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ABSTRACT

Teacher education in the U.S. faces a critical dilemma: preparing white, middle-class preservice teachers to teach increasingly diverse student populations in public schools. Early field experiences (EFEs) show promise for addressing this mismatch, yet little is actually known about what happens to preservice teachers in practicum experiences. This research examined the experiences of preservice teachers in an EFE, which combined a foundations of education course and a general methods course, along with classroom, school, and community-based field experiences, within the larger context of a college of education that actively sought to recruit and prepare teachers for a multicultural society. Modeled after Zeichner's (1996) notion of an educative practicum, the EFE and the accompanying courses occurred in an urban middle and elementary school complex in a large southwestern U.S. city. In this article, the experiences and perspectives of two preservice teachers (a Mexican-American woman and a white woman) are highlighted, with particular attention to their participation in multiple communities, their use of multiple literacies, and their shifts in practices, understandings, and voice over the course of the EFE. Implications for field experiences, admissions criteria for teacher education programs, and recruitment and retention of members of underrepresented groups are discussed. (Contains 45 references.) (Author/SM)

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Perspectives on a Reconceptualized Early Field Experience

In an Urban School

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Paper presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association,

Montreal, Canada

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Abstract

Teacher education in the United States faces a critical dilemma: preparing white, middle class preservice teachers to teach increasingly diverse student populations in public schools. Early field experiences (EFEs) show promise for addressing this mismatch; yet, little is actually known about what happens to preservice teachers in practicum experiences. This research examines the experiences of preservice teachers in an EFE, which combined a foundations of education course and a general methods course, along with classroom, school, and community-based field experiences, within the larger context of a college of education that actively seeks to recruit and prepare teachers for a multicultural society. Modeled after Zeichner's (1996) notion of an "educative practicum," the EFE and the accompanying courses took place in an urban middle and elementary school complex in a large city in the Southwestern United States. In this article, the experiences and perspectives of two preservice teachers—a Mexican-American woman and a White woman—are highlighted, with particular attention paid to their participation in multiple communities, their use of multiple literacies, and their shifts in practices, understandings, and voice over the course of the EFE. Implications for field experiences, admissions criteria for teacher education programs, and recruitment and retention of members of under-represented groups are discussed.

Perspectives on a Reconceptualized Early Field Experience in an Urban School

Teacher education institutions and public schools in the United States face the urgent challenge of addressing the mismatch between preservice teachers and public school students in terms of race, social class, and language background (Gomez, 1996). While the numbers of children of color, poor children, and linguistically diverse students rapidly increase (Children's Defense Fund, 1991), most preservice teachers are white, female, middle-class, and monolingual in English (Zimpher, 1989). Moreover, the majority are interested in teaching average students in traditional ways in suburban settings (Zimpher, 1989) and hold beliefs about diversity that may, in fact, limit the educational opportunities of the students of color they will likely teach (Goodlad, 1990; Paine, 1989).

Although preparation of teachers for diversity is a marginal issue in educational research (Grant & Secada, 1990; Zeichner, 1996), early field experiences (EFEs) in diverse settings continue to surface as a “best practice” (Grant, 1994) for addressing this mismatch. Since experience is often considered the best teacher—especially for learning to teach—the call for more field experience in diverse settings comes as no surprise. Yet, not all experience is equally educative (Dewey, 1938; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985); consequently, some EFEs in diverse settings may teach damaging, unintended lessons by socializing preservice teachers into existing school cultures or reinforcing stereotypical notions about “Others.” For EFEs to serve as a “best practice,” Gomez (1996) argues that they must be “reconceptualized” so that all prospective teachers have the opportunity to develop meaningful, long-term relationships with people different than themselves in “carefully placed and carefully supervised” practicums (p. 126). Zeichner (1996) advises that EFEs must become “educative practicums” that: (a) move beyond individual classroom placements to focus on the full scope of teachers’ roles within schools and communities, (b) stress that all students from all backgrounds can learn, and (c) prepare teacher candidates for the process of lifelong learning and professional development (p. 218).

Moving away from a single classroom approach in EFEs as Zeichner (1996) suggests, expands the context to include experiences that are typically absent in teacher education. For example, parent involvement is largely ignored in teacher preparation (de Acosta, 1996); yet, experiences with parents could be beneficial for confronting beliefs about diversity and challenging limited, middle-class assumptions about parent involvement in schools (Foster & Loven, 1992). Extending EFEs further into communities might assist preservice teachers in developing the notion of looking at families and communities as “zones of possibility” (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Providing multiple opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with students of color, poor children, and children with first languages other than English and to learn that, indeed, all students can learn is also critical. Finally, to promote lifelong learning, Knowles and Cole (1996) suggest that EFEs be structured around inquiry into self and external contexts, arguing that this dual approach serves to provide beginning teachers with tools that will serve them well for continuing to learn beyond formal teacher education.

Since it is difficult to tease out specific effects of EFEs on preservice teachers within the larger picture of a preservice teacher’s life experiences and experiences in teacher education, Carter and Anders (1996) point out that “perhaps outcome [of field experiences] is not the most critical issue” (p. 575) for research. Rather, they argue, “it may well be more pivotal to understand the pedagogical process itself, what happens as the pedagogies are being carried out” (Carter & Anders, 1996, p. 575). To understand “pedagogical processes,” this study foregrounds how preservice teachers actually experienced and made sense of a reconceptualized EFE.¹ In doing so, the research provides the field with a richer picture of the “ecology” (Zeichner, 1987) of an EFE. Additionally, this study highlights an effort to teach a largely “culturally insular” (Zimpher, 1989) preservice teacher population from a social reconstructionist, inquiry-driven

¹ This article is drawn from a study completed in 1998. For a more extensive report, refer to Burant, 1998.

approach and includes the perspectives of preservice teachers of color, which are largely missing from literature on preservice teachers' experiences in teacher education (Pailliotet, 1997).

