roots to the meaning of spirituality for those who are not Christian or who express spirituality in ways other than formal worship. In addition, the data from the focus groups pointed to the need for participants to have more information about culture at the intersection of race, power, and privilege.

The second stage of the action research process is discussed next. Although the action research process appears as a linear, four stage progression, in reality the stages occur continuously throughout the semester. For example, the planning stage is ongoing even though much of the information is gathered during the first focus group discussions. As new information is shared and new knowledge constructed, additional planning occurs. Similarly, acting, reflecting, and observing continue through the entire research process. The next section describes

the implementation of the plan based on the data collected in the planning stage, as well as while the research process unfolds.

Stage Two: Acting

This stage of the action research cycle involves developing and implementing the plan based on the analysis of the data collected from the focus groups and questionnaires. The plan evolves from the information of the participants, and the implementation of the plan involves introducing strategies to increase awareness of spiritual and cultural competence. I identified a framework of possible activities in Chapter Three from the many pedagogical strategies to increase culturally responsive education identified in the literature. Most of those strategies were used in this study, as well as additional resources uncovered as reflection and analysis of themes in the data suggested specific strategies were necessary.

The major findings of the study are presented in this section as the strategies are introduced and participants reflect on their meaning making as it unfolds over the course of the semester. For clarity, in this section I will present the findings from the critical action research process as they unfolded in the context of the strategies implemented over the course of the 15-week semester. For ease of description and discussion, the class sessions are grouped in segments rather than presenting each session individually, since over the course of the 15-week semester, several sessions were devoted to curriculum content only (e.g. group leadership skills simulations, group theory discussion, see Appendix E for course syllabus).

Foregrounded in this section is the new knowledge participants constructed in reference to understanding positionality in their learning about the “other,” and about recognizing racist attitudes, White privilege, and the concept of who has a voice based on institutionalized social structures. In addition, participants demonstrated the presence of shifting identity (Hayes &

Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 2003) as the intersection of gender, class, and race began to be unearthed as participants discussed the material. In addition, participants clearly gained an understanding of spirituality as beyond Christianity and began viewing spirituality (including their Christian beliefs) in the context of culture. The critical component of the action research design was preserved continually through the acting stage through attention to power differentials, emphasis on lived experiences, commitment to social change, and attention to positionality (teacher/student, student/client). These components will be discussed further in this section as I describe the research process as it unfolded.

Weeks 1-3: Constructing the Learning Environment

The dual role of beginning a course and beginning the action research process required attention to the curricular content related to social work practice with groups, as well as attention to data collection for the study. It was important to establish a balance so neither area was deficient. I decided to separately focus the sessions, sometimes concentrating on curriculum content related to group theory and skills, and other times concentrating on group dynamics through introducing activities related to culture and spirituality and facilitating group discussions. This approach seemed to suffice, and by the third week one participant commented “I like when we get into *our* group,” referring to the sessions when the focus group or semi-structured discussions occurred. In fact, the feedback gathered later from the Critical Incident Questionnaires (CIQ), displayed in Appendix C, predominantly reflected high levels of engagement during sessions where we discussed culture and spirituality in a group format.

Using student experiences as a jumping off point. In the initial stages of the research process, participants’ experiences became a jumping off point. The focus group during the second and third weeks of class introduced participants to the topic of culture in terms of their

cultural heritage and moving toward being culturally competent social work practitioners. In addition, this format paralleled the beginning stages of group development and participants experienced issues of establishing trust, setting goals, defining the purpose of the group, and practicing skills to promote member-to-member communication. As the teacher, researcher, and group facilitator, I modeled social work skills and made visible group dynamics while conducting the focus group. During this preliminary time of the semester, students are often distracted with learning the expectations of the course, adjusting to a new semester, and in this case, grasping the research process. Consequently, these early weeks focused on gathering concrete information (course information, focus group information, administering the MAKSS questionnaire), and thus less affective activities occurred.

The students enthusiastically contributed to the focus group discussions, which focused largely on their experiences. They were willing to answer questions thoughtfully and completely. The most difficult task for me as the researcher was keeping them focused on the questions; they tended to be tangential in their discussions of culture and ethnocentric in their discussion. This is likely due to their familiarity with each other from past classes, and they felt comfortable in sharing their beliefs and aspects of their lives. In addition, the pedagogy employed in keeping with critical action research was uncharacteristic of social work classes these students experienced previously. Sheared (1999) discusses the concept of constructing the learning environment so learners feel validated in their beliefs, values, and experiences. Participants were not required to take notes or listen to a lecture. The small group format and atmosphere of discussion was refreshingly different and promoted positive energy and was a way to deconstruct traditional pedagogical strategies that marginalize learners (Gay, 2000). This also affirmed the critical action research principle of sharing power and emphasizing lived experience, as students

shared their own experiences and beliefs about cultural competence and culture heritage in a manner conducive to encouraging empowerment and making meaning of their experiences.

Early in the research process, participants' experiences with race, ethnicity, and their level of cultural awareness clearly created the frame of reference from which they constructed knowledge. As Gay (2000) and Guy (1999a) discuss, this is most important for learners who risk loss of identity based on the dominant culture's view. In this study, the participants were all White, therefore part of the dominant culture. However, socioeconomic status and gender differences (although slight) played a role in the level of marginalization taking place in the class, and participants evidenced avoidance to discussing the "taboos" embedded in a discussion of race and ethnicity (Hart, 1992, p. 9). In this case, the taboos were White privilege and socioeconomic status. Interestingly, an article presented to the participants to read and discuss early in the semester clearly illustrated a phenomenon played out in the group during the study. Marbley (2004) in her piece *His Eye is on the Sparrow* states "the group becomes a microcosm whereby the group members' values, beliefs, prejudices and racial biases...may be played out in the group setting" (p. 248). The participant group embodied these words as was evident through the discussions about culture especially as it turned to racism, privilege, and difference. The data displayed their values, beliefs, prejudices, and biases, which upon critical reflection contributed to the learning and knowledge construction evident by the end of the study.

Focusing on culture and race more than gender. Whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the researcher and all participants, more of the course focused on dynamics of culture and race/ethnicity than it did on gender, though gender dynamics were evident and limited discussion occurred throughout the course. I observed the dynamics related to gender that played out in this group of eight women and one man as largely institutionalized in social work

education. My experience at this small Christian college, at a larger public university where I previously taught, and in my undergraduate and graduate social work programs revealed the same gender ratios. Male students are in the minority in social work education (and, therefore, social work practice, although, interestingly, there is a higher percentage of males teaching social work education than in social work practice, Vodde, 2000). In this study, the man in the group was a fourth year student, so he was accustomed to representing the male voice in social work classes. Early in the semester, Nicolas addressed the issue of gender when he talked about his experiences being the only male in most social work classes. His comments were contextualized by a discussion of voice and the inherent expectation that one person speaks for the whole group. He expressed his experience as not necessarily negative, but rather wishing he did not have the responsibility of speaking as the lone male voice. The women in the group remained dominant in most (if not all) conversations, but clearly deferred to Nicolas when he stated his view. An example of this is Dorcas' response to Nicolas' comments about his experience being the male voice. She responded to him by saying, "I feel bad," indicating (at least in my perception) a socialized nurturing response common to women regarding men. A similar response from other women occurred when Nicolas asked the group to make an exception for him so he could leave early to go home to Peru for Christmas break. When he asked if they minded if he took his final exam (a class presentation) during the last day of class rather than the scheduled final exam time, and indicated that he wanted to be home to "see my sister's Christmas pageant" the class collectively responded by indicating that they felt sorry for him and would grant his request.

A caveat to the gender issue is that Nicolas had the experience of growing up in an ethnically different culture, thereby bringing lived experiences that afforded him an understanding of culture on a deeper level. Although in a female dominated field such as social

work, a tendency is to overvalue a male voice, in this case, the male had some valid authority based on his lived experience. This brings to light the issue of the positionality of the male student in the class in regard to gender and privilege. In this case, the male could be considered the privileged “other”, an interesting dichotomy given the participants’ awareness of “other”, but not in terms of their own peer group. There was little discussion or critique about issues of gender in our group, except in a few instances (discussed in this chapter as they appear in the data). Even during discussions of White privilege, race was the focus rather than gender in terms of power differential of White males. Interestingly, I did not make this phenomenon visible during the semester. Perhaps this was due to my intense focus on the participants’ knowledge construction of culture at the intersection of race, power, and privilege, along with the issues of spirituality. However, given the gender make-up of social work classes, the goal of providing culturally responsive education would warrant attention to gender of the students in the class (this is discussed in detail in Chapter Five).

Overall, the first three weeks of the research process launched the study in a positive light with students participating fully in the focus groups, questionnaires, and discussions. As I analyzed the data collected during the first three weeks, I chose to introduce the Marbley (2004) article during week three to help students begin to look at what the literature says regarding issues of race and ethnicity in the context of cultural competence in group practice. The article presented the perspective of a woman of color facilitating a group of predominantly White members. She presented, through use of several scenarios, how she experienced issues of race, ethnicity, values and prejudices between and among members in a group setting. The article was a good starting point for the research participants. It was basic enough that the participants could relate to it given their limited awareness of group dynamics and group work skills and their own

level of cultural awareness. It provided a further frame of reference for discussion of cultural competence and group practice.

Interestingly, in light of the discussion of gender, it is worthy to note the article does not address the issue of gender, only race and ethnicity and the intersection of power and oppression, even though the author (a woman of color) states she has experienced “prejudice and bias” because of her “gender and race” (Marbley, 2004, p. 249). She goes on to describe several group scenarios in which one group is all women, and another group she co-facilitates with a man. However, nowhere in the article does she address issues of gender (although admittedly, the article’s primary focus is about race issues). Another parallel between the article and the group in this study is the description of one of the group scenarios where the group watched the video *The Color of Fear* (Wah & Hunter, 1994). The particular group she described was of mixed race and gender and her co-facilitator was male. However, she only foregrounds the significant race dynamics that occurred with no mention of gender. The following discussion of the introduction of the video and subsequent reactions of the participants includes mention of gender as it appeared in the data during the discussions.

Week 4-7: Confronting Racism and Power Relations

The next four weeks of the research study were transformative in the life of the participants as well as the dynamics of the group. The findings during this time reflect learning based on analysis of data collected from participant and researcher reflection of several activities foregrounding this period of the semester. The middle stage of group practice is typically characterized by carrying out the tasks of the group and working on individual and group goals (Corey & Corey, 2002). In addition, this stage in group practice is a time when group members feel comfortable, have established basic trust, and will engage in confrontation and conflict with

the leader and each other (Corey & Corey, 2002). Students are taught skills for dealing with resistance and difficult client situations in group practice. Again, this period in the research process corresponded with the second stage of group development.

Introducing power relations. Drawing from May (1999) and his discourse on critical multiculturalism, I saw the need to address the concept of homogeneity (of the participants) and foreground social structures in the context of race and ethnicity to critically engage the participants with information on other cultures and backgrounds. This is not to assume essentialism (belief that cultural values and practices are universal), but to promote awareness of power relations and social structures that contribute to racism and biases (May, 1999). By bringing content about marginalized groups to the center (Banks, 1994), I attempted to situate the concept of difference in a perspective of giving voice and listening to the voices of marginalized groups. This constructionist approach allowed participants affectively and cognitively to examine their “truths” regarding oppression, racism, and White privilege. The video *Color of Fear* (Wah & Hunter, 1994) foregrounded eight men of different races and ethnicities and their experience living together for three days engaged in spontaneous dialogue around issues of racism and perspectives of power in society. Participants viewed the video over two sessions during the fourth week of class, and discussed it face-to-face during the next session immediately following the viewing. Additional discussion using an online asynchronous format provided participants another venue to express their feelings, concerns, and interpretations of the powerful experience. I observed the participants body language as they watched the video. It was interesting to see the difference in their reactions. Rae appeared the most intent as she watched, focusing on the screen with a very intense look. I described Marilyn in my notes as looking mesmerized and amazed as the men spoke, especially when the interaction between the men in

the video became conflictual. Dorcas kept busy taking notes during many of the scenes. Chloe seemed to look away from the screen often, and appeared to be looking down at the table. Nicolas laid his head on the table, indicating a relaxed attitude. Others watched with an engaged look, no one seemed bored by the action.

Words used by the participants to describe the video and their reactions ranged from “angry,” “frustrated,” “uncomfortable,” “helpless” and “embarrassed” to “enlightened,” “grateful,” “powerful,” and “challenging.” It was definitely a transitional experience for most participants in that it brought out aspects of societal power differential, racism, and positionality while deconstructing cultural homogeneity and essentialist attitudes through hearing the voices of the African American, Asian, Latino, and Caucasian men in the group. Reflection through class and online discussions yielded opposition between some participants as they confronted prejudices and biases related to racism and White privilege. These discussions marked a pivotal point in the participants’ knowledge construction that clearly foregrounded their shifting identity as they listened and responded to the voices and lived experiences of the marginalized groups. The findings presented within the following sub themes describe participants’ reflection in the context of racism, gender, and White privilege.

Expressing more emotions online than face-to-face. The discussion of the video initially focused on participants’ view of the group of men in relation to the group dynamics occurring during the film. For example, the initial few comments were “they listened to each other [using] active listening,” and “they seemed to move through the stages [of group development] quickly.” I found this very significant and felt it was a way of avoiding the emotions that video evoked. I was feeling frustrated that the conversation was on this level, rather than dealing with the issue of racism and hearing the voices of the men. The discussion gradually shifted to discussing

David (a white man in the group who resists engaging the notion of White privilege), in the context of deconstructing his role in the group. The talk stayed focused on the group as the other, and through much of the face-to-face discussion, participants de-personalized what they saw. Marilyn however, shifted the discussion when she said she felt “helpless” as she watched the video in the context of feeling that as a White person, she cannot change society. Some participants then revealed feeling “guilty” and “embarrassed” for their Whiteness and the role they feel they (or their ancestors) played in perpetuating a racist society.

When the discussion moved to the online format, participants expressed many more emotions. Van Soest, Cannon, and Grant (2000) suggest that the strategy of using asynchronous communication assists participants to feel supported and perhaps freer to discuss intense emotions especially when confronted with ideas that may be “overwhelming and create debilitating anxiety” (p. 465). At times, some participants confronted each other, specifically in relation to comments about racism, guilt, and the concept of White privilege. Rae responded to Marilyn after the response (related above) and clearly stated her position:

I think that is one of the problems with the video, that White people end up feeling like we need to apologize for the attitudes and actions of other people who have very little in common with us other than that they have the same skin tone. I am unwilling to take that responsibility, and I don't think it's fair that someone would ask or expect me to do that.

The tenor of this response, and the fact that Rae felt comfortable sharing it, is consistent with the transition stage experienced by most groups. The online discussion continued on a much more emotional level as participants shared their meaning making as they reflected on the video.

Reacting to issues of gender at the intersection of race. Some participants brought out the issue of gender during the face-to-face discussion of the video. It is important to keep in mind the

less emotional, more cognitive level of the face-to-face discussion, which leads me to surmise that when Chloe addressed the issue of gender (below), it was motivated by her level of intellectual processing. However, she moved toward dealing with the affective when she brought up the issue of gender and foregrounded gender stereotypes:

I think it would be interesting; most of us here are females responding to a group of males. Would males respond differently to the video? I feel afraid of males, Black or White. If I was put into that situation with Victor [Black man in the video who became emotional and expressed himself with a raised voice], I would be scared, he scared me. Not because of his color, but because I equate aggression with all males. Maybe that's something to consider, our female perspective.

At this point, the discussion focused on the issue of fear. However, Dorcas alluded to the intersection of race and gender when she responded to Chloe by saying "I really resonated with your fear. I thought it was me. It's bizarre hearing men talk about fear. It was weird recognizing that race has the same powerful impact as gender."

Nicolas did not respond during this interchange, although as stated before, the women tended to dominate the conversation, so it is not clear whether Nicolas may have had a response he did not verbalize. At the end of the conversation, he referred to the dynamics regarding the verbal interaction of the minority men in the video dominating the White men by saying "I valued what he [the filmmaker] did. He took what usually happens and turned it around." Nicolas' comments occurred at the end of the session. There was no further mention of gender when the discussion moved to the online format. Clearly, this was a point where I could have explored the issue of gender further. The issue of the unconsciousness of gender as it played out in this study will be discussed more in Chapter Five.

Questioning racist attitudes. Several participants communicated denial of their own racist attitudes, but questioned the validity of their perception. Nicole expressed her reaction and perceptions of her racism at the intersection with gender:

The video was very powerful to me. I remember feeling very drained after both class periods that we took to watch it. The video was a very big eye opener to the intensity and depth that racism runs. As a White American woman who did not grow up in a racially diverse area, I have not had to face such issues at the level discussed in this video.

Personally it caused me to re-examine my thoughts and views on the issues of racism. In my mind I may not believe that I am a racist, but perhaps when I would convey my ideas and feelings to members of a different ethnicity, they may see me in a different light.

Lily shared that the video “made racism come alive” and prompted her to make connections to how racism was evident in her family:

I know that racism exists; in fact I see it in my grandfather’s comments and even jokes from my dad. Thoughts even pop into my own mind and I have to wonder where they came from. I would not consider myself a racist, but I think our culture influences us so much to adopt some of these racist beliefs.

Similarly, Rosemarie reflected on her own level of racism:

I really feel like I’m not a racist person at all, but when it comes down to it could others see me as racist? Are what I think to be completely innocent and equal thoughts toward people and races really demeaning or prejudiced in some way? How do I find the answers to these questions except to look at myself critically and objectively and ask other people that are minorities about themselves and get to know them.

Nicolas articulated a deeper level of awareness and meaning making of racism. He foregrounds his lived experience growing up in another culture as he offers a frame for the experience to the other participants:

There are different points in my life when I would have taken this [video] in different ways, but right now I am able to analyze it constructively. When we hear voices of frustration from minority members of the group for the first time, it can be a frustrating experience. Still, seeing perspectives that we are not used to seeing can be one of the best ways to learn, especially about race.

In addition, he shared his perspective of racism as being on a structural level, indicating his movement beyond the personal to looking at social systems:

I have also found myself at different points saying “well, I’m no racist,” but I’ve learned that it isn’t that easy. I used to think that racism was only intentional acts, but I think now my perspective is not only that we commit unintentional acts of racism, but also that [social] structures themselves are racist. Unfortunately, unless we can attempt to raise our conscious [*sic*] about this, we can easily be swept into these structures. I’m working on it, I hope.

Reflection on racism and the recognition of racist thoughts, actions, as well as presence of racist displays in families led to meaning making about White privilege. As participants began to become aware of lived experiences of others, both within their own group and through the video and readings, they constructed knowledge that addressed and took into account White privilege and the larger forces of oppression in society.

Acknowledging and resisting White privilege. Little discussion of the concept of White privilege occurred before this point in the research process, other than its mention by Nicolas in the initial focus group. It was difficult to determine whether this was an avoidance of the topic (possibly considered “taboo,” as discussed previously), or if participants lacked knowledge of the construct. After reflecting on the video, the participants dealt with the issue much more directly and participants expressed their beliefs about the existence of White privilege, though some were also somewhat resistant to it. Dorcas, Lily, Rosemarie, Nicole, Lydia, Marilyn, and Nicolas were the most verbal about their beliefs about White privilege. Several participants contextualized White privilege on the level of personal awareness and new learning, while others moved beyond a basic understanding to bring in the intersection of class, gender, and religion. This demonstrates the multiple levels of understanding and stages of racial identity development of the participants. For Rosemarie and Nicole, owning White privilege was a new experience. Nicole described:

I think that it is very easy for most of us at [this college], with a very small racially diverse population to be ignorant to White privilege. I know that after I watched the video I became more aware of just how ignorant I was to White privilege. Now every time I see a member of a different ethnicity than myself, I wonder if they view me negatively because I have the luxury not only of White privilege, but of being ignorant of it if I choose to do so.

Rosemarie identified her level of awareness of White privilege and verbalized a commonality other’s indicated they shared (blissful ignorance) when she stated:

I see more clearly how minorities can feel towards Whites and White privilege. I understand [now] that White privilege is a very real thing. David’s [a White person in the

video] blissful ignorance of the other men's feelings helped me realize that a lot of us are blissfully ignorant and we tend to gloss over the racism issues in an attempt to make everything equal and okay for everyone.

Lydia internalized her White privilege and expressed her frustration with conceptualizing this new learning:

It's also frustrating that I have the privilege to watch a movie like that and leave thinking, "hmmm, I learned something new" and go on with my day pushing it all to the back of my mind. That is White privilege. I don't have to live the realities the men were talking about and it takes a group of people baring their souls and sharing deep stuff for me to notice many racial tensions. It makes me wonder what I'm not aware of in the experiences of some friends and acquaintances from minority groups around me.

Nicole, Rosemarie, and Lydia reflected on their White privilege and expressed new meaning making as they realized it affected their lives. Other participants openly resisted the idea of Whites having privilege.

Marilyn was somewhat more tentative in accepting White privilege as valid in her belief system. She expressed resistance to believing White's are privileged, and pushed others to consider privilege and the intersection of race, class, and gender. Also worthy to note is that she put the phrase White privilege in quotes whenever she referred to it in writing, which I interpret as an indication of her disengagement from the concept. She responded to Lydia by saying:

When [Lydia] brought up "White privilege," I cringed. I cannot verbalize exactly how I feel about that phrase. I have mixed emotions about it. But what I can verbalize is that I think it's not so much important to focus of [*sic*] "White privilege" as it is to focus on what each individual carries with them that affects how they function in the larger whole.

(I am not by any means dismissing “White privilege.” I am just trying to look at other aspects as well).

In the same vein, Rae skeptically discussed White privilege and the intersection of culture and class:

I guess I don’t see Whites as having class privilege because it doesn’t explain why there are Whites in poverty. If we as Caucasians experience privilege based on the color of our skin, why are there poor white people living in rural areas who are at a lower standard of living than poor African Americans in urban areas? The color of my skin has been such a big part of my life. I think in my own life, I was judged a lot more for being a Christian than for being White. Where I was growing up if you considered yourself privileged or if there was privilege you had no friends. It doesn’t make sense in the context of [*sic*] which we live.

Exploring the intersections of systems of privilege. Marilyn and Rae’s responses turned the discussion to reveal learning about race and White privilege at the intersection of other systems of privilege, including religion, class and gender. Lily stated:

I agree, race isn’t the only influence. But I do think that in our culture, Whites have a privilege. Sure, the structure may look more like males (White and then minorities) and then women (White and then minorities) but usually the White culture is on top of these other minorities. The same thing with religion, Christian White males are on top. In fact the rich, Christian, White males are on top of everyone. Our culture ranks everyone in every way, not just race.

Lily’s comment showed her understanding of gender as connected to White privilege, but this was the only time gender was discussed in context with White privilege. Participants saw race as

the primary aspect of White privilege, although Lily clearly has some idea that gender privilege exists within White privilege. Lydia's learning situates in the context of intersectionality as she foregrounds the idea of multiple privileges:

...socioeconomics, education, gender, and religion can play a huge part in securing or missing opportunities...But I will say that I bring up White privilege because to me it is the one kind of privilege that makes the least amount of sense...Other privileges come from something more tangible- money, years of education, religion differences, and gender role differences...That certainly doesn't make them right, but at least we can acknowledge the roots. Pure White privilege (with all other things equal) is a lot harder to trace, but it does exist...I do think it is a powerful force, made even more potent by our denial and unawareness of it.

Marilyn also deals with the idea of multiple privileges, although her description is more focused on the theme of rejecting White privilege in favor of looking at privilege with a broader lens. She continued to hold on to the concept that "people are people" and the need to look beyond race:

Whites aren't the only privileged ones and just because you are White doesn't mean you have an enormous head-start in life...What about "rich privilege?" How about "politician privilege" in basically every country, or "gender privilege?" I guess basically what I mean to bring up is that race is not the only thing that defines each individual (although it may have a large impact)...our worldviews are not just made up from our race, or even our religion, but a whole lot of different things combined...when we are working with clients, we may be dealing with all sorts of people, and we can't just view them by race.

Participants clearly demonstrated new knowledge construction about White privilege. I was pleasantly surprised that they were able to address the intersections of race, class, and to a

limited extent, gender, given the relative newness of this information. The focus of culturally responsive education and the poststructural feminisms contextualizing this study visibly impacted their learning as they showed movement toward greater awareness of the role of culture and social structures in their lives and practice.

Moving from guilt to concern with social action. Participants' evidenced their varying stages of consciousness about race by demonstrating levels of awareness of racism and White privilege as well as expression of guilt as they attempted to reconcile their Whiteness in light of hearing the voices of those different from them. We expect participants to express feelings of guilt at this point in their learning. Sue (2003) talks about this phenomenon in association with learning about White privilege, especially as White people become aware of White privilege. In addition, it is not uncommon to express feelings of shame associated with being part of a race that perpetuated oppression of others historically and currently (Sue, 2003). Only a few participants discussed this aspect and two offered resistance to the concept. Lily reflected on the issue of shame and guilt when she related back to a previous story she shared about racism in her family:

I am not sure whether there is shame in being White. I think most of the shame results from the beliefs and prejudices held by many White people. I [feel] shame because of the people that perpetuate these beliefs. I thought about the comments that I have heard my grandfather make and the reaction I know I would receive from him if I brought a minority home for Christmas dinner. The shame results from those that hold those beliefs.

Rae expressed resistance to the suggestion that guilt could be associated with White privilege. She consistently articulated that she feels "race is a non-issue," and draws on her lived

experiences growing up “with a lot of minorities” how that impacted her in regard to guilt about being White. She continued to problematize the issue of White privilege and strongly supported an essentialist (May, 1999) view that people have “diverse worldviews” and the importance of “understand[ing] and respect[ing] an individual’s culture and experience” as the basis of cultural competence. Her resistance to looking at oppression, power, privilege, and race did not change very much by the end of the semester. She communicates this when she stated:

I am frustrated that White people are ashamed of being White. [Growing up] I wasn’t exposed to this type of attitude. I was introduced to it on this campus... White people feeling guilty for being White? That’s disgusting. As social workers, we have to know our values and know different perspectives. It’s better to treat individuals with dignity and respect while also keeping in mind that there are people we will probably be working with who operate within the worldviews we saw in the [video].

As described previously, Marilyn also expressed resistance to the concept of White privilege, so it is not surprising she reacted to guilt related to White privilege:

I think it would be wrong for me to constantly feel a guilt or pressure because of my skin color, just like I feel it’s wrong that others do the same. And someone may argue that “it must be nice for you White people to have that option of just ignoring the situation/not doing anything about it. Other races/cultures don’t have that freedom.” That may be so, but there’s nothing I can personally do about it, other than what I am already doing: being open to individuals, treating every person with dignity, respect, and value.

The expression of guilt by some participants and not others possibly demonstrates the levels to which they have internalized the aspect of White privilege. Situated in the context of racial/cultural identity development, it is a result of where they are in their development that they

feel one way or the other. The fact that participants are more aware following their reflection and being exposed to the video and readings this semester speaks to their shifting identity. Whether they deny or accept White privilege, the space created for them to reflect and make meaning shows the impact of culturally responsive education.

New learning during this period included questioning how racism can be addressed given the social structures of power and oppression. Constructing knowledge in the area of social consciousness was a major thrust of this critical action research study. Participant learning in this area showed growth and movement toward becoming culturally competent social work practitioners aware of the importance of social change. Although participants did not have the answer to how to begin to create social change, they acknowledged it as an important issue to deal with and began to take responsibility for taking a role to influence social structures perpetuating racism and oppression. Lydia explains her reaction to new learning about racism and her inclination to “go out and change the systems” when she stated:

Racial divisions are real, and I hardly know how to respond to them. Hearing of racial pain makes me want to go out and change the systems, advocate, educate, and listen to suppressed voices, while at the same time I feel immobilized by the magnitude of the problem and worry that I am still too ignorant to contribute to positive change. I still have a lot to learn.

Lily also conveyed a new awareness of social consciousness as well as feelings of being overwhelmed by the idea of creating change in the larger society:

[I want] to change the world but have no idea where to even start. It seems that changing your own views is not enough. And it is not! But how do we change the views of others also, especially when so many are not willing to listen and see the racial pain. It makes

me wonder if these racist attitudes can ever be erased. They are so deeply engrained in our culture that it seems impossible to erase. We have so many prejudices even within the White culture because of social class, religion, and more. To remove these prejudices is a huge task.

Clearly, Lily's notion of "erasing" attitudes and prejudices displays a basic level of awareness of structural inequities, power, and oppression. However, her increased social consciousness reveals critical thinking and reflection.

The strategy of critical reflection on the video using an online format with participants in small groups proved very effective. The randomly assigned groups facilitated easy response to each other multiple times and produced rich conversation.

Researcher reflections: sharing power with students. Another strategy implemented during weeks four and six involved using a Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) (see Appendix C) in an attempt to share power with the students, so they would feel that they had some control over their own learning, and voice in the research process. Participants were asked to complete the CIQ weekly to have continuous input in the research process. I used the valuable feedback from the CIQ for continuous assessment of the action research process. When participants first began completing the CIQ, they had the option of giving feedback anonymously, but they could read others' feedback. This method seemed to prompt answers that were simply repetition of others' answers. I preferred that the feedback would truly reflect the participants' thoughts and feelings, so I attempted to change the set-up to have them post directly to me. A quirk in the system did not allow anonymous posting directly to me. If they wanted to post to me, I would know who wrote the feedback. I presented this dilemma to them (in an attempt to share power), and the participants elected to post the CIQ online directly to me with names attached. They

stated they were not concerned that I knew what they communicated in their CIQ. Initial comments reflected high engagement with the research process and discussions of culture and spirituality. Low engagement seemed to occur when addressing curriculum content about group dynamics, skills for working with groups, and when I implemented a more traditional pedagogical format (i.e. PowerPoint slides and structured presentation of material). I found this significant and not surprising in light of a culturally responsive education paradigm. It seemed to reinforce the relevance of culturally responsive education and teaching and the role culture, privilege, and power differential play in the educational process. When I used conventional ways of teaching, I marginalized the learners and used my power differential to transmit knowledge that I (the educator) decided was worthy to transmit (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). This is consistent with the Liberal philosophy of education (Elias & Merraim, 1995), and what students experience routinely in classes at this liberal arts college. When they experienced a taste of a pedagogy in which they could be active in producing the knowledge, they responded affirmatively, felt less marginalized, and more validated in their beliefs, as they expressed through class discussion and their CIQ's.

Another strategy employed in this period was observation of face-to-face community groups. This served as a graded assignment where students were required to choose a professionally facilitated group focused on providing support, therapy, or education to persons in the community. A stipulation was that the groups consist of members identified as racially/ethnically different from the student observer. This was a way for students to observe how the facilitator addresses issues of difference and what dynamics, skills, and techniques are used. In addition, students could address issues related to difference as they heard and observed the interactions. This proved not to be a viable strategy, as it was exceedingly difficult to find

groups that were feasible for students to observe (i.e. due to issues accessibility and confidentiality), let alone groups where members were racially or ethnically different. What resulted was that students fulfilled the assignment using whatever group was available, and they drew on differences such as age, gender, disability, and class. This strategy did not generate much data or serve the purpose hoped for in the planning stage.

This period (weeks 4-7) in the acting stage of the research process was very dynamic and began to help participants gain insight into their worldview regarding racial and ethnic stereotypes and biases. They also became more aware of each other's attitudes and behaviors related to awareness of culture and spirituality.

Weeks 8-11: Expanding Awareness of Spirituality

The middle stage of group development incorporates the transition phase and the work phase of the group in moving toward its goals. A characteristic of this time during group development is anxiety associated with uncovering potentially difficult feelings as group members begin to look at themselves and the issues that brought them to the group. During this period in the study, participants continued the CIQ's, online discussions, community group observations, and began critical reflection in the form of online journaling. Participants kept online personal journals where they reflected weekly on events in and out of class that affected their learning and understanding of culture, spirituality and group development. I read the journals and dialogued with the participant one on one in an online, asynchronous format. The findings during this point in the semester are reflective of the new knowledge construction of the participants about culture and spirituality.

The curriculum content during these four weeks focused on learning about the initial stage of group development. As a way to experientially present the material, I introduced an

activity intended for use as an icebreaker in group practice. The activity appeared in Van Soest (2003) and was an effective way to demonstrate another aspect of cultural awareness among the participants of the study. Participants broke into groups of two or three and discussed their first name. They were instructed to tell each other how and why they got their name and how they felt about it. This generated much conversation and interesting dialogue related to their culture and ethnic heritage. Several participants expressed surprise at how “such a simple activity says so much about our culture.” Many participants stated they would use this activity when they facilitate a group in practice, which reinforced the value of using the activity in the context of culturally responsive education.

Finding new meaning about culture and spirituality through sharing symbols. A hallmark of this period was the sharing of cultural/spiritual symbols. A few weeks following the focus group discussion about spirituality, participants read a chapter from Wuthnow (2001) to introduce them to forms of spiritual expression apart from familiar Christian methods of prayer, hymn singing, and attending church. The need for participants to expand their awareness in this area stemmed from reflection on the spirituality focus group discussion where their Christian frame of reference was abundantly clear. Upon analysis of the data from that discussion, the Wuthnow (2001) book came to mind and I searched for an appropriate reading. I chose this chapter (Chapter 4) because of the format where Wuthnow (2001) portrayed stories of several artists in his study that experienced spirituality through various art forms. In addition to reading this chapter, I asked participants to bring in a symbolic representation of their culture or spirituality. This activity was designed as a strategy to create awareness of the connection between their culture and spiritual beliefs and/or practices. Tisdell (2003) discusses the use of symbols as a way for participants to illustrate affectively their beliefs in a way that encourages

authenticity. In this study, the participants embraced this activity and although they verbalized having difficulty in choosing a symbol, all shared deep representations of great meaning. Sharing the symbols in a group during a class session promoted conversation and participants felt free to ask each other questions about their symbol and story. The findings presented here reflect data analysis and reflection of the entire process of sharing symbols and online discussion of the Wuthnow (2001) reading. In reality, the sharing activity and online discussion took place from the end of week seven to week eleven. For clarity, all findings from this reflection are discussed in this section.

Initially, participants discussed the meaning of symbolism and power of symbolic representation. When I asked what they felt was the significance of a symbol, they (characteristically) related to their Christian religious traditions by describing how symbols are used in churches. Dorcas relates the activity to the existential aspects of religious practice:

Symbols are so much more powerful than word, at least for me. Like in protestant churches they sometime are so word oriented...words are so limiting in what you can say and articulate, but symbols take on a life of their own...

Similarly, Nicole discusses her Catholic heritage and says, "it's something that reminds me where I am, at least in [the Catholic] church... [Especially] the cross that is in the church." Lydia remarks about the part symbols play in the Mennonite tradition:

It's plain in the structure of the building, but I think symbolism is there, like in the way they talk, different things we do, it seems like there is a connection to symbols.

Several participants brought symbols that had a religious meaning to them, others brought symbols less related directly to religion, but most had some spiritual connection. Lily, Rosemarie, Nicolas, Chloe, Nicole, and Marilyn shared symbols that were not obviously

religious symbols, but several used the word “spiritual” when telling their story. Rae, Dorcas, and Lydia shared symbols from their religious traditions in various forms. This showed a shift toward looking at a connection between culture and spirituality, possibly because this activity immediately followed the Wuthnow reading. Surprisingly (to me) Dorcas was the only participant to bring a cross as her symbol. I anticipated more participants connecting more obviously to their Christian tradition, although I was not surprised that if only one student would bring a cross, it would be Dorcas, given her strong connection to her Christian traditions as demonstrated by her frequently interjecting Christianity in discussions. Rae brought her Star of David necklace, and described it as a representation of her “struggle with the spirituality question because my parents come from two very strange religions- one half Catholic and one half Jewish.”

Marilyn described her symbol as spiritual, but she clearly meant in a cultural not religious sense:

I brought a silver ring my grandmother gave me that has [my initial] on it that was given to her. Her name was [the same as mine] as well...This is very spiritual for me because it represents my family...It's a very spiritual thing, my family, because, well, I guess, my grandmother, she is sick with cancer right now, and, well, death is spiritual and loss is spiritual.

Nicolas shared that he had no difficulty choosing a symbol. This reflects his level of cultural identity as developed beyond most other participants. He stated:

I got excited about this, so I brought in several things. I brought in two representations, one is from Peruvian culture, where I grew up... and this is more traditional from the mountain areas where there is more agriculture, so the carving shows that...I also brought

a postcard from my friend from Scotland because I always wanted to go to Scotland and find what the roots of my ancestors are...

I find it significant that Nicolas did not bring a symbol of his American culture. He did not address this, but he gave many clues during the semester that he more closely related to his Peruvian culture than the culture he currently lives in while in college. No one asked this question, including me.

Chloe described having a difficult time choosing a symbol. Her symbol was a “rock that says the ‘the Lord is my rock’ that my sister gave to me for graduation.” She expresses her connection to spirituality and culture as represented by the rock:

It reminds me a lot of my family culture, especially between me and my sister. It sits on my desk and its really cool...my sister knew me well enough to know that this is something that would mean a lot to me. I come from a very small family...so, it's just, a lot of my spiritual culture is from relating to other people and a lot of times praying doesn't always work for me and reading the Bible doesn't work for me, but going and having a deep conversation with my sister is what I do.

Participants by week nine and ten were engaged in the research process and making connections between spirituality and culture on level beyond that of Christianity. Lydia was the last person to share her symbol (a hymnal), during week eleven, and she described how her Mennonite tradition focused heavily on singing hymns and how singing the hymns in “four part harmony is very much a part of my culture.”

The findings clearly show new learning about the participants' own culture through this activity, and emphasizes their “shifting identity” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 207) and their increased cultural awareness by this point in the study. One way this manifested was as participants gained

knowledge from readings, watching the video, sharing symbols, and discussions, they shifted from thinking about culture only as an ethnic construct to looking at social structures in relation to oppression, race, class and gender. Rosemarie, who never verbalized her ethnic background, began to talk about her culture in terms of gender and class. She clearly identified her culture as related to aspects of her family, including the impact of divorce and subsequent decline in the family's socioeconomic status. She shared her cultural symbol (drill bits) and referred to the significance of being a woman in a working class family:

I work with [my stepfather] and it's just a very cultural experience because we're just all hands on and things. As a blended family, this is something we all do together and we all share together. A lot of stigmas are put on lower class and working class people. I deal with a lot of that. It's common knowledge that a divorce will take its toll on a family financially, now it's become a part of my life. I get defensive, too, because I'm a girl and I get discriminated against sometimes because I like to work on things, like my car. My roommate's boyfriend is from a family with money and I was fixing something and he said "oh, why don't you get a new one?" and I said "why don't I just fix it?" Before the two families came together [after the divorce] I would have had his feelings too.

Similarly, Nicole, who previously shared concerns about her lack of awareness of her ethnic background, was ultimately able to relate cultural awareness in terms of socioeconomic status:

I understand about socioeconomic status because my family has gradually crept down further. I really identify with culture and status. It's very difficult to break the stereotypes about culture, not just racial culture, but the culture of, like lower class and middle class.