The Context

This study took place in a public elementary and middle school complex—and its immediate surroundings—within a rapidly changing urban school district in a large city in the Southwest. Sections of the area were primarily rural until several years ago; and, horses and chickens are still kept on small ranches lining a major riverbed near the suburban edge. In the immediate vicinity of the schools, burned and vacant buildings stand alongside new apartment complexes, while older middle and working class homes—some with statues of the Virgin of Guadalupe in orderly yards—contrast with fields of desert brush and abandoned furniture and shopping carts. A strip of established family-owned businesses provide an anchor to the past; yet, multinational chains seem to sprout overnight. In the neighborhood, approximately 29% of the individuals and 22% of the families live below the poverty level (Wabnik, 1997). According to local police statistics collected over the last eight years, this area is known by the last two digits of its postal zip code as “one of the greatest areas of family stress and crisis in the city . . . based on reports such as domestic violence, child abuse, neglect, and drug and alcohol violations” (Wabnik, 1997, p. A14).

The Schools

Shifts in the student population mirror changes in the area. According to the principal of the middle school (personal interview, 1996), of the approximately 1600 students in the schools, the percentage of Hispanic students (44%) is rapidly increasing and the percentage of other members of diverse groups (Native American, African-American, and Asian-American) is approximately 10%. The number of students who speak languages other than English as a first

language is also rising. Additionally, 80-95% of the elementary students and 66% of the middle school students qualify for free or reduced lunches. Both schools recently adapted curriculum and practices to accommodate these changes. Efforts at the middle school included: expanding the role of the school in serving families; using the site for English as a Second Language classes for parents of students at both schools; and adding an at-risk program, a student advisory period, and an extended “activity” curriculum. At the elementary school, the principal sought to create a “community school” by: (a) employing two family advocates and a bilingual (Spanish/English) interpreter; (b) paying close attention to inclusive language practices; (c) increasing efforts to develop a strong Parent Teacher Organization; (d) adding more multicultural activities, such as a ballet folklórico; and, (e) encouraging greater accessibility of faculty and the principal to parents and families.

The Reconceptualized EFE

The reconceptualized EFE in the schools was housed in a portable classroom near the edge of the middle school—a site it occupied for the last five years. Two days per week, preservice teachers met there for three-hour classes, while one day each week, they participated in practicum experiences in classrooms, the schools, and the surrounding neighborhood. Within the courses, social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), reflective practice (Dewey, 1933/1964; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; & Schön, 1987), and “education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist” (Sleeter, 1996) guided curriculum and pedagogy. Understandings were demonstrated through “studio-based portfolios” (D. Kirby & D. Latta, personal communication, August 1997) that served two complementary functions: to present a picture of both the “work” and the “worker’s” processes of learning. Preservice teachers used a portfolio framework or “scaffold” (Bruner, 1986) consisting of three major sections—reflections (weekly writings called reflections, or “R’s,” and an educational autobiography), inquiries (reading logs and a critical issues in education investigation), and actions (classroom observations and school and

community-based activities) that reflected the overlapping processes of learning in the course. Grassroots projects or "actions" included: a neighborhood "mini-ethnography" or "shaggin' around" community study, a school-community newsletter project with sixth-graders, childcare for Parent Teacher Organization meetings and parent English as a Second Language classes, parent coffees, and a "book and breakfast" reading club at the elementary school.

Methodology

To understand experience within this "bounded system" (a system in which I was both a co-teacher and a researcher), I utilized a qualitative, case study approach (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994) drawing from both the constructivist-interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and phenomenological (Schutz, 1967) perspectives. I sought to answer two questions:

1. What is the nature of the experiences of preservice teachers in a reconceptualized EFE in teacher education?
2. What sense do preservice teachers make of their experiences in this EFE?

Selection and Data Collection

The original sample consisted of twenty-six preservice teachers enrolled in the EFE in the fall of 1997. Over a period of six months, I used criterion-based sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) to select four participants for case studies. To construct the cases, data were collected from September of 1997 to January of 1998 from four sources: observations, documents, interviews, and focus groups. I observed the participants from September through December of 1997 for two, three-hour class sessions each week, as well as during one three-hour field experience per week. Sometimes, I was a full observer—positioned in a corner of the room taking field notes—when my teaching partner guided a class discussion or when a guest speaker was present. At other times, I was nearly a full participant, especially when participants and I

took part in community or school “actions” together. In addition, I collected all course documents (handouts, course readings, lesson plans, and communications from preservice teachers), and the contents of each participant's portfolio. I conducted focus groups in December 1997 to engage participants in conversation about the contents of their portfolios, their experiences in the EFE, and the meanings of their experiences. These were audiotaped and transcribed. Finally, I conducted two forms of interviews and audiotaped and transcribed each one. Near the end of October 1997, I interviewed each individual in the original sample. In late January of 1998, I interviewed six participants. To plan and conduct interviews, I relied on both Spradley’s (1979) ethnographic interview and Seidman’s (1991) phenomenological interview guidelines; however, I developed questions using an organic, recursive process of listening to previous interview tapes, reading field notes, and examining portfolios.

Analysis

To analyze data, I used constant comparison (Glazer & Strauss, 1967) in a five-phase process. In the *early analysis* phase, which began immediately as the first pieces of data were collected, I focused on participant selection and the continuing need for adjustments in data collection. In *midway analysis*, I engaged in recursive processes of interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing audiotapes of midterm interviews. Struck by the tentative quality of voice apparent in several of the women in the sample, I approached *midway analysis* with a decidedly feminist lens by using DeVault’s (1990) perspective on “listening from a women’s standpoint” and paying careful attention to instances when participants found it difficult to effectively use existing language to express their views. Next, in *immersion analysis*, I shifted from writing daily field notes about more common experiences to immersing myself more fully in the varied experiences and the writing of specific participants. In the *traveling analysis* phase, I took the data on two, three-day passenger train trips in order to analyze and consider the data while in a state of isolated motion, using a four-step process of assigning “meaning units” (Ely, 1991) to

the data. In *grounded analysis*, I selected the final four participants and alternated between considering both individual cases and the larger themes emerging from these cases through transcribing interviews, reviewing field notes for representations of each participant's experiences, and creating visual representations of the experiences and meanings for each participant. Once themes were identified, I revisited all sources for common and discrepant themes (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992) and checked with the participants to confirm experiences and clarify meanings.