Lily's identity early in the semester clearly related to culture in terms of ethnicity, as revealed earlier in this chapter. She began to deconstruct her understanding of culture as she reflected on

others voices, and demonstrated new meaning of culture at the intersection of class when she said:

Someone mentioned the effects of socioeconomic diversity and it made me think about how we don't really discuss that aspect too much. I think that class affects everyone even within the same gender, spiritual, and ethnic backgrounds. Class seems to reinforce many stereotypes.

Broadening understanding of spiritual expression. This sparked more discussion connecting the Wuthnow (2001) article to ways that people (in general) may find spirituality within their culture, apart from religion. The data indicated mixed reactions including surprise, freedom, and a way to engage other senses. Reading the Wuthnow (2001) chapter created surprised reactions in several participants. Lydia expressed:

I read the part about the lady that chants, you know, I couldn't quite figure out what exactly that means or what that sounds like or looks like. What she was really saying was that it was really something that was very personally meaningful, and that at times in her life she was searching for something that was very personally meaningful. She suggested that there are a lot of really good ways to express your spirituality but don't just stay on the surface of all of them but go deeper and make it really personal.

Rae also related:

I found it to be very strange. I'm sorry. I was trying hard to adjust my perspective; it was just very weird to me. I don't mean that in an offensive way if anybody really, really identified with the article. Stop laughing, I'm being serious! I found it to be very weird. I read the article about the lady who would chant, I couldn't identify with it. I found nothing to identify with, and I'm trying really hard to relate.

Similarly, Marilyn felt she could not connect with the reading, and is again consistent with her belief that “people are people”:

My initial reaction was similar to [Rae’s]. I thought the first woman’s (chanting) method of living out her spirituality was odd. I didn’t really think it was crazy or anything, but I wasn’t exactly sure how it was spiritual at all...I would like to understand more, but then again, a lot of people don’t understand my spirituality, and they don’t have to. So, even though I don’t understand, I can respect her spirituality and her routine. If it’s working for her, it’s positive.

Two participants connected the Wuthnow (2001) reading directly to Christianity. Lydia and Dorcas most clearly constructed their meaning by relating to God and the expression of spirituality through art. Dorcas most clearly expressed her meaning making when she said, “art can be so expressive and reflective; it is a beautiful way of expressing oneself to God when words fail...” Lydia expressed a similar reaction: “these unique people who are seeking God through a variety of unique expressions are inspiring to me. It makes sense to me how a creative God would desire his children to be creative too.”

However, the overall findings related to the knowledge construction from this reading represented a strong connection by the participants to gaining a new understanding of ways spirituality can be expressed beyond traditional, formal, church services. Most participants expressed appreciation for this revelation and responded by feeling liberated, as Nicole and Chloe stated.

Nicole shared:

I felt reading this article was very freeing for me. It was very interesting to see how different people not only worship, but also how they incorporate spirituality into their

lives. I am at a point in my life where I am trying to find my path regarding worship styles...reading this article and seeing that there are so many different methods of doing so was very encouraging and inspiring.

Chloe also used the term “freeing” when she shared her response to the reading:

This article was freeing to me. I attend a church at home where things are done “by the book.” I have felt in the past like I couldn’t leave the church in search of a different one because everyone there knew me...I loved the discussion of different types of worship in this article. Like [Dorcas] talked about, sometimes it’s easier to worship through art or dance.

Nicolas also found a more personal connection with the reading. He shared:

I have always thought that there was a deep spirituality in art. This is especially true when it comes to music which has always been a big part of my life. The article was comprised of people who found spiritual meaning in simple things from art to meditation. It is exciting to me when I start to hear consideration of such simple activities being spiritual...

Lydia and Lily also made connections to culture in addition to recognizing the power of spiritual expression through art. Lydia states:

It doesn’t matter to me whether or not I could relate to the actual practices the people were involved in, but the more important thing was learning from the discipline, consistency, self-awareness, and connection...that was part of their different expressions.

Lily shares her initial struggle with grasping the full meaning of the stories:

...I was surprised by the different spiritual outlets people found and what they meant to them. I couldn’t really identify with any of the stories. And it seemed to me, that most of

these spiritual outlets were related to their culture in some way...I couldn't think of anything in particular that related to my culture that I could enhance as a spiritual outlet...reading the article made me want to have a spiritual outlet of my own.

Discussing the Wuthnow chapter online asynchronously allowed participants to thoroughly examine their reactions. As described, some participants found the concepts addressed in the chapter "freeing," as well as a way to express themselves using other "parts of your brain," not just intellect. Others seemed to feel reading this gave them "permission" to look beyond traditional Christian worship and that it is acceptable to be "unconventional and unique" in expressing spirituality. At this point, however, there was still a continuous shift to discussing Christianity as an integral part of the discussion. This lessened as the semester began to wind to a close.

Researcher reflections: Limitations of power sharing in higher education. Several sessions during this period were devoted to curriculum content on group development and did not provide an opportunity for discussions directly related to culture and spirituality. In addition, a conference and fall break precluded class time during these weeks. However, the online journaling, CIQ, and asynchronous discussions continued throughout the period. Even though no direct discussions ensued, the concepts involved in culturally responsive education and teaching played a role in each session and the overall class environment. Awareness of my positionality as a White woman in authority in the classroom foregrounds the intersection of gender, age, class, and privilege and the influence I have on the participants as students. As I attempted to share power, it became difficult at times when I was in the situation of grading simulations and assignments. There is no provision for sharing of power in the academic institution, which exemplifies the oppression and inequalities of social structures based on race, class, and gender,

and disability (Grant & Sleeter, 2003). Several ways I shared power during this period was by listening to students' voices when establishing due dates for assignments, asking for feedback on assignments and suggestions of ways to better facilitate learning, and offering opportunities for re-writes on papers and assignments. However, it was important to recognize that inherent in the educational system are the cultural influences and bias of textbooks, accreditation mandates, and institutional demands. Therefore, while my efforts to provide culturally responsive education served to improve this course, there were areas that I did not ameliorate.

A concern I had at this point in the semester was time management. I felt very overwhelmed by the need to gather data and the responsibility of teaching group practice skills to future social work practitioners. As I reflected on my notes about this during the latter part of the semester, I realized an important finding relative to culturally responsive education: my tendency to view the research as separate from the course curriculum was somewhat problematic. Culturally responsive education is not an "add on" to a class, it is a way of conceptualizing and believing in the pedagogical perspective of promoting education as a "politically neutral process" (Hart, 1992, p. 9), and deconstructing conventional ways of teaching (Gay, 2000). Therefore, this research process is a way to develop the strategies that I internalize in my teaching philosophy (I discuss this further in Chapter Five). For now, though, adapting new ways of thinking and teaching a course that I have taught multiple times in a certain format, required intentionality and, yes, time management.

Patterns of communication were evident by this time in the semester. Some participants were consistently verbal, while others, especially Rosemarie, Chloe, and Lily were quiet during group discussion. Chloe and Lily were very interactive in online journaling and asynchronous discussion, but Rosemarie never engaged as fully as the rest. However, I have observed this in

previous classes with her and recognized this as a pattern similar to the past. Because I am aware of the issues surrounding her disengagement, and knowing it has nothing to do with the topic, I chose to encourage her participation in whatever ways she felt able.

Weeks 12-15: Making Connections to Social Work Practice: Becoming More Critically Reflective

Dealing with the ending was the topic for both the research study and the group skills course. Participants experienced the end of the research process simultaneously while they learned how to facilitate the end of a group in social work practice. In working with groups, characteristics of ending the group are denial, making connections to learning, and identifying areas of future learning. Several activities characterized the last weeks of the semester and addressed the curriculum content on group development: student simulations of course content (ending stage of group development), and a final exam which was a class presentation of a theory of group practice. In terms of the research process, participants reflected on the activities introduced in the last weeks of the semester, and participated in the final focus group conducted during the last two class sessions of the semester to address the research question and identify areas of knowledge construction.

Several activities facilitated discussion during weeks twelve through fifteen. Participants were introduced to two readings focused on practical information to consider when working with persons from diverse cultures. The findings from the activities during these weeks are presented next. The overall observations and final reflections of the research process that occurred during the final focus group, although conducted during week 15, are presented in a later section describing the observing stage of the study.

The participants also completed the D'Andrea, Daniels, and Heck's (1991) *Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey* (MAKSS) again at the end of the research study.

Completing this survey again at the end of the research process allowed the participants to see the change in their level of awareness and confidence in their skills when dealing with issues of difference (see Appendix B for final results). The results showed a slight increase in the level of cultural awareness, knowledge, and potential skills from the beginning of the semester, but the participants and researcher felt the information gained from the questionnaires was not as relevant as the knowledge construction and meaning making from the overall research process. This is perhaps due to the focus of the MAKSS, which was more geared to persons in counselor training, and the participants did not relate to some of the information addressed by the questionnaire.

One of the readings during this period was an article written by Cervantes and Parham (2005) that took a practitioner approach to culture and spirituality. I also introduced Hays' (2001) ADDRESSING model by giving participants chapters two and three from her book *Addressing Cultural Complexities in Practice*. These readings were in response to participant responses on the CIQ and in discussions asking for ways to "deal with spirituality and culture with clients." Their request for practical information about the process of connecting process to practice was addressed through the interpretation and discussion of these readings. I questioned whether I should have introduced the ADDRESSING (Hays, 2001) model and the Cervantes and Parham (2005) article earlier in the semester. Some participants thought they could apply it more directly if they had been aware of it earlier, while others felt they did not have the background knowledge to understand the model and discussion until this point. I tend to think that perhaps introducing the readings around week ten or eleven would give a practical guide to participants

that were ready and students who were not ready could “grow into it” and use it as a framework for the remainder of the semester.

Critically examining the author’s frame of reference. Several participants reacted to the Cervantes and Parham (2005) article by questioning the way the authors dealt with describing minority groups. Some participants particularly responded negatively to “lumping people of color” rather than describing specific ethnic groups. This displays the moving forward of the participants since the beginning of the semester in their understanding of “the other.” In this case, they were able to analyze the authors’ language and categorization of minority clients. Rae stated “I feel like the article was saying, if you are White, then you are this. And that’s not true at all. What about Jewish people?” Others responded in the same vein, as Marilyn shared her point:

It’s like, not even speaking to a specific culture. Its saying “here’s White and here’s people of color”, and its like White is one ethnicity and [not recognizing that] people of color are a whole lot of ethnicities, even in the US. That bothered me...

As discussed previously, Marilyn was resistant to move beyond looking at forces of oppression and issues of race as influencing interactions. Her statement here shows her shifting identity to be able to feel discomfort in reading a perspective so close to her previously held beliefs.

Chloe’s interpretation of this aspect of the article was similar, although she personalized her perception of what the authors’ were trying to convey, indicating understanding on some level of the intersection of race and oppression:

It bothered me a little bit, reading this article, just because it only was about people of color, as opposed to everyone. Just because I may not have experienced oppression, and racist remarks towards me, I had things happen in my life that, like there were kids who said things and they were White, so I think it was not as much [an issue of color].

Engaging the author's ideas in light of lived experience. Participants also responded to the Hays' (2001) chapters, although in a much more positive light. Several highlighted lived experience and connected their meaning making of the chapters. Nicolas (who indicated he would have liked to see the ADDRESSING framework earlier in the semester) felt it "made a lot of sense...it was really interesting when she talked about how different fields [disciplines] look at different backgrounds. I think I take pride in social work that we do tend to have more of that perspective [attention to diversity]." Nicolas also brought out an example of how he interpreted what the author was trying to say. He connected to his lived experience of growing up in a different culture, which served to embody what the other participants were trying to say about "lumping people of color":

I found it really helpful to read the questions they ask, especially the one that says "what is the relationship between your physical identity and your self-identification in your cultural context" [Hays, 2001, p.]. I think that's really important and its weird for me because it's something I deal with all the time. It's a completely understandable assumption, that I would be like most people who grew up here [in the US], but I didn't, and I have many other cultural influences, and often times when I go back home [to Peru] and I meet new people, they don't believe me that I can speak Spanish and act as they can, but when people first see me, they don't see that. I'm constantly having to tell people what I am, which is incredibly frustrating. I've come to the point where I realize I need to start identifying myself as bi-cultural. People say "you're not really Peruvian" or "you're not really from the US", so I don't know. People just assume.

Dorcas also shared a lived experience during this discussion and expressed her meaning making from reading the Hays' (2001) chapter to a discussion with her family during Thanksgiving break. She shared her reaction to how her father addressed culture during that conversation:

[This] made me think more about my own culture, that whole stereotype of White people not having a culture at all. I think it's made me think more deeply about that, and what my culture and ethnic heritage is and create a stronger identification. My dad says "you don't need a culture, just be American and that's fine" and I'm like, no, that's not ok.

There's something meaningful about knowing where you came from and knowing your heritage. I don't know if we would have talked about it in those terms prior to this class.

The fact that the participants addressed the Cervantes and Parham (2005) article and the Hays (2001) chapters on this level shows definite forward movement in terms of increased

understanding of issues of race, culture, and spirituality from the beginning of the semester.

Their discussion at this ending time in the semester took on a much higher level of critique and critical thinking than earlier discussions. Clearly, participants began to make connections between their lived experience, culture and spirituality, and social work practice.

The third stage of the action research process is observing. Discussion of the final focus group is presented in the next section through presentation of the findings of the participants' overall learning in light of the observation stage. As described in Chapter Three, the observing stage addresses data collected on multiple levels and the observation of the research process as a whole. Participants described observations of their learning at the end of the semester through the final focus group conducted during the last two sessions of the semester.

Stage Three: Observing

The third stage of this action research study focuses on the observations and reflections at the end of the semester. This stage contextualizes the critical aspect of action research in that communication of the shared understanding between participants and researcher is necessary to encourage development of a critical consciousness (McTaggart, 1991). This section presents the findings as the participants began to make meaning of their experiences in terms of the “broader picture” and discussed observations, assumptions, feelings, ideas, learning, and reflections on application to practice. Observation and reflection was ongoing throughout the study, but the participants specifically discussed their overall observations and final reflections during the focus group, conducted during the last two class sessions. The participant and researcher observations on the activities and events throughout the semester culminated in a discussion of the research question “how did the strategies affect students’ learning about cultural and spiritual issues, particularly in relation to those who are very different from themselves?”

Through culturally responsive education, participants learned to explore their spiritual and cultural worldview, situate spirituality in the context of culture, and recognize racism and White privilege. This section identifies ways participants made meaning of their learning in the larger context of the college community and social work practice. As they made observations and reflected on their learning, three major themes emerged and are discussed here: moving beyond Christianity, new learning about cultural competence for social work practice, and culturally responsive education as drawing on multiple domains of learning.

In addition, I reflect on my observations of the research process as the teacher-researcher, and the unique aspects of my role in the research process. The next chapter presents a discussion

and conclusions that examine the overall research process in light of the literature and theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Two.

Moving Beyond Christianity

Observation and final reflection on the data from participants' observations of readings, sharing cultural symbols, and discussion (online asynchronous and face-to-face) resulted in findings presented in this section as participants reflected on the semester in the final focus group. A major change from the beginning of the study is the language used by the participants. The final focus group yielded much more discussion using the terms oppression, culture, privilege, class, spirituality (rather than religion), spirituality in the context of culture, and prefacing statements with 'Christian' when referring to Christianity rather than assuming Christianity is universal.

The observations and final reflections in this first theme display the knowledge construction related to spirituality and the connection to culture, especially in light of one of the major premises of this study, that culturally competent social work practitioners view spirituality in a global context rather than narrowly defining it in terms of Christianity. Since the participants are students at a Christian college, their spiritual context lies firmly in Christianity. The goal of this study was certainly not to change or diminish the importance of their Christian religiosity, but to encourage them to look at spirituality as encompassing more than a religious aspect, and create space for those who do not espouse Christianity but demonstrate spirituality in ways that are different from the traditions most familiar to the participants.

Framing spirituality in new ways. Several participants clearly articulated their new learning about spirituality when they related a shift in thinking and expressing themselves. Chloe was the first to respond to the focus question "talk about what you learned this semester about

culture and spirituality especially in relation to people who are different.” Her meaning making addressed the goal of the study as she stated:

I’ve learned how to talk about culture and spirituality without bringing my own spirituality into it so much. A lot of our conversation would end up talking about Christianity even if that was not the point of it. So I’ve become more aware of where I’m coming from and how to talk to people in their context.

Nicole shared her learning about spirituality displaying her movement to understand spirituality beyond Christianity when she said:

I learned to be more open to hearing and understanding the different spiritual factors. I think before I was more judgmental and didn’t want to understand why people believed something different, especially different from myself. I find myself understanding it more and appreciating it more, and not necessarily to the point where I need to change how I define my spirituality for myself, but just that I can appreciate where they’re coming from and how that can be spiritual as well.

Dorcas explained her meaning making as expanding her currently held truths and knowledge:

I don’t know, its always so hard to say this is where I was and this is where I am now. But through this class I feel I felt more deeply about things that were already important to me, if that makes sense. And I’ve been more aware I feel over the duration of the semester about spiritual/cultural differences, variety, and so on and like you know, about things I was thinking about.

Lydia shared a clear example of her meaning making when she reflected on her observation of a community group:

...when I was observing one of the groups [there was] a guy who had been in jail for like 10 years, and had been in the group for about two years, but when in jail he took art lessons and got a bachelors degree and made some really good strides in his life...I was so impressed by him, I thought wow, he really has turned his life around. He was stressing the important insights and all of a sudden I realized he didn't mention spirituality or God anywhere and I realized I'm so used to thinking like, "Oh, people need God, they need God to turn your life around." I still believe that, but here was an instance of somebody who perceivably had it together and there's never been a mention of spirituality in the group. I was impressed by that.

Nicolas summed up his learning and clearly moved beyond Christianity when he said, "I forget what some of my assumptions were. Now I realize that spirituality is an important part of social work practice. At [this college] we usually only discuss how we are all Christians."

Viewing spirituality in the context of culture. The concept of spirituality as not necessarily Christianity was most clearly illustrated as participants reflected on the strategies of sharing cultural symbols, and assigned readings (Wuthnow, Hays, and Cervantes). Probably the most concrete demonstration of new knowledge construction was in this area of connecting spirituality to culture. Most all participants grasped this concept and reflected on their spirituality as well as spirituality of others as rooted in culture. The new learning shared by participants when asked, "what do you know now that you did not know before about the issue of connecting culture to spirituality" shows much greater depth of understanding from the beginning of the semester. They clearly articulated their learning and demonstrated the new knowledge they constructed regarding spirituality as culturally situated, beyond the common thread of Christianity. Nicole stated:

The level of value of your spirituality is impacted by your culture. The American culture as a whole, spirituality isn't something that's emphasized in a lot of things. I feel like that sets a tone for how people find their spirituality as valuable. It can, depending on what the culture is, be very valuable to people.

Marilyn shared:

...We've always come back to it in our conversations, It's really obvious that a person can't get away from it, like spirituality is a part of your culture. We just can't separate, like this part of me because the impact it has on the world and how we interact with people. It's really obvious in our discussions that like we can't get away from our culture, we can't get away from our spirituality, it's part of who we are and it's going to affect our interactions and we just have to realize how and try to minimize bias...

Lydia made a connection between spirituality and culture at the intersection of race, demonstrating her new level of conceptualization:

It pains me to know that people are living with psychological oppression all the time, but I'd rather acknowledge it and say that it's real to me and that it does affect the way I see spirituality. There's a disconnect between how we see each other and listen to each other. Like, the spirituality of my White Mennonite church isn't offering much to African American people. That's real obvious, just by looking at it.

Lily expanded her cultural/spiritual lens as demonstrated through her learning "how to include spirituality and keep in mind what one person thinks is not necessarily how you define it." She went on to say, "I think we need to recognize there's a lot of things that play into it, it's not just like we can assume everyone's like you. You have to look at what their culture is."