Participants

The final sample consisted of four preservice teachers; however, in this article, the experiences of two preservice teachers—Monica, a 35 year-old Mexican American woman, and Cindy, a 20 year-old White woman—are presented. Both are majoring in elementary education and nearing the end of their teacher education programs. Excerpts from their educational autobiographies below serve to introduce each one:

Monica. As “part of the sixth generation [in her family] to live in this southwestern city,” Monica’s strong family ties contributed to both her work ethic and cultural pride. Her father “worked at an automotive parts shop [and] believed that it was important to work hard and honestly for a living, especially if you were Hispanic.” However, her cultural identity was tainted by the far-reaching effects of racism:

My parents grew up when it was forbidden to speak Spanish in school ... this resulted in English speaking only in our home.... This presents me with an obstacle in my life. I find it very frustrating that I am not fluent in Spanish; and, the language has been difficult for me to master as an adult.

Monica also had early school experiences that made her feel “ashamed of being Mexican-American;” yet, she remembers elementary school and junior high with fondness. With the move to high school, her outlook changed:

Suddenly I was on my own and it was a very intimidating experience. This period of my life was definitely a turning point, as my teen years became some of the most trying and difficult times I have known. In addition to being on an emotional roller coaster I was also feeling insecure and ugly. As if things couldn’t get worse, my parents were having marital problems and filing for divorce ... we should have seen it coming: the silk shirts, the gold jewelry, the fake sideburns ... the new car, and a much younger girlfriend.

With her parents’ attention largely focused elsewhere, Monica aligned herself with popular girls who:

knew how to party, where to party, and how to create a party ... along with these new fun girls came the guys. In fact, this is when I met my first boyfriend, not the kind of boy you bring home to Mom and Dad.... This guy was always in trouble, drove a new truck, had money ... someone my parents would hate.... [he was] perfect.

Monica graduated from high school as quickly as she could and immediately married “that crazy guy [her] parents hated.”

During the course of the study, Monica attended the university full-time after spending the previous seventeen years working in clerical positions, raising two children with her husband, and periodically taking classes at the community college. She also worked part-time and remained active on the governing boards of several youth agencies. She wanted to become a

teacher, she explained, “to continue the tradition of strong women in her family” and to fulfill a long-held dream.

Cindy. Cindy is, in her words, a “clone” of her two older sisters: “all tall blondes with almond shaped blue eyes and Kodak smiles.” She was raised in the “perfect American family” with a “dad [who] was the business man, successful and happy in his career [and] whistled when he came home from work ... and mom, the energetic fitness instructor who ran marathons, drove the light blue minivan on family trips across the country and on endless carpools back and forth from the athletic club.” Cindy grew up in an affluent suburb of a large industrial city in the Midwest on a street “lined with large brick and stone homes, each one with perfectly trimmed hedges, edged lawns, and manicured flower beds [with] large green trees lining the boulevard all the way to the end of the street.” She described her town as a “tight knit community, which through schools, athletic and country clubs, churches and other organizations gave each individual an extreme sense of belonging;” yet, she recently has come to “realize what a superficial place [this town] was to grow up in, [and] I hang my head when people ask me where I am from.” She believes that it is “wrong to feel ashamed;” however, she “feels guilty” about her privilege and is “scared to be classified as a snob.”

In high school, her peers thought she would be “the type of person who would come back to high school reunions and be remembered for always brightening people’s days and being nice to everyone.” When Cindy was a senior in high school, however, she “woke up one morning and realized that there was more to worry about than missing recess [or] losing a swim meet.” She explained, “for the past seventeen years I had been a part of a perfect, wonderful, loving family. I guess we were too flawless. After twenty-five years of marriage, my parents were getting a divorce [and] my whole childhood ... everything that we stood for crumbled.” Through this experience, Cindy “learned to consider [herself] a victim of blessings and miracles, not a victim of tragedy.”

Now, nearing the end of her final year at a large university thousands of miles from home, she said, “I think I came here to escape all that madness ... but what I found here has been more than I ever could have imagined.” From the excitement of freshman year when she “met the greatest group of friends, pledged a sorority, had the wildest parties, had a million college crushes, lived in the craziest room, with the craziest neighbors, on the craziest floor, in the craziest dorm,” she has matured, she said, “into one of those people who tells others how fast it all goes by.” She currently lives in a sorority house, holds a leadership position on the governing board of the campus Greek system as a coordinator of a community service in schools program, and holds several part-time jobs. She intends to stay in the Southwest to begin teaching.

Monica and Cindy’s Experiences in a Reconceptualized EFE

From the first day of the EFE—when they simultaneously judged one another from across the room—Monica and Cindy’s experiences intersected. Analysis of their experiences revealed three main findings. First, they participated in a range of communities—or groups of people—engaged in purposeful, necessary activity with evidence of shared practices, resources, memory, and affection over the course of the EFE. These included communities within the EFE, such as writing response groups, as well as those in classrooms, the schools, the neighborhood, and city contexts. Second, their use of multiple literacies, or semiotic tools used to make sense of experience in this specific sociocultural context, was a salient feature of their experiences. Finally, they experienced transformations or shifts in practices, understandings, and voice.

Monica's Experiences

Monica’s experiences in the communities within the EFE were tightly woven into the strong, mutually beneficial relationship she had with her close friend and confidante Carmen,

who was also enrolled in this EFE. They met a few years ago at the community college and had a number of other “Hispanic woman teacher friends” in common. They lived within a mile of one another in a largely working class, Mexican-American neighborhood. Monica was the older of the pair, while Carmen was just beginning married life and getting used to the responsibilities of taking care of her two-year-old son, living with her extended family, and attending classes full-time. Although Monica and Carmen both established connections with other members of the classroom community, their tight bond held as the semester progressed. They arrived and left together, sat at the same table everyday, participated in some of the same community service activities—like the parent coffees—and typically spent time together on the weekends doing their inquiry projects on their related topics: a proposed Hispanic studies curriculum in the city schools and bilingual education.

As I observed their interactions and the level of care they provided for one another on a daily basis—and began as well to experience their care for me and mine for them—I was reminded of the “confianza” or mutual trust that Moll and Greenberg (1990) identified as a prominent feature in the working class Hispanic communities in this particular town. These mutually beneficial networks serve as flexible systems in which necessary “funds of knowledge” are exchanged as members navigate their daily lives. This sharing of resources and knowledge with Carmen was a most significant feature of Monica’s involvement in the EFE.

Writing group. Monica was also a member of a writing response group in the class with six women who came together initially because they chose to read texts about the experiences of girls in schools. During their “book talks” (Monica read Pipher’s Reviving Ophelia), they created a bond which grew stronger as they began to share their writing. In the group, Monica and Cindy developed a connection over time, which eventually included Carmen and Cindy’s “sorority sister” Amy, although both sets of friends crossed borders to make this happen. Monica admits, “when those two [Cindy and Amy] walked in on the first day, I was like, ‘Oh my

God!’ They wore their little sweatshirts with their little sorority emblems on them and I thought they were such snobs.” This stereotype shifted for Monica when she talked to Cindy for the first time during a meeting of their writing group. Monica remembered:

The way she read her autobiography and the way she wrote ... I thought, "she is a real person." She was almost in tears when she read through parts of it. Afterwards I thought she was really sincere. Although her Mom didn’t smoke crack or anything, she had these catastrophes she went through and she struggled in her life ... she became "real" to me in that group.

Through the writing group, Monica grew to know Cindy and explained, "As I got to know one [Cindy] I got to know the other [Amy]... and I found that they were really open-minded." In an interview in the following semester, Monica exclaimed, "Now I have classes with them again—I have every class with Amy—and we are joined at the hip ... I even go with them to their sorority houses sometimes." Monica laughed as she described herself—"a thirty-five year old short Hispanic woman"—surrounded by "two young tall blondes and running from class to class" on the crowded university campus.

Classroom community as a whole. Monica began the semester as a fairly vocal student who raised questions about a host of issues in the classroom community. For example, in the first week of class, she brought in and shared a newspaper article about a proposal for alternative teacher certification and wanted to know, "What everyone thought about this." Keen on digging for the "dirt" surrounding local educational politics, Monica typically spoke up when controversial local issues, such as bilingual education, were on the floor, often with a casual, leading question like, "Isn’t there a history there?" or comments such as, "I’ve heard that there are some problems with that." However, about halfway through the course, Monica’s

experiences in the midst of several conflicts about linguistic diversity turned her thoughts decidedly underground. She described the first of those conflicts:

Dan [the other teacher in the course] was talking about the requirement in the college for learning another language and the fact that Spanish is a target language because of where we are located geographically. At the break, a couple people left class and they said that they did not understand why Spanish was so important. They did not understand the whole diversity issue and they were complaining because we were constantly talking about diversity in the class. They thought that Dan had badgered them when he said, "Hello look where we live, we live in the Southwest, we're here and not in France." They took great offense to that and thought he [a White man] was racist against White people. So, I reiterated what Dan said, but then I just kind of walked off after awhile and thought "I don't want to get into it with these people because they just don't get it."

After several similar incidents, Monica kept her thoughts either to herself or shared them only with those she thought would "understand," like Carmen.

Although her voice turned underground when issues of diversity were discussed, Monica remained a solid leader in the classroom community. She was the first person to bring bagels and cream cheese for the snack table (from the "best" bagel place in town), and she continued to make similar contributions throughout the semester. In addition, with her offer to bring "chorizo and eggs" to the final faculty and staff appreciation breakfast at the schools, the class followed her lead and transformed what could have been standard breakfast fare of donuts and juice into a more festive meal of Southwestern substance and style, with enough breakfast burritos, fried potatoes, enchiladas, and fresh salsa to feed the faculty, as well as the mechanics and bus drivers from the district garage across the street.

Classroom observations. Moving away from the portable classroom, Monica engaged in two very different classroom observation placements over the course of the EFE. She initially observed in a fifth grade classroom with a young Hispanic teacher who made time to sit and talk with the university students who observed in her class. During one observation, Monica helped out in the “fifth grade store, where the kids cash in the incentives they’ve earned over time” and through this experience, Monica came to believe that rewards “are essential” but “need to be tied to group goals.” Later, when Monica volunteered to take part in a community newsletter project, her placement changed to a sixth grade, team-taught, inquiry program where the community newsletter project took place. After her first visit, Monica was visibly upset. My field notes document her frustration:

The newsletter group came back to class all flipped out about their first observation in the sixth grade inquiry program. They talked about the "lack of structure" in the class, about observing kids “cheating on a test” and “talking when the teachers were giving directions.” Monica was agitated and said, “Maybe I’m just too tired and stressed but it is hard for me to imagine spending more time there.”

Over time, Monica’s distaste for some of the practices in this setting grew:

The newsletter gave us the opportunity to get first hand action with the kids ... but I had so much frustration with [the teachers’] classroom. I felt that the kids who were already motivated succeeded in the classroom and those that lacked motivation for whatever reason were left behind. I think that as a teacher you have to make sure your kids are with you, and you can’t do that if their backs are turned and they are talking constantly.

Monica did not see the underlying goals of their inquiry approach come to fruition. Several times, I spoke with Monica and the rest of her group about the challenges of working on a

project like this with students on a part-time basis; however, Monica came out of this experience with the sense that “the lack of structure” as she observed it would not work for all students, especially for some of the Hispanic students in the class.

Parent and principal coffees. Beyond classroom observations, Monica participated in the morning coffees for parents at the elementary school and came to see the value of extending invitations to parents in different ways:

It was inspiring to see just how many parents really care about their children. Those in attendance were sincere and genuinely interested in becoming a part of their child’s school. Many of the parents spoke only Spanish and a faculty interpreter was present ... the principal created an atmosphere where parents can come and visit the school and not be intimidated. This is vital given the fact that many parents do not have the educational background and also may experience a language barrier. Traditionally, parents like this would tend to shy away from the school giving the impression that they don’t care.

Monica left the coffee feeling as if the “principal and the teachers in attendance cared about us as future teachers and about parents,” and she exclaimed, “I want to teach in a school like this!”