By the time of the final focus group, several participants who initially struggled with the concepts and the vastly different ways spirituality was expressed shared their new understanding of the value of difference. Rae expressed her learning when she revealed her recent attempts to understand spirituality in the context of culture:

...One thing I have been doing is going to [the city] every Friday to celebrate Sabbath with a family who are Jewish. At first I felt very uncomfortable but it's really helped me learn a lot about my own background, my own heritage...there are not very many opportunities to do that on campus unless you put yourself in a place where you are completely out of your comfort zone and try to understand from another religious perspective how people think.

Marilyn summed up her learning in relation to spirituality in the context of culture, which reflects her willingness to acknowledge “the other.” She clearly shows movement in thinking beyond Christianity, and recognizes the source of her discomfort earlier in the semester:

I've learned, that as long as we are appreciative of our differences, I'm thinking back to the article about chanting and the different forms of spirituality that some of us, including myself, were pretty uncomfortable with. We just didn't understand it. We just don't have to understand fully how it's spiritual for someone else, we just have to recognize that it is and use it as a strength in our helping relationship.

The observations of the participants throughout the study and connections to learning made during the final focus group displays the shifting identity brought about by the pedagogical strategies implemented during the semester. As participants discussed their final reflections, their move toward increased cultural competence was obvious, and they constructed new knowledge of culturally competent social work practitioners.

New Learning about Cultural Competence for Social Work Practice

The meaning constructed by participants also moved from personal to working with clients, and how they relate issues of culture, spirituality, and systems of privilege to social work practice. When asked about “how would you describe your cultural competence as a social worker now versus at the beginning of the semester,” a new level of understanding became known. Findings considered within this theme demonstrate the meaning making of participants about spirituality and culture situated at the intersections of race and systems of privilege. In addition, participants began to recognize gender as an area of oppression in need of consideration in light of culturally competent social work practice.

Connecting learning about spirituality to social work practice. As participants shared observations and final reflections of their learning, several related how they connected the classroom discussions and meaning making about spirituality to working with clients.

Marilyn used an example to explain her meaning making:

I think in a group setting, let's say you have two African Americans, and you are in a conversation in a group about spirituality, I think that as the social worker its essential to realize that they could have something in common, and how they see their spirituality manifested. It's important for us to understand where they're coming from, and in a group setting...help them to understand that, yeah, we come from different places and you see it this way, but as a group worker we can point it out, or help them point it out to each other, focus the group to realize that we come from different places and we're not going to see our spirituality as the same thing, but that's OK.

Rae discussed her new understanding of definition related to spirituality and working with clients:

We never know what kind of clients we're going to be working with. People have different ways of defining spirituality, like even in class when we talk about being spiritual, some people talk about church, some people talk about other things. This is a personal thing, not something I would want to project on a client.

Nicolas took a different approach to describe his connection to social work practice by describing his struggle with the issue of religion (specifically Christianity) and oppression. He responded to the issue of cultural competence and awareness of our cultural and spiritual lens by saying:

I really struggle sometimes, because in essence I do agree with that [notion of awareness of cultural/spiritual lens], but when it comes to examining, I guess it's really religion, but spirituality, that is in some ways oppressive, I don't know how to deal with that.

Christianity can be oppressive in a lot of ways. I don't think Jesus intended for us to be oppressive in our relationships with one another, but in a lot of ways, when you look at relationships, like when you look at male/female like in the church and everything, the way families are structured and the hierarchies, [it is oppressive].

This statement by Nicolas served to situate a brief discussion of cultural competence in relation to gender and to social work practice.

Limited consideration of the gendered dimension of culture in the social work profession.

Participants briefly discussed gender during the final focus group. Although occasionally brought up during class discussions, the focus throughout the semester was primarily culture (race/ethnicity) and spirituality with some emphasis on the intersection of class. The recognition at the end that gender is an area of oppression foregrounded the newfound awareness of the participants and their ability to make connections on a higher level than before.

As participants discussed their learning about race, culture, and spirituality during the final focus group, they addressed the issue of gender and expressed their awareness of how gender comes into play in terms of difference. Several participants communicated their concern about being in predominantly female classes and their desire to have more male voices in the classroom. This seems to be consistent with their recognition that to hear the voices of the group (in this case, men) they need to hear more than one perspective. This relates to their learning about difference and looking at “the other,” in that they are not viewing men as the other, but as voices affecting their lives in terms of social work practice. Marilyn was the first to respond with:

I wish that there were more males in our major. I would really like to hear from, instead of subconsciously looking at [Nicolas], a male perspective. I would really like to hear what all this means, being a man, and not just one individual’s perspective...All our social work classes are females, so we’re getting only the female perspective on social work...I’ve thought of that before, but what can we do about it?

Nicole took the discussion further as she looked at the intersection of gender and oppression and applied her learning to social work as a gendered profession. She shared:

I feel like I’ve really been finding oppression as a social work major, like even my boyfriend has kinda written stuff off, about my major because, “oh, you’re females, that’s all you do is sit down and talk about what to do.” I feel like, I don’t know if this is generalizable, but I feel like within the profession when we get out there into the field, that part of the reason we’re looked down upon is because we are a female dominated profession. I feel like people don’t understand, they just say “you’re out to save the world.”

Nicolas responded to her with similar thoughts about the oppression of the social work profession. Interestingly, he related to her based on the oppression, more than gender. This further emphasizes the avoidance of dealing with (or perhaps recognizing) gender in the way that race, class, or privilege was addressed. Nicolas shared:

I share similar things about being a social worker, especially about being male in a major that's not popular for males and not popular in general...When people ask me what my major is, I used to say "social work," now I always follow it with "and I like it a lot." A lot of other majors don't know what social work is.

The brief discussion about gender foregrounded the learning about culture, as other participants pointed out after this exchange between Marilyn, Nicole, and Nicolas. Other participants related the issue of oppression of the social work profession to culture, and the societal constructs that view "helping" as gendered as well as less valid than other professions. These observations and feelings of oppression surprised me, not because I had not realized they existed in the profession, but because I did not realize the participants experienced the same feelings at their stage of educational development. After this exchange, I realized how my own internalization of oppression in a gendered profession precluded bringing the topic to light in the class. These observations speak to the participant learning and increased self-awareness over the course of the semester of the intersections of culture, oppression, and systems of privilege.

Seeing the effects of culture and White privilege in lived experiences. During the final focus group participants were asked to connect their learning with social work practice and respond to the questions "how have you seen your 'lens' shift over this semester as you look at working with groups?" and "What have you learned about yourself that will contribute to or detract from becoming an effective group leader?" This learning is perhaps best summed up by

the personal experience Dorcas shared that occurred during an agency visit at the end of the semester. This example clearly shows the more intense level of awareness and critical examination of events that previously (before this semester) may not have been significant. Dorcas' response to the experience and meaning making in relation to social work practice is particularly notable:

This very evening I was standing in a room watching the tangible effects of White privilege; I wanted to scream. I know White privilege, this is not the first time I've seen White people, with good intentions, in authority, "helping" minorities. But seeing it before doesn't make it any easier to see it again. And it certainly doesn't make it easier to accept that I may end up in the same position. I know social service organizations are necessary, of course I know that. But it seems so counterproductive to 'empower' minority clients by having an all-White staff. Does cultural competency cut it? It certainly helps, I'm sure. But the fact remains that I am a White girl who will always be in the place of privilege because my skin happens to be the right color. As we were driving home tonight, I was calculating how feasible it would be for me to change my skin color like the author of "Black Like Me." I know this isn't the answer either. Even as I write this, I can hear [Rae] saying that I'm making a bigger deal of race than it is. Either way, I wish I knew a better solution.

Dorcas' experience related the concept of dealing with racism to social work practice, foregrounding the importance of constructing knowledge in application to practice situations and working with clients.

An interesting development during the focus group foregrounded the trust and cohesiveness of the participants. The discussion focused on the intersection of class and

privilege, and Nicole disclosed her recent experience with counseling. She connected her experience with cultural expectations in terms of negative connotations of counseling, and the disclosure was a very moving moment for the group. She emotionally and painfully shared her experience this semester:

I haven't shared this with you guys, but I've become a client. It's been very difficult for me because I'm there, I'm a client. I haven't said anything because there's so much [cultural] stigma attached.

Nicole's disclosure prompted several participants to offer support and disclosure of their own counseling experiences and the perception of stigma as related to cultural expectations, especially in terms of class. They articulated their new understanding of clients as "the other" as they realized they could be describing themselves. It was a powerful time of meaning making, and Dorcas shared her somewhat different perception of counseling when she stated:

From my background and personality, it's really offensive to me for people to expect me to talk about what's going on. Like my cultural background and stuff, we don't talk about [our problems]...on both sides of my extended family, you just don't...so I can understand when they talk about Asian cultures and how they don't want to share.

Culturally Responsive Education as Drawing on Multiple Domains of Learning

The participants positively received the overall process of providing culturally responsive education, largely because it was grounded in multiple domains of learning. By drawing on who they are as spiritual and cultural beings, the participants' real life experiences were foregrounded within the experiential, affective, cultural, spiritual, and relational dimensions. The differences in the class format, pedagogical strategies, and attempts to share power contextualized the course and created a new learning experience. Participants shared their unsolicited feelings about the

research experience, when Lydia said she felt “this was the best social work class I’ve had.” In addition, several stated they enjoyed the cohesion of the group and the lasting bond they expect to experience: “we’ve even talked about getting together outside of class.” Others found the forum to discuss issues of racism and bias a necessary outlet for frustration and meaning making.

Two weeks after the final focus group, I contacted the students by email to ask for further reflection now that the study ended. I asked two questions: “What was the most significant event in this class that enhanced your learning,” and “If you were going to describe this class to another social work student, what would you say?” All participants except Rosemarie responded to my request, even though they were on Christmas break. Interestingly, when asked the questions, several responses addressed the course content devoted to learning about skills to work with groups, while others addressed strategies and activities focused on culture and spirituality.

Many responses focused on the cohesion of the group and felt that enabled them the opportunity “to openly share our views and experiences, which made thinking and learning about spirituality and culture come alive.” They felt the ability to discuss the video, readings, and cultural symbols resulted from “feeling 100% comfortable” and having a “group dynamic definitely different than prior social work classes, in a very positive way.” They also spoke highly of the experiential nature of the class in terms of group development and dynamics, as one participant stated, “we learned about group dynamics by being a group ourselves.” Still other participants discussed their observations of the culturally responsive learning process as Marilyn stated, “I learned quite a bit from this class about myself, and about social work, and important issues that may not typically be discussed in a classroom setting, for example, bringing in our

spiritual/cultural symbols.” Nicolas and Dorcas addressed how hearing the voices of others in the group enhanced their learning about themselves. Dorcas related:

Not only was I asked to think deeply from my own perspective, but I was able to hear the opinions of my peers as well. Who would have thought there was so much to learn about diversity in what initially appeared to be a homogeneous culture of White, middle class, females!

Nicolas shared:

...it was enjoyable to learn from other people perspectives of culture and spirituality. I would say personally, that though I considered myself mostly aware of how my culture and spirituality influenced me, sharing this and seeing other people’s stories and perspectives helped me understand this even more.

Others felt the discussion of the video was “most significant and impacting,” and others listed the Wuthnow (2001) article. Lydia described the value of the video as:

...so important to me because not only did it bring to light a lot of racial issues...but it also taught the importance of listening and validating each person’s point of view regardless of if we agree or not. This has become a theme for me of the class, and is now something I’m much more aware of within class discussions and life in general.

Overall, the action research process received affirmation from the participants during the observing and initial reflection stage, largely due to the multiple dimensions of learning used to encourage knowledge construction and meaning making. The high regard for the process was also evidenced in the willingness of the participants to go beyond the expectations of a typical social work class to complete CIQ’s, answer additional questions, and do additional readings.

Chapter Summary and Final Reflections

During the planning stage, aspects of group process and development contributed to the research process. As students were learning about skills to work with groups in a social work setting, they experientially related group development and the stages of a group to the class sessions as the action research unfolded. The early stage of group development is characterized by establishing trust (Toseland & Rivas, 2005), as described fully in Chapter Three. As the students came together to discuss culture and spirituality, they were able to see and feel what clients experience as they begin a group experience. The ability to use this dichotomy as a teaching tool enhanced both the research and the educational experience for the students. Although the full value of this component was not pre-determined, once it was identified I used the congruence of the research design and the experiential aspect of the classroom to augment the course and student learning.

During this stage, the participants were willing to share their feelings, beliefs, and attitudes about culture and spirituality. Some of the participants struggled with articulating their cultural heritage, often because it was not something they previously addressed. After hearing the focus group discussions, participants who were not as engaged became much more connected to the conversation and obviously gave more thought to the issues of culture and cultural competence.

The acting stage culminated with the participants feeling comfortable with the research process and demonstrating an openness to suggestions from readings about working with those that are different. In addition, they were willing to talk, confront, suggest, and learn from each other through face-to-face discussions and asynchronous communication. This willingness to embrace new ideas exhibited a great stride in moving toward cultural competence in social work

practice. The participants became a cohesive group that developed a high level of trust by the end of the semester. This not only contributed to the action research, it also provided an experiential mode of learning group process and development.

The observing and ongoing reflecting stages occurred throughout the research process, in the sense that I was always observing and reflecting on what was going on at every phase of the study. The multiple methods of data collection provided a rich array of participant contributions to the research through their reflections, discussion, and meaning making. Through these observations, participants and researcher documented learning about themselves, others, and social work practice through their impressions, feelings, and questions. These ongoing observations and reflections required continuous attention to multiple forms of data collection, and ensuring data was recorded for later reflection and use in relating the thick, rich, description paramount to qualitative action research.

Overall, I was very pleased with the students' learning, the level of participation by the students, and with the teaching-research process. I continuously had to keep in mind that I was wearing two hats, the researcher and the teacher. The researcher part of me needed to let the discussions happen without trying to influence the conversation by "teaching." By attending to the critical action principle of sharing power, I was able to restrain my intuitive reaction to be the authority and exert my "power" to try to change behavior. In addition to those discussed earlier in this chapter, I realized there were several ways I "shared power" during the action research process. First, I sat around the table with the students rather than stand in the front of the class. The sessions were held in a seminar room rather than a traditional classroom, so there was a sense of "we" rather than "I-them." Second, the focus group and semi-structured discussions

provided information to both the researcher and the participants as knowledge was constructed through the process of making meaning of the discussions.

The stages of planning, acting, observing and ongoing reflection progressed as expected during the study. Participants were enthusiastic and eager to be part of the study, and contributed to the process by keeping journals, posting to asynchronous discussions, attending class, and providing additional information as needed. My final reflections immediately following the final session were that this was a very worthwhile experience for both the students and me.

This chapter presented the findings of the action research study through the stages of planning, acting, observing and ongoing reflection. Participant knowledge construction was evident through the themes and sub themes organizing the findings and demonstrated meaning making as they addressed the research question “how did the strategies affect students’ learning about cultural and spiritual issues, particularly in relation to those who are very different from themselves?” Issues pertaining to critical action research, especially challenging power relations and developing critical consciousness for social change were foregrounded throughout the chapter as I described the study as it unfolded. The pedagogical strategies implemented during the semester clearly resulted in new knowledge construction regarding cultural competence and the ability of the participants to relate their meaning making to social work practice foregrounds the effectiveness of the strategies. The next chapter provides a discussion of the overall research study in relation to the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this action research study was to increase participants' social consciousness and prepare them to move toward becoming culturally competent social work practitioners. This purpose was addressed by implementing strategies to increase student self-awareness of cultural and spiritual issues during a course required for all social work majors that focused on learning about group development and group process, and developing skills to work with groups in social work practice. In addition, given that the study took place at a Christian college made up mostly of White Euro-Americans, students in the social work program of this college viewed culture and spirituality through a lens of Christianity. They appeared to have little knowledge or understanding of systems of oppression, especially in relation to religion, race, power, and privilege.

By exploring participants' meaning making in light of the pedagogical strategies implemented throughout the semester, this study examined the value of the strategies in increasing students' self-awareness of their own cultural and spiritual lens, and increased their learning about cultural and spiritual issues, especially in relation to those who are different from themselves. It was a hope that this study serves to substantiate current knowledge about culturally responsive education and the strategies suggested in the literature, as well as contribute to the knowledge base by empirically assessing the level to which these strategies increase student awareness of cultural and spiritual issues in social work practice.

Critical action research principles contextualized this study through recognition of status and power differentials (of the researcher and participants) and prioritizing the need to attend to these issues (McTaggart, 1991). In addition, attention to providing culturally responsive education by deconstructing traditional pedagogical education strategies typically embedded in

the classroom structure served to increase inclusivity through attention to the values and beliefs of all cultures. The critical aspect of this action research study foregrounded participants' involvement in the educational process and supported interpretation of lived experiences through the lens of race, ethnicity, culture, class, and to some extent, gender. This served to situate the action research by helping participants understand how their spiritual and cultural beliefs and heritage serve as the lens by which they view oppression, and how they can develop skills to work toward equity and social justice.

Poststructural and intersectional feminist perspectives informed this study, along with discourses underlying culturally responsive teaching that include multicultural education, critical multiculturalism, anti-racist education, and spirituality. The meaning making of the participants and researcher was situated in the discourses that served as the theoretical grounding of the study. In particular, the study foregrounded how power and privilege affect the five areas described by current feminist thinkers: knowledge construction, voice, authority, positionality, and the shifting nature of identity (Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Orner, 1992; St. Pierre, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). This is central to understanding and examining how learners begin to understand not only their own perspectives, but also those of others very different from themselves in terms of race, gender, culture, or religion. In addition, cultural perspectives on spirituality and its influence on higher education and social work also ground this study. As participants moved through the semester, the model of culturally responsive education created space for them to begin to deconstruct categories of race, ethnicity, and class, and look at spirituality, oppression, and social structures in the frame of White privilege.

The research study addressed the issues of implementing pedagogical strategies and assessing student learning resulting from these strategies. The major findings presented in the

last chapter were organized in major themes uncovered through analysis of the data generated during the study, which investigated the research question “how did the strategies affect students’ learning about cultural and spiritual issues, particularly in relation to those who are very different from themselves?” These themes revealed the knowledge construction of the participants in consideration of the research question within the stages of the action research process. Now, in this chapter, I discuss the overall research process and findings in the context of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, as presented in the literature review in Chapter Two. First, I look at the study in the frame of the overall knowledge construction of the participants and the evolving nature of learning. Next, I discuss the implications of the study for the fields of adult education and social work. Lastly, I present the strengths and limitations of the research and recommendations for further research.

The Evolving Nature of Learning

The cyclical nature of action research and the process orientation of groups as they develop over time served as the backdrop for this study, and foregrounded the evolving nature of student learning as the participants were introduced to new information about systems of privilege. The meaning making that occurred over the course of the semester demonstrates a progression of knowledge construction that began during the planning stage when participants addressed the questions “what is cultural competence?” and “how will you know what you need to know to be culturally competent?” This learning process continued through the final focus group when participants considered their learning in the context of the questions “what do you know now that you did not know before about the issue of connecting culture to spirituality?” and “how would you describe your cultural competence as a social worker now versus at the beginning of the semester?” This section demonstrates the participants’ knowledge construction

and shifting identity through a consideration of the findings in the context of voice, positionality, and authority, elements of poststructural feminist perspectives contextualizing the study. In addition, this section considers the findings in the context of the discourses of spirituality and culturally responsive education.