“Hard lives everywhere.” During the first “mini-ethnographic” excursion into the neighborhood, Monica and her “shaggin’ around” partner chose to “become anthropologists in the area directly behind the school parking lot: the trailer park and the section 8 apartments.” Although she was “a bit intimidated in the trailer park at first,” Monica gained an appreciation for “the hard lives everywhere” and the experience “put things into perspective” as she “imagined the daily lives that students who lived in this immediate area might be experiencing.” She was startled by hidden nature of the difficult economic conditions in this area because “you hear a lot about the south side with all the press about high crime rates, the low test scores, the

drop-out rates, etc..., but to hear about and see the situation in this part of town was eye-opening to me.” She added, “teaching in an area like this takes a special kind of teacher ... and these areas are where good teachers are needed. Personally, I look forward to teaching in a place like this.”

”Let’s shake up the high school curriculum!” Monica extended the boundaries of her field experience in order to understand a citizen’s group’s efforts to establish an Hispanic studies curriculum in another larger school district within the city limits. She described her reason for this choice:

My son had a really good teacher for Chicano history and I took a good class at the community college on Mexican history. I keep all kinds of newspaper clippings, and have years and years of articles on education, Chicano English, and bilingual education ... so I had a lot to build on.

Her collected archives and prior interest fueled her desire “to figure out why the minority drop-out rate is so high [and] why kids are not interested.” Monica observed disengagement in her own son, who was “reading Greek and Roman and ‘Much Ado About Nothing’ in high school and could care less about it.” She agreed that “students need some classics” but wondered if “they need to incorporate some Chicano and Native American stuff into all of that curriculum so kids can find out where their place is in history.” As her investigation progressed, Monica attended a community forum where “all the different views” instigated a more serious search on her part to learn about bilingual education. As she explained, “I didn’t understand so many parts of bilingual education and realized that I needed to be educated about this and maybe then I can educate someone else because there are so many misconceptions.” Monica interviewed the coordinator of the district’s efforts to study the Hispanic studies proposal and he “helped [her]

figure out all the different types of bilingual education too.” Monica reflected on the importance of this investigation for herself and her family:

I think the more you know, the more educated you are, so I plan to stay involved in this issue. Ever since I wrote that paper, my son has become more interested too. He said, “I want a list of Chicano literature so I can take it to my principal and tell him that I don’t understand why we can’t study this kind of stuff....I’m creating a radical in my family!

Monica's multiple literacies. Evidence of Monica’s use of multiple literacies in the EFE were captured in her portfolio: a thick, purple three-ring binder, with a cartoon character called “the Cool K-9 Pochacco, the hip pup with a cool attitude” dancing on the front, back and sides. Although Monica thought the portfolio idea was “a little bit weird at first, because you weren’t telling me how to set it up and I am so used to teachers telling me exactly how they want stuff,” her final compilation of work was well-organized and thorough. Within her portfolio, her reflection pieces and reading logs stand out as evidence of varied literacies she used to make meaning in the EFE.

Monica’s weekly reflections or “R’s” were handwritten in large block style letters in an assortment of vibrant colors on looseleaf pieces of paper. She explained that she often wrote them in bed at night with the thought in mind that she was “writing a letter to Terry or Dan.” It took time, however, for Monica to settle into this more informal type of writing. Her first reflective piece or “R,” which addressed the reasons why she wanted to be a teacher, was distant and impersonal:

In today’s society it is vital that we graduate compassionate, dedicated teachers into the profession. Why? Because today’s teacher not only communicates knowledge but is a

child's counselor, mentor and friend. Equally important is a teacher that embraces diversity and appreciates each child's differences.

Dan responded to her first piece by writing, "So what about you Monica? Use the 'R' to relax, open up, be personal, and use your own voice." With this invitation, Monica began her second piece with the caution, "All right you asked for it! I will try to relax and write what I feel about the 'R' topics. You may be sorry." Still, in this piece she continued to hide any uncertainties and presented herself in a "together" light as she described the details of her busy life as a working mother, full-time student, and community volunteer. After the course was over, Monica explained the difficulty she had in writing the initial reflections:

At the beginning, not knowing you and Dan, I was hesitant to like pour out my soul because I thought you would think that I was weird. I thought you'd say "What a freak!" As I got to know you, your comments were so encouraging to me. It meant something to me that you would write back . . . so I could relax and let my hair down.

By the fourth week, Monica wrote longer and more conversational pieces, and we began to engage in extended dialogue about both educational issues and personal stories. Through this evolving exchange, our relationship developed as colleagues and friends, leading Monica to joke, "Because of the 'R's', you know me better than I know myself!"

Monica's written responses to the course readings were written in the same large and colorful print. She alternated between using a two-column format, with notes from the text on the left side and reactions to the text on the right, and lists of comments or notes. Monica reacted strongly to particular course readings, such as Savage Inequalities (Kozol, 1991) and Funding for Justice (Rethinking Schools, 1997), with comments full of exclamation points and big smiling faces drawn in the margins. For example, in response to an editorial in Funding for Justice that

called for a new vision of schooling and a critical, anti-racist curriculum, Monica wrote, “Oh my God ... someone finally recognized this and put it in print! Awesome! Curriculum should be a rainbow of resistance, reflecting the diversity of people! Yes!”

Shifts in voice. Monica came into the semester with a strong curiosity about educational issues and fluctuated between wanting to hear from experts to trusting her own inner judgment and beliefs. For example, in the second week of the semester, she attached the following list of questions to her “R”: “How do you see charter schools affecting our community? What is the story with standardized tests? Are they of any use?” In a conversation at the end of the course, she laughed about this list and explained, “I wrote all those questions because I thought you had all the answers!” Monica’s motivation for wanting to be “educated” stemmed from both her belief in advocacy and activism to her interest in “getting the inside stuff, finding out what’s going on in the different districts, their curriculums and philosophies.” She adamantly explained, “I don’t want to just settle for a teaching job or work for a principal who hates bilingual education or doesn’t promote diversity.” Instead, Monica said, “I want to go to a place where I can feel comfortable and where I can do some good.”

Yet along with this emerging strength of purpose as a multicultural activist teacher, Monica’s voice in the classroom took an underground turn after she experienced conflicts over issues of diversity in the EFE. At this point, her questions, ideas, and beliefs left the classroom floor and found their way into her weekly reflections and into her conversations with those “who get it” instead of those who don’t. I noted this trend in my research journal:

In some ways, I suspect that the level of discourse about these issues in our “underground literacy” (via the reflection papers)—along with my efforts to keep more “radical views” in balance with the voices of the strong conservative Christian group in our class so as not to “offend” anyone—contributed to turning Monica into an underground writer like

me. This makes me wonder if this pedagogy (i.e. dialogue journals) is necessarily the "best answer" for bringing difficult issues to light in course like this.

Monica's lack of patience for other members of the class who she perceived would turn out to be the kind of teachers who "would've put [her] in the maid at Ramada Inn track" fueled her fire to become a teacher-activist. By the end of the EFE, Monica occupied unsettled terrain in the arena of education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist by shutting out conversations with those who didn't share her views.

Cindy's Experience

With her wide smile and swim-team captain hair, Cindy is difficult not to notice when she enters a room; yet, on the first day of class, she felt particularly noticed and evaluated. "When my best friend Amy and I walked in with our sorority sweatshirts," she noted, "I felt right away like people were looking at us and judging us." She staked out a seat with Amy on the far side of the room and sat there everyday for the duration of the semester. During class discussions, Cindy sometimes whispered with Amy or scribbled notes to her friend in the margins of her notebook. Cindy's involvement in other communities in the EFE paralleled that of her "sorority sister" Amy. They observed in the same classroom for most of the semester, cared for children at the parent ESL classes together, and worked on a curriculum unit as a team. By the end of the semester, Cindy said, "Sometimes it was good to have Amy there but we were sort of stuck to each other. I wish I would have broken away from her sooner."

"Your autobiography group is kind of special." Through "the autobiography group," as Cindy called it, she discovered "that my story would be interesting to other people," and she realized that "all people have stories that are important to share." Cindy also developed a relationship with Monica through reading and sharing their stories. On the last day of class,

Cindy and Monica discussed their early misconceptions and stereotypes, and have since grown to become constant companions at the university. Cindy referred to Monica as “a close friend” and “one of those cool moms.”

The classroom community. At the end of the semester, Cindy exclaimed, “I loved this class right from the beginning and now I light up when I see people from there.” However, in the large group, Cindy was often a silent member because she felt “as if other people were more insightful and had better things to say.” She also had a sporadic habit of closing her eyes for a quick doze and jerking back to life, providing evidence of both a frantic, college lifestyle and her moments of “just checking out for awhile” during discussions. Although she was always a strong contributor when engaged in small group activities, when the arena of discussion widened, she said, “I was often overwhelmed by all the ways to do things and all the theories.”

Classroom observations. Cindy observed four different classroom settings over the course of the EFE and developed a strong sense of community in her final setting. In her first classroom—the sixth grade inquiry program—she was most absorbed in observing the girls who reminded her so much of her “kids from camp!” from her summer job. Her written observations reflected her “just got back from summer camp” state, as each one addressed “missing her girls” and connected the classroom meetings used in this setting to her recent camp counseling techniques. From there, Cindy spent one day with a teacher “so grouchy she made my skin crawl” before going to a second grade classroom. In this class, she was with a teacher who had been a student in the same program just a couple years ago. Many of Cindy’s fears about “out of control” classrooms were calmed in this setting as “this was a mellow, young teacher who had a successful classroom where kids were learning and it wasn’t all out of control.” Finally, Cindy settled in to spend the remainder of the semester in a kindergarten classroom with Ms. Hatfield.

When Cindy first walked into Ms. Hatfield's room, she said, "I thought I was going to die!" She elaborated:

You see, I am a very, highly organized, everything-has-a-place kind of girl. So, when I first saw Ms. Hatfield's room, I thought a tornado had blown through about four times! There were papers on top of papers on top of papers and everything was literally thrown everywhere. Ugh... an absolute nightmare!

However, she quickly grew to adore Ms. Hatfield, a teacher who "pulls knowledge from kids, she doesn't stow knowledge away in them." In this classroom, Cindy was most impressed with the "family members who help in the class and some of them aren't even Moms, they are Grandmas and aunts!" Cindy thought "this was just great to see family members get to come in and see their child and his/her peers learning." She also suspected it must be "special for [family members] to develop a relationship with Ms. Hatfield."

Cindy worked in this setting with Amy and another young woman Carla, and as a threesome, they "fell in love with the class" and volunteered to come on extra days to help with special events, like a Halloween scavenger hunt and party. Cindy, Amy, and Carla radiated with joy when they came back from the Thursday morning observation times. Cindy remembered, "We were always busy in the classroom and the three of us would often get so excited over a kid's work that we would talk about it all the way back to the portable!" This talk about the classrooms was critical for Cindy, as she explained, "I benefited the most from talking about what I was seeing with peers."

In Ms. Hatfield's classroom, Cindy, Amy and Carla struggled to help the Spanish-speaking students with the curriculum in the class. Cindy was "amazed by the fact that Ms. Hatfield does not know Spanish, yet she has at least three kids in her class who did not speak

English!” According to Cindy, “This just doesn't seem fair to the kids because they just stare at Ms. Hatfield rambling on in English and they just don't understand at all.” At times, Cindy was able to help the kids because of her Spanish from high school, but “it still wasn't enough.” In this environment, Cindy also began to worry about other things she saw. She “noticed that some kids were a bit ‘ungroomed’ and looked less cared for than others,” and she was saddened to learn that “around 90% of the school fell below some level for assistance with meals.” However, Cindy said, “This is a wonderful school, with teachers who seem to love their jobs and care about the children here.”

ESL childcare: “Overwhelmed by friendliness.” With Amy and Carla, Cindy volunteered to provide childcare at the ESL classes for parents at the school. This experience is one that Cindy, “wouldn't trade for the world.” After the semester was over, she exclaimed, “I never felt so appreciated in my life! I was overwhelmed by friendliness!” Cindy's eyes lit up when she talked about the meaning of this project to her:

It was my favorite thing in class because people became real. I am not used to having ESL for adults at any school I've ever been to, and the parents were so nice and the kids were so cute! When I went back to my classroom on observation days, I'd think, “those were some of my kids' parents out there” and “I bet those parents are probably so proud of their kids.” It made the kids more like three-dimensional people, knowing where they are coming from.

She also valued the sense of purpose and community this experience provided because “you feel like you are in a whole network.” She added, “Making something like this happen is something to look forward to as a teacher.”