Shifting Identity and Knowledge Construction

The evolving nature of knowledge construction and meaning making during the study closely aligns with the feminist poststructural notion of constantly shifting identity (St. Pierre, 2000; Tisdell, 1998). As new learning occurred, the participants found new meaning about spirituality, culture, and especially systems of privilege. In addition, as they began to understand their positionality including their own race, gender, and religious experience, they began to understand how they came to construct knowledge based on influences like socialization and learning from family. Their awareness of their own cultural and spiritual heritage at the beginning of the study and their increased ability by the end of the semester to frame spirituality in the context of culture foregrounds the impact of the new information and knowledge construction on their individual identity, thereby shifting their understanding and sense of self. The elements of knowledge construction and identity as constantly changing and developing characterize the study and the findings, as the unfolding nature of the action research process is discussed in this section.

In the initial planning stage during the first weeks of the semester, findings at that point revealed participants' limited sense of their own culture and a focus on stereotyping and categorizing, mostly in relation to "the other." These findings are consistent with a multicultural education perspective described by Banks (2002) underlying much of the participants' previous educational experience, in that they learned about races and ethnicities as "the other," but were

not exposed to a critical perspective that foregrounds the intersection of race, class, and privilege. Deconstructing the essentialist notion of cultural difference (May, 1999), through introducing new information about race and power relations provided the opportunity for participants to hear the voices of “the other,” and begin to cognitively and affectively reconstruct new meaning as they questioned racist attitudes and expressed increased social consciousness. They began to construct concepts of “the other” based on connecting their lived experiences to what they heard through the video and readings (Maher & Tetreault, 2001). This new learning foregrounds aspects of critical multiculturalism, as participants began to understand the broader social picture, and looked at difference in the context of culture and power relations (McLaren, 1995). By beginning to understand White privilege, participants could begin to grasp the concept of unearned privilege and power as related to their own lives (McLaren & Torres, 1999). These findings demonstrated their movement from looking at cultural competence in terms of stereotypes and categories to a greater understanding of the intersections of systems of privilege and power.

As the study progressed, participants constructed new knowledge through their interactions and evolving relationships with each other. As described in the findings, the format of the class and the focus on group development encouraged the relational aspect and cohesion of the participants as a group. This critical multicultural approach foregrounded the participants’ involvement in their learning through their relationships and expressing their lived experiences, as well as helping them understand how social constructs contribute to oppression, especially within the lens of race, ethnicity, culture, and class (Nieto, 1999). This effectively created a space for them to view new information and make meaning in a safe environment, especially as they heard the voices of “the other” (through the video and readings) in terms of race, ethnicity,

and privilege. As Maher and Tetreault (2001) point out, the classroom is a place where students construct concepts of “other” based on cultural influences, and in this study, students initially had strong notions of “the other,” and constructed new knowledge as they listened to the voices of races and ethnicities different from themselves. The element of voice, from poststructural and intersectional feminist perspectives, seeks to include all marginalized voices and establish connections that move beyond prejudices and previously held assumptions (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003; Dietz, 2000).

Multiple levels of authority and giving voice. Voice in the context of this study, was less connected with the meaning making from hearing from other participants, since there were no people of color or other marginalized group represented (other than women), and was more a result of cognitively, affectively, and symbolically experiencing new information through the video, readings, and sharing symbols. As participants gave voice to further aspects of their own culture, they began to claim more of their voice in terms of their own culture and understand their culture in new ways. This demonstrates their new understanding of their own shifting identity especially as displayed in the finding related to making new meaning through sharing symbols. The findings early in the study indicated only Nicolas and Dorcas bringing up the notion of voice, mainly in relation to who speaks for a specific group. As the study unfolded, participants did not verbalize the concept of voice until the end when the subject of gender resurfaced in the final focus group. However, they clearly displayed a shifting identity as they gave voice to their new understanding in terms of systems of privilege, culture, and spirituality.

On another level, the concept of voice was evident in the structure of the classroom environment. The voices of the students in terms of input into content and process of the class foregrounded the concept of “making use of the voice” once it is heard (Orner, 1992, p. 76).

Encouraging participants to contribute weekly to a conversation about what was important for them to learn and experience not only exemplified the cyclical nature of the action research process, but also reinforced that the students did indeed have a voice in their learning.

Embedded in the element of authority is the issue of power relations between and among the participants and teacher, in this case, researcher-teacher (Orner, 1992). The authority element played out on several levels as demonstrated in the findings. First and most obvious was the authority vested in me as the teacher in a higher education setting. As discussed in Chapter Four, the structure of higher education, especially in terms of awarding grades, creates a chasm that tends to marginalize students, or at least does not allow them to be full partners in their official evaluation (Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003). In addition, the socialization of students to the traditional teacher-as-authority paradigm is difficult to change in one semester, when they are simultaneously involved in four other classes operating from a traditional liberal philosophical approach, where the purpose of education is for the teacher to give knowledge rather than help students construct it (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). As the findings demonstrated, participants consistently expressed positive regard for my attempts to share power and give them a voice in the process, even given the limitations to sharing power inherent in the structure of higher education. I believe the success of the participants in their move toward cultural competence was enhanced by their ability to contribute to their learning by having authority to ask for what they felt they needed, a belief substantiated by Maher and Tetreault (2001).

A second way authority was manifested focuses on the concept of “truth.” Poststructural feminisms problematize the issue of one “truth” and focus on the notion that multiple truths exist (St. Pierre, 2000). The participants in this study all hold Christianity as absolute truth, which creates a power hierarchy in terms of hearing the voices of those that do not value Christianity as

truth. As the findings show, participants were able to acknowledge other ways to express spirituality as valid by the end of the study, thereby giving up some of the authority initially expressed. This situation is very tricky, however, and foregrounds the notion of authenticity (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). The issue of accepting the concept that there may be different truths, when one strongly believes in Christianity and the teachings of Jesus as truth, could create a dissonance. As Tisdell (1998) points out, ideas “too contrary to our belief system” are difficult to consider, let alone embrace (p. 143). Participants who initially displayed resistance to creating space for other truths in terms of spirituality (as demonstrated in the finding regarding spiritual expression), by the end acknowledged that although they found other ways of expressing spirituality “weird,” they were able to “respect” the individual meaning for the person. This shift in participants’ identity, however small, hopefully created space for the resistant participants to nurture the new knowledge and continue to consider the possibility of multiple truths. As McIntyre (1997) points out, “coming to consciousness” about new truths does not mean embracing the new information, but “we have to begin somewhere” (p. 22). Having the conversations, and sharing lived experiences in addition to hearing the voices of others contributed to at least beginning the process of constructing new knowledge for all participants.

Creating space and moving toward making change. Sheared (1999) promotes the concept that learners need to feel validated in their beliefs, values, and lived experiences, and constructing a learning environment that creates a safe place for learners to share their ideas and beliefs is central to culturally responsive education. Throughout this study, a foremost concern was creating a classroom environment that was supportive, safe, and addressed power differentials of the participants and teacher-researcher. Attending to the lived experiences, power bases, and perceptions of the eight female participants and one male participant in the study was

crucial for culturally responsive learning to occur (Sheared, 1999). This was especially important when I introduced participants to new information about racism and White privilege. The lived experiences of most participants did not include many interactions with other races. With the exception of Rae and Nicolas, participants grew up in mostly White areas. Most participants based their initial perception of “the other” on the notion that “people are people,” problematizing the significance of race. Using a critical multicultural perspective and introducing participants to the voices of members of marginalized communities, participants were able to interpret the experience and contextualize the conversation within race, ethnicity, and White privilege (Nieto, 1999). This was a painful experience for some, as Lydia related when she said, “it pains me to know that this stuff [racial discrimination] goes on, and that people are living with this psychological oppression all the time...” and for others it helped them make meaning of otherwise vague awareness of racism and systems of oppression.

This shifting identity experienced by most participants foregrounds the aspect of Whiteness in that the participants became aware that their Whiteness does not change, but their understanding of themselves in the context of being White changed. The participants’ new meaning about their Whiteness as they watched the video encouraged them to reflect on their own sense of Whiteness and what that means for their lives. McIntyre (1997) suggests that as part of White privilege, White people have a choice whether or not to deal with issues of race and privilege. This was evident through the different levels in which participants made meaning and were able to claim their Whiteness and White privilege. In addition, this aspect foregrounds the concept of shifting identity in poststructural feminist thought as participants gained understanding of the intersections of race and systems of privilege (St. Pierre, 2000).

Creating space was accomplished by recognizing that knowledge construction is relational, evolving, and contextual (Luke & Gore, 1992) and deconstructing conventional ways of teaching. The level of sharing stories and lived experiences, as demonstrated by the cohesiveness of the group throughout the semester, and the sharing of personal information reinforced the importance of attending to the affective and relational aspects of learning through connecting with others as well as connecting new ideas to life experience (Tisdell, 2003). As discussed in the previous chapter, attending to the power differential of the teacher-researcher and participants by attempting to share power positively influenced the learning process, as participants indicated in their discussion of this aspect of the experience.

Aspects of the discourse of antiracist education are evident as we look at the findings labeled questioning racist attitudes and concern with social action. As participants deconstructed their stereotypes and confronted their prejudices, they began to take increased individual responsibility for how they can create change (Morelli & Spencer, 2000). As Ndura (2004) points out, many people have an internalized view of their culture from what they learned in their family, and they may have unconsciously internalized oppressive views of the White dominant culture. Inherent in this finding is the notion that the participants went through some measure of deconstructing their previous learning about spirituality and cultural heritage. Although several participants did not get to this point, those that did clearly began to move toward looking for answers to the questions of what to do to change racist attitudes. By the end of the study, they still had more questions than answers, but their increased awareness and desire to advocate for change addressed a goal of the study, to increase social consciousness.

Gender as an Invisible Presence

It is important at this point that we remember that the participants were all White students, predominantly women, so they made meaning of their culture in new ways, often in the context of White privilege. This brings us to the finding that in relation to privilege, participants focused on race, culture, and religion more than gender, which on the surface may seem unlikely since the group was mostly women. Poststructural feminist thought challenges the notion that women share a common experience because of their gender (Dietz, 2000), and problematizes the issue of women as a category (Alcoff, 1997). However, as the finding indicates, this group of eight women and one man did not look at gender as a significant category. Perhaps not surprisingly, this finding is in line with Van Den Bergh's (1995) conceptualization of feminist principles in the context of social work. Although social work literature addresses the intersecting issues of power, authority and difference, this is mostly in the context of the practitioner/client relationship (Dietz, 2000). Therefore, as a social worker educated within this perspective, I perhaps unwittingly perpetuated aspects of feminist theory reflected in thinking of predominantly White, middle class women as a category, rather than looking from a poststructural perspective that foregrounds race, class, and systems of privilege between and among women (Nicholson, 1990). The fact that I addressed race, class, and systems of privilege, but did not address gender, even when participants brought it up speaks to my identity and positionality as a White, middle class women in a gendered profession. In addition, it foregrounds the expression of gender in the social context of the social work profession (Ropers-Huilman, 2003). Was this an unconscious resistance to addressing gender, even with my critical awareness of poststructural feminisms? Hughes (2000) addresses this unconsciousness in terms of adult education and the need for the educator to pay attention to "what cannot be said" and

“what is said but not acknowledged” (p. 53). In other words, rather than treating gender as invisible, I would be aware that I did not significantly address gender and explore the reasons with the students.

Another interesting observation related to gender lies in the gender make-up of the participant group which included one male student and eight female students, a group representative of the gender distribution in the social work program at this college (as discussed previously). The lone male participant not only signified the under-representation of males in social work education and practice, but an interesting dichotomy. He represented privilege, in that he was white and male. However, in this particular class, he functioned as “the other” since the rest of the group was female. The phenomenon brought about given this demographic served to put him in a role as a “privileged other”, therefore constructing a category divergent from usual systems of privilege based on race, class, gender, culture, and ethnicity. In this case, the group valued Nicolas based on his White male privilege, but also considered him “the other”, evident through their communication patterns that often precluded him from giving input (see Chapter Four for further discussion). This observation is supported by the notion that classroom relationships replicate the social construction of power and difference in a higher education setting (Annas & Maher, 1992). In this case, the male in the classroom where the subject taught is traditionally related to females seemed to evoke mutuality, and there did not appear to be any clear evidence of any form of “vendetta against men” (George, 1992, p. 32) on the part of the female students, nor any dismissive patriarchic behavior on the part of Nicolas. As students were constructing knowledge about the concepts of power and privilege during this study, they were experiencing (via the gender dynamics in the classroom), the way that power and privilege play out in their own lives. Although they voiced some of their meaning making regarding this, (as

presented in the finding related to the gendered dimension of culture in the social work profession), it was not explicitly explored during the study. This again reinforces the invisible presence of gender in the classroom throughout this study.

This discussion leads to another area of poststructural feminist perspective, identity and positionality. This is perhaps the element that most affects knowledge construction, according to Maher and Tetreault (2001), in that the positionality of the students and the teacher-researcher (in the case of this study) influences the learning process (Brown, 2001; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Tisdell, 1998). Positionality in terms of gender in this study foregrounds the dichotomy in that, in a class teaching social work to potential practitioners, on the surface my identity and positionality as a female teacher and social worker posits a lesser focus on gender, largely because social work is a gendered profession. However, in the larger context of the male dominant institution, my identity and positionality in terms of gender clearly intersects with systems of privilege and oppression, and leads to marginalization in many situations (this also speaks to why social workers in general have less power in society than male dominated professions). Therefore, the construction of my identity in this classroom was based on my identity as a social worker, and the social constructs of gender in the profession (Ropers-Huilman, 1998).

The participants alluded to this in the finding labeled limited consideration of the gendered dimension of culture in the social work profession. As they began to discuss the positionality of women as dominant in the social work profession, they indicated a feeling of oppression and invisibility in the context of other disciplines, which they attributed to their gender identity. Again, this seems reinforced by the feminist perspectives foregrounded in social work literature that deal predominantly with therapeutic relationships (Dietz, 2000; Van Den

Bergh, 1994) rather than the positionality of women in larger context of the female dominant profession. Although social work literature discussing feminist perspectives begins to look from a poststructuralist view and considers race, class, and oppressions, the context is the therapeutic relationship, not the profession.

My identity as a White woman in a classroom of traditional aged, mostly female students also foregrounds the issue of transference, as students tend to view me as a nurturing, “mother” figure, further shaping my role and positionality in the class. Certainly caring and nurturing are positive qualities, and I recognize and respect boundary issues, but the gender dynamics played out in the social work classroom characterizes the culture of the profession, contextualized in the discussion in social work literature. Van Den Bergh (1995) clearly displays this as she discusses the feminist principles of caring and connecting by using descriptors such as empathy, responsibility, and mutuality. Browne (1994) points out that the societal “undervaluing of caretaking” associates social work with traditional female roles and “women’s work” (p. 8), thereby reinforcing the oppression of the profession. A recent search for articles revealed none in the social work literature addressing the issue of a gendered profession, unless it was in reference to practice. One article appeared in sociology literature that dealt with professions that are “gendered institutions,” and listed social work as fitting the description (Adams, 2003, p. 267). Clearly, the social work profession must address this (apparent) resistance to look at itself in terms of identity and positionality.

Adult education addresses the issue of positionality more clearly, especially in relation to gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, and disability. My positionality and the positionality of the participants (where they are in relation to their shifting identities) played an important part in the dynamics of the classroom and their knowledge construction (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Spirituality

The issue of nurturing spirituality in the classroom has become a bit more prevalent in adult education literature in the recent years with the publication of books and articles on the topic (English & Gillen, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Tisdell, 2000, 2003), though the field had been nearly completely silent on the subject prior to the year 2000. Several authors question the appropriateness of educators taking on the issue of spirituality in the classroom. For example, while Fenwick (2001) is one of the authors and proponents of discussions of spirituality in the classroom, she notes that some may ask questions about the ethical implications of spirituality in the classroom and whether teachers are promoting spirituality for their own needs (the social work profession would ask this question as well). Lauzon (2001) raises the question of whether bringing spirituality into the classroom breaches the boundary between the personal and professional. These issues are not prominent in the classroom of a Christian college where discussion of religion and applying faith to practice is consistent and ongoing. However, the willingness of the participants in this study to discuss spirituality beyond Christianity demonstrated the supportive and safe environment created for students (Fenwick, 2001). The participants in this study would not argue with the literature's assertion that spirituality is an integral part of all being, such that it cannot be separated from oneself (Fenwick, 2001; Gillen & English, 2000; Harris, 2001; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004; Lauzon, 2001 Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). In fact, they struggle more with *how* to incorporate their spirituality in all aspects of their life, especially social work practice.

Introducing the concept of spirituality to students in a Christian higher education setting immediately met with a religious interpretation. Participants promptly inferred a religious context when I asked them to describe their spiritual traditions. Both social work and adult

education literature strongly support this behavior in discussions of definition of spirituality and religion (Astin, 2004; Cascio, 1998; Hodge, 2003; Lauzon, 2001). There is a vast lack of consensus regarding a definition of spirituality and religion in the literature (discussed at length in Chapter Two), and the interchanging of terms is not uncommon (English & Gillen, 2000), as demonstrated by the participants in this study. However, the participants were not averse to making a distinction between spirituality and religion when I proposed a definition, and quickly began to shift toward conceptualizing spirituality as a sense of self and purpose in life (Austin, 2004; Bean, 2000; English, 2000). In addition, they displayed an evolving understanding of themselves as Christians, and were able to validate other's beliefs as spiritual even if those beliefs did not involve God.

Social work discourse considers spirituality a core part of social work practice, and much writing is from a Christian perspective. The findings from this study support the shift the participants made from looking strictly at Christianity to looking at spirituality in the context of culture, as they began framing spirituality in new ways and accepting spiritual differences, especially in spiritual expression. As they shared their cultural symbols and read Wuthnow's (2001) chapter, they articulated a shifting identity similar to what Canda (1998), and Canda and Furman (1999) call spiritual competence. The inclusion of material on spirituality, cultural heritage, and even the discussions that included Christianity in this social work course addressed the paucity of this type of content found in social work education (Hodge, 2003). The small number of social work education programs with content on spirituality in their curriculum (Sheridan et al., 1994) foregrounded the need for this type of study to show how inclusion of spiritual and cultural content is possible and successful in creating awareness in social work students. Therefore, the findings from this study indicate increased awareness of participants in

their understanding of their own spiritual lens, as well as acknowledging the importance of other spiritual practices as valid, thereby upholding the need found in social work literature for more social work education programs to include content on spirituality (Sheridan, 1998).

Including spirituality in the context of the class was not difficult for me as the teacher. My identity as rooted in my spirituality precipitated my comfort level with addressing spirituality in the classroom. I strongly resonate with Shahjahan's (2004) perceptions that we bring our entire being into the classroom the need to teach with "our bodies and souls" (p. 304). As several authors support, the teacher's critical examination of his or her own spiritual beliefs impacts how spiritual issues are treated in the classroom (Astin, 2004; Lauzon, 2001; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000). Interacting with the participants and identifying with their Christian religiosity was helpful in constructing a learning environment where learning about spirituality (and culture) could be transformative (Shahjahan, 2004). In addition, Cranton and Carusetta (2004) stress the importance of striving for authenticity through genuineness, consistently modeling values through actions, and encouraging others to be authentic. This is closely aligned to social work values (National Association of Social Workers, 2004), and central to teaching social work. Operating from this perspective and helping connect the participants with each other to promote their spiritual well-being throughout the study foregrounded the move toward authenticity.

I was surprised at how easily the participants adapted to thinking about spirituality not only apart from Christianity, but also in the context of culture. The Wuthnow (2001) reading and sharing cultural symbols resulted in participants finding new meaning about spirituality and culture. As the findings from the final focus group demonstrate, participants moved from seeing others spirituality as "weird," to articulating an understanding and acceptance of different forms of spiritual expression. As Marilyn says during the final focus group, "it's really obvious in our

discussions that we can't get away from our culture, we can't get away from our spirituality, it's part of who we are and it's going to affect our interactions." This statement (corroborated by all participants) clearly shows the internalization by the end of the study of the concept of spirituality as rooted in culture.