“I had no idea what to expect.” Thinking back to the beginning of the semester, Cindy recalled:

I honestly had no idea what to expect in this area. I asked Amy what she thought of [this school] and she had no idea either! Considering that it was close to the “U” I may have thought it was a little on the "ghetto" side ... I am only familiar with the “U” area and the homes up in the suburban hills, so when I first saw the trailer across the street from the school, I am sure I assumed the community was a poor and uncaring place, kind of like its surroundings, rundown. But, if someone had told me it was the best school in the city I would have believed them!

For her first “shaggin’ around” venture beyond the immediate neighborhood, Cindy teamed up with Amy and a few other students and walked around one section of the attendance area located near another elementary school. She began her investigation at the school, which was “nestled off a busy road, [with] a small silver lining embracing it.” Cindy reported, “the red brick building was very clean, well-kept and manicured ... the lawn was nicely mowed and trimmed ... and no trash was lying around.” However, she added, “I did notice that it was surrounded by a chain link fence, but I think that most schools out here seem to be, and it is something that I have just not gotten used to yet.” On her walk, she saw:

Homes set back on large lots off of a dirt road ... many with chain link fences and average cars ... a strip mall, a bank, some home improvement type stores, a day care, apartments, a sketchy pizza place, a run down thrift store, some medical businesses with lovely landscaping ... and across a busy street, there was a nice looking, adobe style, gated community.

On her return trip to the area the following week, Cindy stopped in two businesses to “get a feel for the community.” She went into a “rundown fast food place, not as nice as the newer ones,” and got into a conversation with Alfredo, an employee who was mopping outside. “He was so friendly!,” Cindy wrote, “And he said that the area around here used to be a lot quieter, but now people kick back and party a lot.” From there, Cindy and Amy went into “a smelly and gross” day care across the street, where she found out from the manager “that most of the children who attended this day care were on some kind of public assistance and only 25% paid cash.”

At the end of the semester, Cindy reflected on her experiences in the neighborhood:

After getting out in the community ... I was surprised to see some of the upkeep of the homes ... they were like treasures tucked off the busy street. I was also surprised because everyone was so friendly everywhere we went. Going out into the area it was reinforced to us several times that this was definitely a poorer area and many people were on financial assistance.

She also came to “feel an attachment and much more of an appreciation for the area” and commented on the value of getting out into the community:

I have learned so much from this experience. It is so important to reach out and "see" where the students are coming from. It just makes it that much easier to learn to understand them and appreciate their values and desires. I will do a similar thing when I get a job in a district. I think it would be cool to get a head start on studying the district's neighborhood before the teaching year begins and then continue studying throughout the year and in years to come. I also realize how fortunate I would be to live right in the

district that my teaching is being done in. If we are not aware of where our students are coming from, how can we begin to understand and respect them?

Cindy's multiple literacies. Cindy struggled for the first half of the semester in putting together a portfolio. Not “getting to it sooner” was one of her “big regrets.” In the beginning, she completed her reflective pieces in large batches; consequently, on some days, a pile of three or four pieces of writing from Cindy appeared in the basket of work to be read. However, by the end of the course, her portfolio reflected pride and dedication to organized, quality work. Cindy’s portfolio was a thick, bulging, black three-ring binder with dividers coded in primary colors. In her action section, she included carefully captioned photographs to document her time in the kindergarten class and in the parent ESL classes childcare. She also included a chronological, detailed section for all of her class notes and handouts. Through the experience of constructing a portfolio, Cindy came to “like this portfolio thing” for both herself and her future students.

At her midterm portfolio interview, Cindy seemed hesitant as she hurriedly flipped through her portfolio, trying, it appeared, to hide the gaps in her reading logs. She explained that the “reading and writing in this course was difficult” for her by portraying a picture of herself, “sitting late at night at my computer trying to keep my eyes open, while thinking through all the writing at once.” In her midterm reflection, she wrote, “I find the logs or “L’s” frustrating and I hate doing them. I don’t like reading and reflecting. I think I need to come up with a different system for logging my readings.” Using a “different system” of handwriting responses to the readings, rather than trying to summarize them in an “academic” style at the computer, Cindy completed the required reading logs by the end of the semester. Yet, she did not use them as prompts to share ideas in class discussion about the readings or as vehicles to talk about text. Interestingly, at the end of this semester, Cindy reported, “I bought all the optional books and someday I will have to sit down and read them.”

Cindy’s written reflections or “R’s” grew in both length and detail over the course of the semester; and, she explained that writing “R’s” was the area where she saw the “most growth.” Her first reflection was simply a list of general reasons why she wanted to be a teacher—a format chosen, she explained, “because I was having trouble organizing my thoughts.” Some of her reasons for teaching included:

I love working with youth.

I like expanding peoples [sic] thoughts and ideas.

I like the lifestyle of a teacher.

I like have [sic] a lasting impression, impact, and effect of [sic] people.

Teaching and learning are always changing and growing.

Dan responded to Cindy’s first “R” with the questions: “What do you imagine the lifestyle of a teacher to look like?” and, “What strengths and talents do you bring to teaching?” In her second “R” Cindy qualified her entry into the “R” topic—the broad question “Who are you?” across a range of categories—by writing, “I feel this is an overwhelming question, which is not easily answered, but I will try my best!” About midway through the piece, she addressed the impact of gender on her life by writing, “As for gender, I am female, which plays an enormous role in shaping who I am, ladedadeda.” Cindy continued using phrases like, “Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah ...” or “Hum ...” throughout her “R’s” when it seemed as if she either did not exactly know what to say or was writing things that did not sound genuine to her.

By the fourth week, Cindy wrote an “R” that came to life with specific details as she thoughtfully considered the place of rewards in creating a positive classroom climate:

When thinking about rewards, it is difficult to come to a conclusion ... everybody wants rewards, but when rewards become comparisons and win-lose relationships among students, the focus of the goal is lost ... I don't think that a reward should be a physical possession, but simply individual recognition. Maybe, just a simple "Three cheers for _____! Hip, hip, hooray!" or other "grouch-busters." I think that rewards should be given to a class as a whole as they strive to work cooperatively for a common goal.