Drawing on Multiple Domains of Learning to Increase Culturally Responsive Education

Drawing on multiple domains of learning (the affective, cognitive, spiritual, symbolic, and cultural) and using various pedagogical strategies to increase culturally responsive education is central to this study. Foregrounding the relational aspects of the action research process served to promote cohesiveness of the group and contribute to the learning that occurred. Since action research is research done with a group instead of on a group, the informal structure and ability of the researcher to adapt many methods and strategies was instrumental in carrying out the research process to provide culturally responsive education.

Use of symbol and narrative. Using symbolic representation provided a means for participants to "think outside the box" by exercising their creativity in expressing themselves. Tisdell (2003) and others discuss the use of symbol extensively, and bringing this concept to the social work classroom encouraged authenticity and contributed to the cohesion of the group as they interacted in a format unlike traditional teaching pedagogy. By sharing symbols and telling their stories, participants used more than cognitive means to express themselves and gain understanding; they connected the affective as well. As Gay (2000) points out, the impact of varying methods of communication in the culturally responsive classroom assists students to embody "cultural values and ways of knowing" so teachers and learners can "genuinely understand each other" (p. 81).

The finding labeled framing spirituality in new ways reflects the value of engaging the participants affectively, which served to encourage the participants to hear each other and affectively engage in one another's stories. In addition, the concept of "learning-within-relationship" addresses the meaning making of the participants as they heard each other's stories and developed a cohesive group, rather than engage traditional pedagogy of more individualized teaching (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 177). This contributed to the powerful effect of the strategy of sharing cultural symbols, as well as further supporting the importance of group process in action research.

Presenting voice of "the other" through video and reading. Another strategy directed at providing culturally responsive education utilized visual and literary genres that brought the voices of marginalized groups into the classroom. Readings from "ethnic authors" as in the article by Marbley (2004), the stories written by the participants in Wuthnow's (2001) study, and the video *Color of Fear* (Wah & Hunter, 1994) not only gave voice to marginalized groups, but also validated the authentic identity of the people in the readings and video, and helped participants problematize the notion of one truth (Gay, 2000, p. 74). Through the introduction of a "culturally pluralistic perspective" through the readings and video, and creating space for participants to reflect and react to what they saw and read, participants made meaning relationally (through discussion) and cognitively (Tisdell, 2003, p. 214). In addition, the readings and video were relevant to the course content, as they depicted group development, process, and dynamics.

The Marbley (2004) article went even further as the author discussed her experience facilitating a group where the same video (*Color of Fear*) was used to help members gain awareness and exposure to various racial and ethnic groups. Participants in this study could

relate their experiences and reactions to the video to the members of the group in the article, thereby normalizing their feelings and reactions. The complementary aspects of the two strategies were unintentional, but served to enhance the meaning making and validity of the strategies.

Support through technology. Van Soest, Canon, and Grant (2000) discuss the use of technology to encourage interaction and engage students while discussing sensitive topics. Using the Blackboard Learning System was a valuable tool during this study, as it enabled students to discuss difficult topics asynchronously during out-of-class time. The findings suggest that in the early stages of the study, participants were more likely to display emotion and discuss at a deeper level when they carried out online discussions. This was especially evidenced during the discussion of the video *Color of Fear* (Wah & Hunter, 1994), as students were presented information through the voices of “the other,” a new situation for many.

Similarly, Tisdell (2003) discussed the strategy of forming “mentoring communities” (p. 221) so students can offer support to each other during times of dealing with difficult information. As participants addressed issues of race and systems of privilege, they used the asynchronous discussions to support, confront, challenge, and make meaning of their experience in class. They continued in mentoring communities throughout the study, discussing events and issues at several points during the semester, such as after reading Wuthnow’s (2001) chapter, viewing the video, and sharing awareness of spiritual traditions. By gaining insight into not only their own, but also others’ cultural and spiritual lens, participants seemed to feel free to support and challenge each other in an appropriate forum. Often participants referenced the online discussions in the classroom during face-to-face discussions, providing a rich contribution to all aspects of the study.

The Blackboard system provided a means for students to journal and complete critical incident questionnaires (CIQ) online. This strategy, promoted by Van Soest and Garcia (2003), enabled participants to record thoughts, feelings, observations, interpretations, and questions in dialogue with the teacher-researcher. Initially, I asked participants to post their CIQ's and journal anonymously, as suggested by Van Soest and Garcia (2003). However, the Blackboard system was not set up to allow individual, anonymous online posts. I contacted the social work educator's listserv, of which the authors' participate, to try to enact the strategy as they suggest. I determined that although the anonymous strategy is suggested in the literature, educators using the Blackboard system are unable to actualize the strategy as written. Instead, students' chose to make their journals and CIQ's known to me, which seemed to work well, however I cannot determine if the entries would have been different if anonymity was preserved.

Implications of the Study for Adult Education and Social Work

The literature in the field of adult education and social work typically does not address spirituality in the context of culture, or place much emphasis on the students' understanding of their spiritual and cultural heritage as important to cultural competence as social work practitioners. Social work education on the campus of the small, Christian liberal arts college where this study took place does not typically address systems of power and privilege, nor does it recognize and challenge the positionality and authority of the teacher or students. As discussed in the previous section, poststructural feminist perspectives underlying this study foreground the need to deconstruct categories of race, class, gender, as well as recognize systems of privilege, and, as contextualized in this study, give participants a way to make meaning of new information aimed at increasing cultural competence.

The critical action research process employed in this study worked well within the context of providing culturally responsive education. This was largely characterized by the evolving, informal, cyclical features that foregrounded solving problems and creating awareness through collaborative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It allowed me to make changes in my own teaching practice and then observe the outcomes of those changes (Jacobsen, 1998; McNicoll, 1999), as demonstrated in the knowledge construction and shifting identity of the participants by the end of the study. In addition, the aspects of the critical action research approach to the study foregrounded development of critical consciousness and knowledge construction that was transformative (McIntyre, 1997). The informal nature of action research lent itself to the classroom setting, especially in light of the experiential focus of learning about group development and dynamics. This approach resulted in several implications from the study to inform the fields of adult education and social work, including corroborating potential strategies implemented during the study. This section presents these implications labeled: importance of hearing other's voices, value of group process, importance of ongoing support, value of creating space, and value of technology.

Importance of Hearing Other's Voices

A major premise of culturally responsive education is the recognition of the role culture and systems of privilege play in marginalizing both students and teacher (Guy, 1999a). Social work classes at the college I teach do not (based on my knowledge of the curriculum), as a general practice, include a culturally responsive approach and seek to create a space for students to become aware of how they view clients through a lens influenced by their cultural and spiritual heritage. Some classes focus solely on diversity and take a multicultural approach to education (Banks, 2002). This approach does not critically examine the intersections of race,

class, power differences, and gender. The need for social work students to move toward becoming culturally competent practitioners requires more than a multicultural approach in the classroom. The students need to deconstruct categories of race, class, and privilege, and gain an understanding of how systems of privilege play a part in their lives and practice as social workers. In addition, gaining an understanding of spiritual practices and expressions that are different from their own broaden the perspectives of the students and contribute to their level of cultural competence. The culturally responsive pedagogy used in this study focused in part on bringing the voices of marginalized groups and those that are different to the forefront, thereby informing students through the voices, rather than hearing from the teacher. If the teacher is solely responsible for sharing knowledge, the students get only the perspective of the teacher experiences, in this case, a White, middle class women. By bringing the voices and lived experiences of the other into the classroom through video and readings, rather than traditional pedagogy such as utilizing only the textbook (in this case, written by a White male), the students benefited from an approach that went beyond multiculturalism and addressed perspectives of critical multiculturalism and anti-racist education. Therefore, this study benefited students by increasing their awareness of systems of privilege and the influence of their cultural and spiritual heritage in working with those that are different. It also benefited the field of social work and adult education by reinforcing strategies suggested in the literature of using affective and multiple modalities to bring the voices of “the other” into the classroom (Van Soest, Canon, & Grant, 2000; Sevig & Etxkorn, 2001; Dyche & Zayas, 2001).

Value of Group Process

Conducting this study in a course focused on teaching group development and dynamics to social work students served to provide a benefit to the students and the research process

beyond my initial expectation. Utilizing group theory and observing group dynamics capitalized on the educational value to the students by affording them an experiential approach to learning about group development and dynamics, a documented pedagogy to teach social work practice skills (Shulman, 1999; Anderson, 1997). The cohesion that developed assisted the process and served to give students a rich experience whereby they cognitively and affectively gained knowledge and self-awareness. In addition, the stages of group process (Corey, 2000) very closely paralleled the action research process. Although some authors mention the need for attention to group dynamics in action research, there is typically no direct connection to group theory, and the close alignment of the characteristics of the stages of group development to the action research process indicates an opportunity to incorporate group theory into action research discourse.

This implication greatly contributed to the participants' understanding of working with groups as they experienced the process and dynamics as the research unfolded. It also contributed to the participants understanding of relationship and affectively hearing from one another, as well as the need to build trust when discussing some of the difficult topics (Toseland & Rivas, 2005) such as race and White privilege. Recognizing the value of group process during this study also contributed to the knowledge base of social work literature in that it provides social work educators a framework that attends to the needs of the students to learn about group development, while providing a context for incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy. This study certainly contributed to my recognition of how to use group process to enhance culturally responsive education, as well as the importance of foregrounding the group dynamics happening in the class as a way to promote culturally responsive education. This applies not only to courses focusing on group dynamics, but to other courses as well. It is important to keep in mind that a

classroom of students functions in many ways as a group, so attending to group process is necessary.

For the field of adult education, this study contributes to the knowledge base by suggesting that a focus on group process and dynamics be added to the conversation on culturally responsive education. Tisdell (2003) briefly mentions learning in a group setting, however the attention to group process and development in this study proved to be a significant finding, foregrounding the need for additional consideration.

Importance of Ongoing Support

The unfolding nature of the action research process was a critical component in this study. The cyclical rather than linear aspect of action research allowed reflection and observation to be continuous so that planning could occur as the knowledge construction unfolded. Although this study took place within a bounded 15-week period, the class met twice a week so data analysis took place after each class, and strategies planned and implemented as the need arose. The participants' reflection also was ongoing, and as it occurred both asynchronously and face-to-face, they could make meaning of the events continuously during the semester. The multiple ways reflection occurred (journaling, asynchronous discussion, face-to-face interaction, and CIQ's) promoted reflecting on the process of reflection, and gave participants the flexibility to reflect in various ways during the class sessions and outside of the class sessions (Schmitz, Stakeman, & Sisneros, 2001). This promoted meaning making through connecting with the lived experiences of the participants, even as the study was in progress.

Time played a critical role in this study, and as the participants began to deconstruct their beliefs about racism, spirituality and White privilege, they made many connections and challenged many assumptions they held from childhood. However, this process did not end when

the 15-week semester ended. It is likely they will need additional time to reflect on their learning, and as new situations present themselves in social work practice and lived experiences, their assumptions will continue to be challenged. Social work literature addresses this indirectly, in that dealing with clients in a therapeutic setting brings about similar concerns as information is uncovered that is potentially overwhelming (e.g. recollection of sexual abuse), but consideration of this in the context of the learning environment is scanty addressed. Van Soest and Garcia (2003) begin to look at this when they relate it to a grieving process, but do not go so far as to offer insight to what happens when the class ends. However, adult education literature does not attend to this issue. Attention to the aspect of beginning the process of increasing students awareness through culturally responsive education, as well as what to do when the course ends to further support students in their new learning warrants attention in the adult education literature. Hopefully, in this study, the participants' shifting identity and emerging lens through which they view culture and spirituality serves to support them as they encounter greater challenges in their lives and social work practice.

Value of Creating Space

Culturally responsive education relies on constructing a learning environment to validate beliefs, and create the "cultural context" for learning (Gay, 2000, p. 42; Sheared, 1999). In addition, Gay (2000) discusses culturally responsive education as empowering and transformative, and contributing to the learner's own knowledge construction and meaning making through attending to issues of power, positionality, and culture (Sheared, 1999). In this study, structuring a learning environment that encouraged students to construct their own knowledge and make meaning of their lived experiences through the relationships and connections with others foregrounded the value of creating a space for meaning making to occur.

By giving participants space to make meaning of the activities and strategies introduced, rather than highly structure their journaling, discussions, and means of reflection, I found that they were free to take their learning in the direction most meaningful to them and express their “authentic identity” (May, 2002, p. 56). Traditional pedagogy is typically more prescriptive, that is, relying on strictly formatted responses and highly structured assignments. By providing prompts for students to contextualize their learning, such as a guide for critical reflection on the video, critical incident questionnaires, and flexible due dates for journals and assignments, participants could organize their reflection in ways that made sense to them, while still acknowledging the developmental stage of undergraduate students (i.e. varying levels of self-directness in their learning). This implication supports the adult education literature related to seeking authenticity, finding voice, and deconstructing power and authority (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; hooks, 1984; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Tisdell, 2003). In addition, it contributes to the social work literature as it supports the use of methods of reflection, but encourages further conversation related to encouraging students in finding their voice by creating space in the classroom structure.

Value of Technology

The use of technology was a highlight of the study in terms of creating more space for students to communicate with each other and the teacher-researcher. It provided an extension of the classroom, and when time during the class sessions proved short, participants could continue the discussion asynchronously. As described previously, the use of mentoring communities and online journaling (Tisdell, 2003; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003) assisted participants to support each other during times of confronting their own beliefs, and promoted cohesion of the group as they shared thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

The use of technology, specifically a method of asynchronous discussion and feedback, greatly enhanced the culturally responsive aspects of the pedagogical process in this study. Social work educators promote this concept, especially in relation to increasing cultural competence and diversity education. Adult education, at least in my personal experience, uses technology in the form of asynchronous discussion. This could serve to enhance the use of mentoring communities (Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003) by providing a means for students to communicate and interact that could encourage deeper levels of expressing emotion.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study addressed the need to include culturally responsive education in the social work curriculum to increase the cultural competence of social work students, as they become practitioners. In addition to describing the implications of the study for the fields of adult education and social work, it is important to discuss the limitations and strengths of the study. This section presents the limitations and strengths, as well as recommendations for further research.

Limitations of the Study

There were five limitations identified for this study: time management, size and diversity of the participant group, role of the researcher, degrees of social consciousness, and generalizability of action research. Some of these limitations manifested as the study progressed; others became clear upon final reflection. I discuss the limitations in this section, followed by the strengths of the study.

Time management. I conducted this study during a course that met twice a week for 15-weeks. During the semester, I needed to attend to the curriculum content as well as collect data for the study. In a course where the curriculum is already full, introducing additional strategies to

increase the cultural responsiveness of the course was challenging, to say the least, and required constant attention to both aspects: the course content and the study. I mention this as a limitation because as the researcher-teacher, I felt I had a dual role. In essence, I did, but my initial conceptualization of the study and culturally responsive education as an “add-on” to the course certainly contributed to my challenge. Reconfiguring a course to attend to culturally responsive material is a process that can be refined each time the course is taught. My inclusion of the video, readings, sharing cultural symbols, and other strategies would not likely occur in one semester in one course. The strategies can be infused in courses over the curriculum, with consideration of the course objectives and focus. In this case, they were “crammed” into one course to test the strategies and the impact on students’ learning. The issue of incorporating culturally responsive education, then, becomes finding the appropriate strategies based on the learning objectives for each phase of the student’s educational program.

I recognized this tension midway through the semester, as I needed to take time during class sessions to attend to the learning needs of the students in terms of learning skills to work with groups. Although the focus of the class (group development) perfectly suited the action research process, in that students could experientially learn about group dynamics, some of the time needed to be dedicated to group theory and simulating newly learned skills. Overall, this course was ideal for conducting this study, but social work educators should not try to “fit in” all strategies in one course.

Size and diversity of the participant group. The social work classes at the college I teach are small, due to the size of the social work program and the exclusion of non-majors in classes teaching skills for social work practice. Having nine participants was actually a mid-size social work class, but to increase cultural competence of social work students, having male and female

voices and people of color would enhance the learning for all students. Without diversity of race and gender, it was incumbent on me to bring the voices to the students, which certainly resulted in learning, but I wonder if more learning would occur if the group were more diverse. Culturally responsive education, as discussed by Gay (2000) and Tisdell (2003) focuses on the diversity of the group and bringing the voices of “the other” to the forefront. In a class with no racial diversity and very little gender diversity (including the teacher) perspectives are very limited to the thinking and inherent biases of the dominant culture.

Role of the researcher. My identity and positionality as a White, female teacher in a class of White, predominantly female students sets up a gender dynamic that served to eclipse dealing with the issue of gender as a category during the study. As I was a co-constructor of knowledge (a characteristic of the action research process), I was also entrenched in the social construction of my “femaleness”, and for all my intentions to be culturally responsive in my teaching, missed the opportunity to address this important aspect. I operationalized my assumptions about constructions of race, class, and systems of privilege, but not gender, and as Maher & Tetreault (2001) point out, my ability to address these issues shapes classroom knowledge.

Degrees of social consciousness. One of the goals of this study was to increase participants’ social consciousness and encourage them to work for social change. While all participants demonstrated an increased awareness of systems of privilege, especially as it affects social work practice, this does not guarantee they will advocate for social change. The knowledge constructed during the study that was related to a greater understanding of systems of oppression helped participants understand their positionality and the importance of creating social change, but developing a “critical consciousness with an emphasis on social change” does not necessarily result in social change (McIntyre, 1997, p. 22). There was no mechanism in this

study to engage participants in a social change effort, other than in the classroom. It is a limitation of this study that no evidence of creating social change emerged. However, in light of the time management issues, a follow-up in the next social work class could focus on a project to embody the learning and shifting identity of the students.

In addition, I have limited knowledge as to whether or not introducing the strategies to increase critical consciousness will increase the students' culturally competency as social work practitioners. This remains to be seen, and as the participants are engaged in practice situations, such as senior field placements, evidence of the impact of this study will be more apparent through field evaluations and field instructor observations. The increased knowledge construction, language use, and questioning by the end of the semester are encouraging signs that students will be more culturally competent, but recognizing that coming to cultural competence is a process, requiring ongoing learning and meaning making.

Generalizability of action research. There are several limitations to the action research paradigm. One is the generalizability of results as limited to the specific group in which the research was conducted (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Generalizability in qualitative research does not fit the traditional view that values replicating the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, the strategies implemented through the critical action research design resulted in participants' knowledge construction about issues of culture and spirituality. The findings from this study are applicable to the students in this social work class, to the social work program at this college, and to me as a social work educator, in that I learned the feasibility of the strategies and implications for use in other social work classes. Therefore, we reconceptualize generalizability by foregrounding the relevance of the findings to the individual participants in the study and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Strengths of the Study

In this section, I identify and discuss the strengths of this study. Based on the observations and reflection of the overall study, I recognize these four strengths: methodology, pedagogical strategies, benefit to the students, and improved practice.

Methodology. The non-linear, cyclical design of the action research process contributed to this study by foregrounding an evolving learning process and encouraging knowledge construction through a problem solving and relational approach (Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Stringer, 1996). A purpose of this study was to create awareness and change attitudes and behaviors to be more culturally competent. The critical action research methodology was especially relevant since it provided a process by which participants could begin to understand and discuss the complex issues of race, power, and systems of privilege (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). In addition, the critical component of the action research process that foregrounded social justice, critical consciousness, and sharing power (McIntyre, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) encouraged creating the space for participants to construct their own knowledge about themselves.

Pedagogical strategies. Powerful meaning making occurred for participants as they viewed the video, read the articles, and constructed knowledge individually and as a group, both face-to-face and asynchronously. The pedagogical strategies implemented contributed to the knowledge construction and resulted in the shifting identity of the participants as they gave voice to their meaning making about themselves and social work practice. In addition, an outcome of this study is that the use of these strategies in this study reinforces the adult education and social work literature that suggests that the strategies increase student awareness of social and cultural

issues. The findings of this study verify the value of these strategies, at least in the context of this study.

Benefit to the students. The most important strength of this study to me is the benefit of the action research process to the students. As an educator, I care deeply about student learning, and the impetus for this project came from observing a problem and wanting to address it. Reflecting on the data and findings and realizing the learning that occurred as the participants moved through the semester made the project worth the effort. All participants reported benefiting from the study to some degree, from feeling deeply challenged to begin advocating for social change to gaining a personal understanding of how their cultural and spiritual lens influences their practice. The increased knowledge the students shared in the final focus group and in follow-up emails clearly demonstrated the value they felt personally and professionally through their participation in the study.

Improved practice. An assumption of action research is evaluating and improving practice through inductive study by engaging participants in the study of their own problem and becoming part of the change process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). I am an adult educator and social work practitioner, and believe in an ethical obligation for ongoing evaluation of my practice. This study enabled me to formally evaluate my teaching and foreground areas of strength and need for improvement. My greatest awareness coming out of this study is the powerful impact I have on the students and the tremendous responsibility of teaching undergraduate students to be more culturally competent as social work practitioners. As the study unfolded, the knowledge constructed by the participants and me that led to implementing specific strategies highlighted to me how everything I do in the classroom, however small, significantly influences student learning. By examining my practice through this study, I became acutely

aware of my responsibility as a teacher to be cognizant of my authority and positionality, and the influence of power and privilege in the classroom. In addition, recognizing the gender unconsciousness at play during the study points out how easily I was caught up in my own socially constructed identity and did not realize the need for change. This study reinforced my commitment to the process of teaching and learning, especially in a culturally responsive way.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several recommendations for future research stem from this study. First, the nature of critical action research limits the generalization of findings to the study at hand. Therefore, a clear recommendation suggests continuing this research in other social work classes with the participant group. It is not a goal to replicate action research, but the planning, acting, observing, reflecting cycle can be continued taking into account the feedback and data analysis from this study. As stated previously, the strategies introduced in this study could be implemented in other classes, rather than packed into one class. By repeating this study and building on the participants' knowledge construction, there could be movement toward social change. In addition, conducting a similar study in a course focused on another aspect of social work practice, for example, practice with families, or practice with organizations/communities, could demonstrate how the use of the strategies affects knowledge construction in another area of practice. This same idea applies to conducting a similar study in a course with students who are in their first or second year of the social work program, and would potentially be in a different place in their identity development.

Another recommendation for further research takes into account the unconsciousness of gender in this study. A similar study should foreground attention to gender as well as race, class, power and systems of privilege and fully address the components of culturally responsive

education. By incorporating attention to gender and gender dynamics in the class, as well as social work as a profession, participants would likely gain additional learning as well as greater awareness of shifting identity.

A third recommendation involves including people of color and other minorities in the study. This would enhance the concept of giving voice and creating space for the lived experiences of the participants and marginalized members of the group. The homogeneity of the participants in the current study in terms of race and gender resulted in limited meaning making, whereas including participants of color would allow participants to engage in their own knowing, as well as others' knowing and learn from both experiences (Kirshman, 2005). Similar to the previous recommendation, a more diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, class, and gender would change the dynamics and afford increased opportunity to address culturally responsive educational pedagogy.

Lastly, a recommendation for further research addresses the time management aspect of attending to curriculum content as well as responsibilities for conducting a study. Incorporating culturally responsive material into a course should augment the curriculum content rather than be in addition to the required content. If this type of study is conducted again in a social work class, I recommend integrating assignments and relevant class material with the strategies to increase culturally responsive education, rather than viewing them as a separate program. This would reduce the pressure on the researcher-teacher to "fit it all in" and make the study more valuable, and more likely to be fully integrated into the curriculum for future use.

Final Reflections

I chose to do this study soon after beginning my teaching position at this Christian college. My initial observations of the students as uninformed about issues of systems of

privilege and cultural competence led me to want to influence their attitudes and behaviors and find out what impact culturally responsive education could have in their lives and practice. I do not think I fully realized how conducting this study would impact my own learning about teaching. I had a cognitive awareness of the collaborative nature of the action research process, and co-constructing knowledge, but the impact of the study on my learning became apparent as the study unfolded. I became more aware of the affective and relational aspects of the teaching and learning process over the course of the semester. Although I have always recognized the importance of relationships in teaching and social work practice, the authority issues and power differentials inherent in traditional classroom structures influenced me and I strived to maintain the distance and boundaries I felt were necessary. Through this study, I recognized that although in undergraduate education boundaries are important (due to the developmental level of the students), I can deconstruct the themes of authority and power to be a more effective teacher.

I welcomed the opportunity to conduct this study and look at my practice from an empirical perspective. I appreciate the new learning I gained, especially in terms of how I unconsciously operationalize my feminist perspectives. Before this study, I would have argued that I practiced more from a poststructural feminist perspective, but clearly, as demonstrated through this study, I worked from a psychological model, looking at women as a category rather than recognizing differences between and among women in terms of race, class, age, power, and privilege. My ability to intellectualize poststructuralism as a concept is perhaps the first step in moving toward affectively internalizing and incorporating the beliefs into practice.

Inherent in conducting research in my own course is an element of risk taking. First, I put myself in a position to risk negative student evaluations if the research affected the course and student learning negatively. This could ultimately have an influence on my promotion and tenure

(although not likely with one class), and tear down my reputation with the students in the social work major. In addition, by asking students for weekly feedback about the class, I committed myself to acting on the feedback and changing my teaching. This was initially a challenge, as I instinctively wanted to hang on to my authority as a teacher and the power inherent in my position. I felt a few moments of apprehension as I considered implementing the strategy of using the critical incident questionnaires, but I overcame those thoughts and as students completed the CIQ's each week, the value of the feedback (not only for the study, but for my teaching) put my fears at rest. This risk taking and learning through giving up power and authority was instrumental in my meaning making during the study. So much so, I am using CIQ's in other classes this semester.

So what does this all mean for me as a teacher in a small, Christian liberal arts college? How does conducting this study make a difference in the larger institutional community, as well as the social work program? First, my awareness of my identity in terms of my feminist perspective answers some questions as to the status of gender in the institution. The feminist perspective I operated from served to perpetuate the notion of women as a category, and in the context of an institution where White males are the majority and traditional male values are only beginning to be challenged, I was buying into the male dominance and keeping the status quo. The institution has potential to break through many socially constructed stereotypes regarding gender. With a president who is a woman and several women in senior administration, it is poised to deconstruct traditional notions of women and encourage critical awareness of intersectional feminisms as they relate to the faculty and students. However, there is a long way to go, and my learning through the process of this research puts me in a position to advance my understanding and impact other women on campus. However, race, class, and ethnicity are a

different story. There continues to be a very small ratio of people of color in the institution.

Senior administration is working to improve those ratios, but at this time, it is very inequitable.

Overall, this study reinforced the need for culturally responsive education in social work classes. I firmly believe it reinforced the need for culturally responsive education in all classes on campus. I remind myself that affecting change is a process, and beginning with this study I hope the process continues and ultimately results in increasing the cultural competence of social work practitioners who practice for social justice and create social change.

The vision for this study was to increase cultural competence of social work students through the educational process, and help them move toward increasing critical consciousness and effecting social change. This goal has more far-reaching effects however, in that by including culturally responsive education as praxis in social work education overall, the social work profession, and ultimately society, would benefit from increased understanding, inclusion, and acceptance of “the other” in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF RECRUITMENT

Teaching Social Work Students through Culturally Responsive Education: An Action Research Study Drawing on Culture and Spirituality

To: (student's name)

Date: August, 2005

Re: Action Research study to take place during the fall semester

Hello! I hope you had a restful summer. It is soon time for classes to begin, and I want to tell you what is happening in our Groups class this fall.

As many of you know, I am working on my doctoral dissertation at Penn State University. As part of my research, I am conducting a study of how the inclusion of culturally and spiritually responsive material in course curriculum affects students' perceptions and awareness of their worldviews. I will be introducing various activities during our social work class, and then analyzing the responses through conversations, small group activities, and through our assignment and projects. The overall objective is for students to become more culturally competent social workers.

All students will take part in the activities as part of the course content. All activities and assignments are designed to meet the course outcomes for teaching you about group work in social work, and they will have a focus on working with diverse populations. Although you will be taking part in all the activities, you can choose not to have any observations or information about you included in my research. By signing the consent form, you decide if I can use your input in my final analysis of the data I collect during the semester.

What does this mean for you if you choose to participate? The good news is that is DOES NOT mean any extra work on your part. Everything we do is part of the normal class syllabus. If you choose to participate, any information I collect is strictly confidential and remains locked in a file in my office. I would like to audio tape some of our small group sessions, and I will keep the tapes confidential. Your name will not be attached to the study in any way. I will use pseudonyms during the final write up of the study.

In addition, I WILL NOT KNOW who agrees to participate and who is not a participant until the end of the semester after the grades are posted. That way, you do not have to feel that choosing not to participate can affect your grade in any way. When you send back the consent form (attached to this letter), it goes to my advisor at Penn State, and she keeps them in her office until after I post your grades. The only thing she will check is to be sure I have enough participants to carry out the project.

I am excited about the possibility of all of you being part of my research. Please think about whether you will choose to participate, and sign the enclosed consent form before coming to class on August 30.

Thank you,

Vicki Root
Assistant Professor of Social Work

APPENDIX B: MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Teaching Social Work Students through Culturally Responsive Education: An Action Research Study Drawing on Culture and Spirituality

The Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (MAKSS)

The Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (MAKSS) is designed as a self-assessment of your multicultural counseling awareness, knowledge, and skills. This shortened form is condensed from a 60-item survey designed by Michael D'Andrea, Judy Daniels, and Ronald Heck, Department of Counselor Education, University of Hawaii, Manoa. It is divided into three sections. Each section contains items that measure multicultural awareness, multicultural counseling knowledge, or multicultural counseling skills.

Please respond to all 30 items, even if you are not working with clients or actively conducting groups. Base your response on what you think at this time. Try to assess yourself as honestly as possible rather than answering in the way you think would be desirable.

Multicultural Awareness

1. One of the potential negative consequences about gaining information concerning specific cultures is that students might stereotype members of those cultural groups according to the information they have gained.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

2. At this time in your life, how would you rate yourself in terms of understanding how your cultural background has influenced the way you think and act?

Very limited Limited Fairly aware Very aware

3. At this point in your life, how would you rate your understanding of the impact of the way you think and act when interacting with persons of different cultural backgrounds?

Very limited Limited Fairly aware Very aware

4. The human service professions, especially counseling and social work, have failed to meet the mental health needs of ethnic minorities.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

5. At the present time, how would you generally rate yourself in terms of being able to accurately compare your own cultural perspective with that of a person from another culture?

- | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|
| | Very limited | Limited | Good | Very good |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|
6. The criteria of self-awareness, self-fulfillment, and self-discovery are important measures in most counseling sessions.
- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
7. Promoting a client's sense of psychological independence is usually a safe goal to strive for in most helping situations.
- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
8. How would you react to the following statement? In general, social work services should be directed toward assisting clients to adjust to stressful environmental situations.
- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
9. Psychological problems vary with the culture of the client.
- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
10. There are some basic skills that are applicable to create successful outcomes regardless of the client's cultural background.
- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|

Multicultural Knowledge

At the present time, how would you rate your own understanding of the following terms:

11. Culture

Very limited	Limited	Good	Very good
---------------------	----------------	-------------	------------------

12. Ethnicity

Very limited	Limited	Good	Very good
---------------------	----------------	-------------	------------------

13. Racism

Very limited	Limited	Good	Very good
---------------------	----------------	-------------	------------------

14. Prejudice

Very limited	Limited	Good	Very good
---------------------	----------------	-------------	------------------

15. Multicultural Counseling

Very limited	Limited	Good	Very good
---------------------	----------------	-------------	------------------

16. Ethnocentrism

Very limited Limited Good Very good

17. Spirituality

Very limited Limited Good Very good

18. In social work, clients from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds should be given the same treatment that White mainstream clients receive.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

19. The difficulty with the concept of “integration” is its implicit bias in favor of the dominant culture.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

20. Racial and ethnic persons are underrepresented in counseling and social work.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

Multicultural Counseling Skills**21. How would you rate your ability to conduct an effective interview with a person from a cultural background significantly different from your own?**

Very limited Limited Good Very good

22. How would you rate your ability to effectively assess the mental health needs of a person from a cultural background significantly different from your own?

Very limited Limited Good Very good

23. In general, how would you rate yourself in terms of being able to effectively deal with biases, discrimination, and prejudices directed at you by a client in a counseling setting?

Very limited Limited Good Very good

24. How well would you rate your ability to accurately identify culturally biased assumptions as they relate to your professional training?

Very limited Limited Good Very good

25. In general, how would you rate your skill level in terms of being able to provide appropriate counseling services to culturally different clients?

Very limited **Limited** **Good** **Very good**

26. How would you rate your ability to effectively secure information and resources to better serve culturally different clients?

Very limited **Limited** **Good** **Very good**

27. How would you rate your ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of women?

Very limited **Limited** **Good** **Very good**

28. How would you rate your ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of men?

Very limited Limited Good Very good

29. How well would you rate your ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of older adults?

Very limited **Limited** **Good** **Very good**

30. How well would you rate your ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of persons who come from very poor socioeconomic backgrounds?

Very limited **Limited** **Good** **Very good**

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey

The results from the questionnaires are presented within the three sections of the MAKSS: multicultural awareness, multicultural counseling knowledge, and multicultural counseling skills. A summary of the questions in each section is reflected in the following displays of the data from the questionnaire administered during the initial focus group, and the questionnaire administered in the final focus group.

Initial Questionnaire Results

SECTION	PARTICIPANT RATING SUMMARY
	Range: 1=very limited/strongly disagree 4=very good/strongly agree
Multicultural Awareness	2.9
Multicultural Counseling Knowledge	2.6
Multicultural Counseling Skills	2.4

Final Questionnaire Results

SECTION	PARTICIPANT RATING SUMMARY
	Range: 1=very limited/strongly disagree 4=very good/strongly agree
Multicultural Awareness	3.3
Multicultural Counseling Knowledge	3.1
Multicultural Counseling Skills	3.0

APPENDIX C: CRITICAL INCIDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Teaching Social Work Students through Culturally Responsive Education: An Action Research Study Drawing on Culture and Spirituality

Please respond to the following questions at the end of each week. Responses should be posted between the end of class Thursday and 12 midnight on Monday each week. Please refer to the class discussions, readings, films, etc. that occur during the week of classes. You can answer in short phrases if you wish.

1. A time in class that I felt most engaged was...
2. A time in class that I felt least engaged was...
3. The thing that surprised me most was...
4. The most important thing I learned was...
5. The thing I hoped we would talk about was...
6. What I hope we talk about in future classes...

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP GUIDELINES

Teaching Social Work Students through Culturally Responsive Education: An Action Research Study Drawing on Culture and Spirituality

Initial Focus Group Guide for Discussion

1. What is your understanding of culturally competent social work practice?
2. How culturally competent do you feel currently as you practice in volunteer situations?
3. What do you feel you need to learn in order to be a culturally competent social work practitioner?
4. How would you describe your cultural heritage?
5. How do you think that knowing about your cultural heritage will help you in social work practice?
6. Describe a situation where you had some sense of your own culture as different from others.
7. What would you like to learn during this semester about culture and cultural competence?
8. What ideas or concerns do you have that I should be aware of as I plan the sessions for this semester? Describe the spiritual tradition you grew up in.
9. What sort of personal spiritual experiences (and/or practices stand out to you during your years at home?
10. What made these experiences special?
11. How have they informed your later life?

Final Focus Group Guide for Discussion

*Teaching Social Work Students through Culturally Responsive Education: An Action Research
Study Drawing on Culture and Spirituality*

1. What did you learn this semester about culture and spirituality, particularly in relation to those who are different from you?
2. How would you describe your cultural competence as a social worker now versus at the beginning of the semester?
3. What do you know now about the connection between culture and spirituality that you did not know at the beginning of the semester?
4. What strategies used this semester contributed to your learning about culture and spirituality?

APPENDIX E: COURSE SYLLABUS

Teaching Social Work Students through Culturally Responsive Education: An Action Research Study Drawing on Culture and Spirituality

SOW 372 Helping Processes III: Practice with Groups Messiah College Social Work Program Course Syllabus Fall 2005

Professor: Vicki Root

Office: Boyer 356

Phone: Home:

Work:

Office Hours: M (1-3), W (9-12), TH (12-1) other hours by appointment

E-Mail: vroot@messiah.edu

Course Syllabus

Mission of the Social Work Program at Messiah College

The mission of the Social Work Program at Messiah College is to offer a professional degree with a strong liberal arts foundation that prepares graduates for generalist social work practice at the entry level and/or prepares them for graduate study. Guided by the accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the program integrates principles of the Christian faith with social work values, knowledge, and skills, along with a commitment of respect for diversity and the enhancement of social and economic justice for all people.

Definition of the Generalist Social Work Perspective

The Messiah College Social Work Program incorporates the use of a generalist perspective to assist students in developing a model of practice. Generalist social work practice includes knowledge, abilities, skills and values that: 1) build on a liberal arts orientation, 2) incorporate systems, strengths and person-in-environment perspectives, 3) are applicable among the multiple fields of practice and practice settings, and 4) are relevant to all client systems (individual, family, group, organization, community). A generalist social worker utilizes a multidimensional framework that: 1) incorporates a problem solving approach, 2) involves self-awareness, respect for diversity and a commitment to social/economic justice, 3) draws from various theoretical frameworks and intervention models, 4) views human behavior in the context of the social environment, and 5) recognizes the potential for change.

Course Description

SOW 372 Helping Processes III: Practice with Groups

This course examines the dynamics of the small group. Different theoretical conceptualizations of the role of the social worker in the group are discussed. Concepts such as group dynamics, norms, and roles are examined. A model for group leadership is introduced and skills for planning, facilitating, and evaluating groups will be developed and practiced. Content will include identifying and implementing group related empirically based interventions and services designed to achieve client and community goals. There is also a focus on the interplay between social work and community groups.

Prerequisite: SOW 204

Program Educational Objectives

Program Educational Objectives are derived from the program goals. Program Educational Objectives must address the Foundation Program Objectives (Educational Policy, Section 3) required by Council of Social Work Education (CSWE). The Foundation Program Objectives are addressed by the following Program Educational Objectives of the Messiah College social work program.

Graduates of the Messiah College undergraduate social work program are generalist social work practitioners who demonstrate the ability to:

1. Exercise critical thinking, self reflection and self-awareness to examine the sources of tension as well as the areas of compatibility between their Christian faith and the secular emphasis of contemporary social work, and the subsequent implications for their professional social work (FPO 1)
2. Understand and adhere to professional social work values and ethics (FPO 2)
3. Apply skills and knowledge of generalist social work to practice with systems of all sizes while ensuring respect for clients' age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation (FPO 3 & 6)
4. Assess situations and apply advocacy strategies using knowledge about the effects of structural inequities based on class, race/culture, gender, sexual orientation, and other forms of oppression in order to influence social change (FPO 4)
5. Understand the relationship of historic social patterns, values, and institutional arrangements, analyze their impact on social welfare policy and services, and formulate strategies to influence current social policy. (FPO 5 & 8)
6. Understand human behavior from holistic and developmental perspectives and use theoretical frameworks encompassing dynamic interaction on all practice levels and among social, political, cultural, economic, psychological, spiritual, and biological factors (FPO 7)
7. Evaluate and assess the effectiveness of their own and their agencies' practice through critical selection and application of theories and research findings related to social work practice (FPO 9)
8. Communicate effectively verbally, nonverbally, and in writing with the client, systems, agencies, and others (FPO 10)

9. Use supervision and consultation to enhance professional development, the delivery of services, and the interpretation and use of organizational policies and procedures (FPO 11)
10. Understand the dynamics of human service organizations and know how to engage in productive organizational change (FPO 12)

Course Objectives and Related Assignments

Course objectives and assignments flow from the program mission and goals. This course meets the following program objectives:

1. Exercise critical thinking, self-reflection and self-awareness to examine the sources of tension as well as the areas of compatibility between Christian faith and the secular emphasis of contemporary social work, and the subsequent implications for professional social work.

Course Objective:

- To routinely apply critical thinking questions to a problem or situation.
- To understand the value of self-awareness in knowing our own values and how they affect us as a group leader.

Related assignments:

- Class discussion, role-play, and small and large group interaction will promote self-awareness and encourage critical thinking and problem solving.
- Readings and videos will encourage self-reflection and increase self-awareness.
- Research and comparison of group models will encourage critical thinking and application of assessment criteria.

3. Apply skills and knowledge of generalist social work to practice with systems of all sizes while ensuring respect for clients' age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.

Course Objective:

- To understand and demonstrate appropriate role behavior for a social worker practicing group work.
- To increase commitment to advocate for access to empowerment and opportunity using group skills in social work practice.
- To understand how diversity (racial, ethnic, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation) influences group membership

Related assignments:

- Simulations will demonstrate knowledge of skill development.
- Students will choose and outline the population and setting for in class simulation.
- Demonstration of knowledge of concepts and skills through examinations.
- Observation of outside group will require critical analysis of group leader's skills.
- Class activities and discussion will encourage identification of cultural worldview to increase understanding of impact of diversity on group practice.

6. Understand human behavior from holistic and developmental perspectives and use theoretical frameworks encompassing dynamic interaction on all practice levels and among social, political, cultural, economic, psychological, spiritual, and biological factors.

Course Objective:

- To understand the dynamics and development of group processes that assist members in achieving their goals.
- To understand how membership in groups (families, organizations, communities) interrelate to affect human behavior and development.

Related assignments:

- Readings, class discussion, role-play, and simulations will show awareness of group dynamics and the effect on human behavior.
- Feedback assignment will show understanding of importance of human development and behavior in a group setting.
- Understanding of group process and the impact on development will be evident through experiential activities and formal examination.

7. Evaluate and assess the effectiveness of individual practice and agencies practice through critical selection and application of theories and research findings related to social work practice.

Course Objective:

- To understand the importance of self-evaluation and one's use of self in establishing effective group structure and process.
- To understand how to utilize a group's power to produce social change.
- To be able to plan and implement groups responsive to individual client needs and congruent with agency's mission.

Related assignments:

- Feedback assignment will demonstrate understanding of effective practice skills.
- Observation of outside group will show students' knowledge of assessment of both individual and agency practice, with attention to issues of diversity.
- Research of group models and development of comprehensive bibliography will encourage and reinforce critical evaluation and assessment skills.

8. Communicate effectively verbally, nonverbally and in writing with the client, systems, agencies, and others.

Course Objective:

- Develop communication skills that allow for effective group facilitation.

Related assignments:

- Feedback assignment will require student to clearly articulate feedback in a constructive, positive manner.
- Observation of outside group will demonstrate effective communication with agency, group members, and leaders.

Required Text

Toseland, R.W., & Rivas, R.F. (2005). *An introduction to groupwork practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Handouts and additional readings will be assigned.

Course Expectations

Assignments/Grading

1. Research of Theoretical Approach to Group Counseling.

Each student will research a theoretical approach to working with groups. Students will choose from theoretical approaches such as Psychoanalytic, Adlerian, Psychodrama, Existential, Person-Centered, Gestalt, Transactional Analysis, Behavioral, Rational Emotive, and Reality. You will write a 5-7-page paper discussing the key concepts, role of the leader, population the theory is best used, and strengths/limitations of the theory in practice, and provide an example of the theory in use through current journal articles. More information on resources, content and format will be discussed in class. *This paper is due by the end of the 6th week of class.*

200 points

2. Observation of a Community Group

Each student must observe and/or participate in an outside, real life, face-to-face group experience. **The choice of the group must be approved by the professor prior to beginning the group.** The group observed should meet the criteria of having members you identify as different from you in terms of some aspect of diversity (race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexual orientation). Keep a journal of your observations of each session. The assignment will reflect observations of group dynamics, group leadership, and group process. Face to face groups must be attended 5 - 7 sessions. Credit will be given two times during the semester. **You must attach your journal to each report when you turn it in. No grade for the report will be given without the journal attached.**

Midway report 75 points

Final report 75 points

Total 150 points

3. Blackboard Assignments

Students will participate in asynchronous (via Blackboard) discussions throughout the semester to increase awareness and knowledge of diversity issues in group practice as well as develop a greater understanding of how cultural and spiritual worldview affects practice. Discussion points and due dates will be discussed in class. **100 points**

4. Simulation and Feedback

Each student will be required to simulate a facilitation of one session of a mutual support group. When a student conducts a simulation, she/he must provide an outline for the group using the guidelines (see appendix D in T & R) plus prompting cards for the group **AT LEAST ONE SESSION BEFORE THEIR ASSIGNED DATE**. The outline will be graded. Although simulations are not graded, **EACH STUDENT MUST LEAD ONE SIMULATION TO PASS THE COURSE**.

In the simulation, students will lead a 25-30 minute mutual aid group using other students in the class as the group participants. The kind of group will be determined in the outline. A sign up sheet will indicate the stage of group interaction for the session (students will choose between initial, transition, working and ending stages).

Students must write extensive (2-3 typed pages) feedback to other students who conduct simulations in class. Serving as a consultant, the student must use the guidelines provided by the professor for giving feedback. Citation of the readings must be made. Only one feedback can be submitted per session. The feedback report is due 1 week after the simulation occurs.

Students will be graded on their evaluations of other student facilitation. Three (3) evaluations must be submitted, one from each stage of the group process.

4 evaluations @30 points each	120 points
Outline	<u>30 points</u>
TOTAL	150

5. Final Exam (Class presentation of theoretical approach)

Students are required to formally present their theoretical approach to the class during the final exam period. Students must use visual aids (powerpoint, overhead, video, etc) when presenting the paper. Part of the presentation must be a role-play that demonstrates a few key points of the theory. Students should recruit class members to help enact the role-play prior to the class presentation.

100 points

This is a practice class, so participation will influence your grade significantly.

Participation includes attending class, preparing for class by completing readings and assignments, and actively participating in classroom activities and discussion. The instructor reserves the option to add or drop points from final grades based on these requirements.

TOTAL POINTS

700

Summary of assignments/grading:

1. Research paper on group model

150 points

2. Observation of community group report	2@ 100 points	200 points
3. Blackboard discussion		100 points
4. Simulation and feedback: 4 feedback reports @ 30 points		
	Simulation outline @ 30 points	150 points
5. Final Exam		<u>100</u> points
TOTAL		700 points

Points Distribution:

651 – 700 = A (93-100%) 630 – 650 = A- (90-92.9%)
 609 – 629 = B+(87-89.9%) 581 – 608 = B (83-86.9%) 560 – 580 = B- (80-82.9%)
 539 – 559 = C+(77-79.9%) 511 – 538 = C (73-76.9%) 490 – 510 = C- (70-72.9%)
 469 – 489 = D+(67-69.9%) 420 – 468 = D (60-66.9%) 413 and below = F (59% or below)

All assignments must be completed in order for a student to pass the course. **Late assignments may lose up to 5 points per day.**

Writing assignments are expected to reflect college standards for organization, grammar, syntax, and mechanics. All papers **MUST** be typed, double spaced, and conform to the format of the American Psychological Association (APA) for margins, citations, and references.

Attendance

The professor takes responsibility for monitoring the classroom climate to provide an atmosphere conducive to student learning. This includes serving as a resource and guide for the students' professional learning, ensuring that the classroom offers a safe opportunity for exchange of ideas and opinions and fairly evaluating all student work.

Students are expected to attend all classes, to come to class on time, to take responsibility for completing required readings, completing all assignments in time and to the best of their abilities, and to actively participate in the class discussions and activities.

Students are expected to work collaboratively and responsibly apply the principles of professionalism. (The NASW Code of Ethics is the standard for professional behavior.) A sincere effort to learn and grow in Christian faith is a key element in the development of the professional self, and is encouraged by the Messiah social work program.

More than three (3) absences will lower your final grade for the course. If you must be absent due to illness, involvement in field trips required by other classes, athletic participation, or similar school related activities, you must inform the instructor in advance of your absence. You remain responsible for arranging to submit any written assignments on the due date if you are absent even if you have given advance notice. Absence due to illness, athletic participation, or school related activities will not be considered in the three-absence allowance if you provide a written excuse from a health care provider, proof of athletic event, or notification from the professor/advisor of the school activity.

All students are held responsible for reading and understanding the definition and discussion of academic dishonesty contained in the Messiah College Student Handbook.

Personal integrity is a behavioral expectation for all members of the Messiah community: administration, faculty, staff, and students. Violations of academic integrity are not consistent with the community standards of Messiah College. These violations include:

Plagiarism:

Submitting as one's own work part or all of any assignment (oral or written) which is copied, paraphrased or purchased from another source, including on-line sources without the proper acknowledgment of that source. Examples: failing to cite a reference, failing to use quotation marks where appropriate, misrepresenting another's work as your own, etc.

Cheating:

Attempting to use or using unauthorized material or study aids for personal assistance in examinations or other academic work. Examples: using a cheat sheet, altering a graded exam, looking at a peer's exam.

Fabrication:

Submitting altered or contrived information in any academic exercise. Examples: falsifying sources and/or data, etc.

Misrepresentation of Academic Records:

Tampering with any portion of a student's record. Example: forging a signature on a registration form or change of grade form.

Facilitating Academic Dishonesty:

Helping another individual violate this policy. Examples: working together on an assignment where collaboration is not allowed, doing work for another student, allowing one's own work to be copied.

Computer Offenses:

Altering or damaging computer programs without permission. Examples: software piracy, constructing viruses, introducing viruses into a system, copying copyrighted programs, etc.

Unfair Advantage:

Attempting to gain advantage over fellow students in an academic exercise. Examples: lying about the need for an extension on a paper, destroying or removing library materials, etc.

Students are always encouraged to discuss the quality of their performance with the instructor. Do not wait until a small problem becomes a larger issue. Arrange a time as soon as possible to discuss questions and concerns.

Ethical Issues in Group Observation

Please remember that groups you observe are for persons who legitimately want to participate in a group process focused on the group purpose. **It would be a violation of social work ethics** to sit in on one of these groups if you pretend to be a participant but do not intend to actively participate. It is ethical to be a participant observer, but not an observer posing as a participant. You need to make your purpose known to the group, i.e. that you are taking a social work class and are required to observe a group. You must also have a legitimate interest in the group in order to be an ethical observer.

Open Door Policy

Interactions with the instructor outside the classroom experience are encouraged. Appointments can be scheduled during regular office hours or during other regularly agreed upon times. Do not hesitate to discuss course content, the field of social work, suggestions, ideas, issues, or concerns. Students are also encouraged to discuss the quality of his/her performance with the instructor. If there are questions about the results of tests or assignments, please arrange to discuss it. Do not wait until a smaller issue becomes a bigger problem.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Any student whose disability falls within ADA guidelines, should inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of any special accommodations or equipment needs necessary to complete the requirements of this course. Students must register documents with the Office of Disability Services (OM342). If you have any questions call 717-766-2511 ext. 5358.

SOW 372 Helping Processes III: Practice with Groups Course Outline Fall 2005

Note: A tentative schedule for this course is indicated below. This outline is a guide and may be altered as needed. Please check Blackboard for updates and revisions to this outline.

Week 1

8/30 Course overview, discussion of group observation, review of generalist definition
What do you know about groups?

9/1 Types of Groups, Values of group practice
Culturally competent group practice
Administration of MKSS
Read: T & R Chap. 1

Week 2

9/6 Small group discussion – spiritual cultural worldview: impact on group practice

9/8 How theory impacts group work
Read: T & R Chap. 2

Week 3

9/13 Ethical issues in group leadership
Read: T & R review pp. 9-11

9/15 Group leadership with populations-at-risk (GLBT, HIV+, women, minorities)

Week 4

9/20 Group dynamics and models of group development
Read: T & R Chap. 3

9/22 Professional group leadership
Read: T & R Chap. 4

Week 5

9/27 Leadership cont'd
Assessment of group leadership skills inventory

9/29 **Adolescent Health Conference 8 AM – 4 PM**
See www.center-school.org/training for information

Week 6

10/4 Culturally sensitive group leadership
Class Activity – Spiritual Time line
Read: T & R Chap. 5

10/6 Planning for the group – proposal, selection, formation
Read: T & R chap. 6
Theory Paper Due

Week 7

10/11 Stages of group process: initial stage
Contracting, goal setting
Read: T & R Chap. 7

10/13 Leader skills in the initial stage

Week 8

10/17 **(MONDAY) NASW Policy Conference in Harrisburg**

10/18 **No class in lieu of Policy Conference**

10/20 **Fall Break**

Week 9

10/25 Simulations – Initial Stage

**10/27 Simulations – Initial Stage
Midway report DUE**

Week 10

**11/1 Stages of group process – Transition stage tasks
Read: T & R Chap. 9**

11/3 Transition stage cont'd – dealing with resistance and conflict

Week 11

11/8 Simulations – Transition Stage

**11/10 Stages of Group Process – Working Stage tasks and interventions
Read: T & R Chap. 10**

Week 12

11/15 Working Stage Cont'd – Leader skills

11/17 Simulations – Working Stage

Week 13

11/22 Small group discussions

11/24 Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

**11/29 Stages of group process – Ending a group tasks
Read: T & R Chap. 14**

12/1 Ending the group – leadership skills

Week 15

**12/6 Simulations – Ending Stage
Final Report due**

12/8 Assessing and evaluating the group
Read: T & R Chap. 8, 13
 Course review and evaluation

Week 16

12/ **FINAL EXAM**
10:30 – 12:30

Suggested Sources

General

Anderson, J. (1997). *Social work with groups: A process model*. White Plains, NY: Longman, Inc.

Corey, G. (2000). *Theory and practice of group counseling*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Corey, G. (2000). *Student manual for theory and practice of group counseling*. Belmont, CA: Brook/Cole.

Greenberg, K. (2003). *Group counseling in K-12 schools: A handbook for school counselors*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Hare, A., Blumberg, H., Davies, M., & Kent, M. (1994). *Small group research: A handbook*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

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Guidelines for Observations of Face to Face Groups

All assignments must cite readings and other relevant literature.

Instructions for Midway report on face to face group – Due 10/27/05 – 100 points [Your journal must be attached to the report]

A four to five (4-5) page typed, double spaced report on your observations of your group to date. This report should include discussion of:

- Observation about group dynamics both, positive and negative
- Observations/concerns about issues of diversity
- Leadership style and skills of group leader
- Group stages of development
- Self-awareness about your participation (if applicable) in a group (i.e. kind of interaction and roles/functions you take on)
- Issues of empowerment – actualized or discouraged
- Issues that you are confused or unclear about, or are questioning
- Expectations for the future of the group

Instructions for Final Report – Due 12/6/05 - 100 points [Your journal and the midway report must be attached to this report]

A four to five (4-5) page typed, double spaced report on your observations of your group that builds on the first report. This report should include:

- Follow-up on the issues addressed in the midway report as they have evolved. Note things that have changed and things that have been stable and discuss this in terms of stages of development and other relevant factors.
- Whether your expectations for the group were met or not and why.
- How this assignment has helped you to learn more about yourself as a developing group leader, i.e. what did the leader do that you would do and you wouldn't do and why?

Guidelines for Feedback to Group Simulation

Students must write extensive (2-3 typed pages) feedback to other students who conduct their simulations in class. Serving as a consultant, the student must use the guidelines provided by the professor for giving feedback. Citation of the readings must also be made. Only one feedback can be submitted per session. The feedback report is **due 1 week after the simulation occurs.**

4@ 30 points each = 120 points

Additional guidelines

The format of the feedback report **must** contain comments regarding:

- ◆ The leadership skills used by the facilitator as identified in your text
 - ◆ Meeting the objectives or conducting activities of the phase of group work being simulated
 - ◆ The observations you have about group dynamics as discussed in the text
 - ◆ In your report, you need to indicate that you can identify skills, activities, and dynamics that occur in the simulation by referencing the texts in your discussion of them.
 - ◆ Comments like "the leader did a really great job" are not very useful in terms of understanding group functioning even though they do make the facilitator feel good (which is okay too). These kinds of comments will not be considered in the grading of the feedback and may detract from the grade if too extensive.
- ◆ **Remember the purpose of this assignment is NOT to give the person doing the simulation an ego boost, but to show that you can identify skills, activities, objectives, and dynamics when you see them or do not see them when you should.**

Guidelines and Format for Theory Research Paper - Due 10/6/05 – 150 points

All papers must be properly documented, APA style.

Each student will research a theoretical approach to working with groups. Students will choose from theoretical approaches such as Psychoanalytic, Adlerian, Psychodrama, Existential, Person-Centered, Gestalt, Transactional Analysis, Behavioral, Rational Emotive, and Reality. A sign-up sheet will be available so each student researches a different theory. You may choose a theory not listed with approval by the Professor. You will write a 5-7 page paper discussing the key concepts of the theory, role of the leader, population the theory is best used, strengths/limitations of the theory in group practice, examples of theory as it is used in practice. **You must include a discussion of how diverse populations (racial, ethnic, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability) may affect/be affected through use of this theory in practice.** Be sure to be specific in covering general aspects of the theory in terms you and other students can understand. At least three sources must be used (books and journals). Web sites may be used in addition to the three book/journal sources.

Grading criteria is as follows:

1. Clarity and comprehensiveness of key points 50 points
2. Description of leadership role and population, example
Of theory in practice 25 points
3. Discussion of strengths and limitations 25 points
4. discussion of issues of theory use with
diverse populations 25
5. Grammar, APA style, properly documented 25 points
Use of sources

Total Points: 150

Guidelines for Class Presentation of Theory – Final Exam – 100 points

Students will present theory paper as a final exam for this course. Presentations will be 20 minutes (5-10 minutes presentation and 10-15 minutes role play) long and include a brief description of the theory and a role play depicting key points of the theory. Presentations will be graded on content, creativity, thoroughness, and clarity.

VITA

Vicki B. Root

Prior to her doctoral studies, Vicki earned her Bachelor of Social Work degree from Shippensburg University. She also earned a Master of Social Work degree from Temple University, and is a licensed social worker in Pennsylvania.

Vicki is a social work educator with seven years experience teaching undergraduate social work. She has over 10 years experience as a social work practitioner in the areas of domestic violence, mental health, and school social work. She teaches courses related to human behavior, group development, research, mental health, and community development. Since research is an integral part of the social work field, she has conducted community-based research in the form of needs assessments and program evaluation for several local social service agencies. Currently, she is the Director of the Social Work Program and Assistant Professor of Social Work at Messiah College.

Since 2000, Vicki has presented on the topics of spirituality and culture in social work practice and education at the *National Association of Social Workers Annual Conferences*, *North American Association for Christians in Social Work National Conference*, *Association for Baccalaureate Program Directors National Conference*, *Council on Social Work Education National Program Meeting*, and *Pennsylvania State University Graduate Research Conference*. She currently serves as the Co-Chair of the Gender Concerns Committee and Senator for the Community of Educators at Messiah College.

Vicki is a member of several professional organizations. They include National Association of Social Workers, North American Associations of Christians in Social Work, Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors, and Council on Social Work Education.