With more of Cindy present in the "R" I had was drawn to respond at length. At the end of this fourth "R", Cindy's extended description of how she would try to create a sense of belonging in her classroom made me smile; and, I wrote, "You are a grouch-buster, Cindy!" in the margin.

Although she relaxed with her "R's," Cindy continued to struggle with reading and writing as she investigated and wrote about her critical issue of choice. She began her research by "looking into funding and trying to figure out some of the funding inequalities in [her home state]" after she found a table representing these disparities in Funding for Justice (Rethinking Schools, 1997). From there, she collected a big stack of files on school funding from the internet; but, she had trouble getting a handle on the issue and turning her multiple resources into a paper. In frustration, she tried writing on another topic: a state legislative proposal to reward teachers with money if and when academic achievement on standardized tests in schools improved. However, she said, "I wrote two or three pages on that and realized that I did not know what I was talking about before I gave it up." Consequently, she did not have a clear idea in mind for her investigation until the last weekend of the semester.

During Thanksgiving break, Cindy flew back home and had a conversation with a cousin about teaching and curriculum at a family gathering. This stimulated her interest in the historical roots of curriculum and she returned after break with a brand new paper that provided an historical overview of the key players in curriculum in the U.S. It seemed natural for her to have

found her topic through conversing at a party with a family member; for, Cindy seemed most at ease when she was gathered around a group of people engaged in laughter and conversation. She said, “Getting to know people should be paid more attention to in classes ... maybe teachers think it is more elementary to do that and you shouldn’t do it in college, but you should walk into your class and know someone.” She added, “I love getting to know people ... and this class is up on pedestal for me because of that.” Reflecting on the importance of conversation and “knowing people” in learning in this EFE, she said, “This is definitely an experience we will all want to bring into our classrooms.”

Cindy's transformations. Cindy’s shifts in this EFE were dramatic. At the beginning of her final reflection, she wrote, “I have learned so much from this class alone about teaching and started a good foundation to a challenging and forever growing career.” Her construction of this foundation seemed most evident in her shifts in practice from student to emerging teacher—with an accompanying shift in voice—and in her desire to teach in a “place with greater need.”

From the beginning of the course until shortly after the midterm, Cindy did not give the course much of her limited time and attention. She completed work in marathon batches, stayed up late to “crank out” reading logs, and arrived in a somewhat sleepy state from “working three jobs and running around like a chicken with its head cut off.” In an interview at the end of the semester, Cindy seemed reluctant to look back on these scattered days. She admitted, “I had a hard time with it before the midterm because I would just take one night and do this stuff for hours on end and then I just would get tired of it.” Closer to the end of the course, Cindy changed her pattern when she “realized that this portfolio is just such an awesome thing!” As a “very organized person” she gave herself a “kick in the butt” and “decided ... to work on it more than one night a week.”

Besides altering her work habits and developing an impressive portfolio, Cindy began to see “sharper ways to look at things” from a teacher’s perspective over the course of the semester. Cindy started with a fear of “getting so wrapped up in survival” that she was “nervous and anxious at the thought of ever maintaining a controlled, productive learning environment.” By the fourth week, her reflective writings and classroom observation reports nearly doubled in length as she spent considerable time writing into the unknown about these concerns. For example, in her seventh “R,” she carefully compared various classroom management theories and how they fit with her as a person:

Initially, I feel myself not wanting to be a Canter ... I’m not sure why ... I think it is because ideally I would like to be a teacher who could understand why students were acting the way they did. I do see myself being a Canter with the respects that I am a very orderly, organized, mechanical person, who as a result is laid-back. So, I can see how a Canter routine would work for me because it is organized, although I must say I hate it when teachers write names on the board!

From there, she went on to develop ideas about other management theories, and concluded with her thoughts on Glasser’s classroom meeting. She wrote, “I love Glasser’s emphasis on communicating in groups, so I think that if meetings could be successfully conducted in the classroom, it would be wonderful.” At the end of the semester, she reconsidered her beliefs:

I am now seeing myself as a Canter/Glasser hybrid. For some reason, I don’t want to be a Canter—but I seem to keep on coming back to it. Maybe because it just seems to be the easiest and doesn't really deal with moral aspects, its just cut and dry. But back to “camp moments,” we used to have weekly meetings with our campers and it was really cool because it definitely built community and taught kids a lot about communication.

Over the course of the semester, Cindy's observations in varied classrooms and her talk about classroom management theories also contributed to her transformed sense of calm about managing a classroom for learning. She explained, "I felt more secure and less anxiety-ridden when I saw teachers who were also new and young who had classes under control, where kids were learning in positive atmospheres." Talking about these concerns was also a part of the process for Cindy, as she added, "It was a relief to know we shared common fears." After the course was over, she said:

I have overcome my phobia of being the first year teacher I realize that I have never been afraid to talk to someone, to get advice, to find someone to tell me how can I get back on top of it when I fall, and if I get in trouble, I will ask questions and find a way to get some help.

The easing of Cindy's fears about classroom management may have contributed to another transformation for Cindy: understanding that she did not necessarily need or want to teach in an affluent, suburban area like her hometown. As a result of her experiences in this school and community, Cindy noted:

One big realization I have come to is that as a teacher you have to want every kid in America to receive an excellent and equal education.... Coming into this class I wanted to get off easy and be the teacher at 'High Peaks'—the place where everybody succeeds ... if you want to make the most of your teaching degree it will not be challenged as much at High Peaks as it would at another district.... One day I realized that the point was to make a difference and that it is not going to be accomplished in a place where everything is already perfect, where there is a controlled group and everything is already plugged in, where test scores are high and schools are too

concerned with their image. The good stuff is in the schools like [this one] where there are progressions, imperfections, and things get turned around.

Cindy grew to “treasure the atmosphere” and “love the kids” in this context, and she hoped that she might eventually find a “place like this to work.” However, she wrote, “I must realize the kind of challenge I am willing to take on, which definitely scares me.”

Reflections on Monica's and Cindy's Experiences

Engaging in this study of preservice teachers’ experiences in a reconceptualized EFE has left me, first of all, with a more comprehensive definition of a “course.” Although I examined Monica's and Cindy's experiences within the bounded system of a specific combination of two teacher education courses, I came away with the notion that a course is far from an isolated set of orchestrated experiences or provisions that can be neatly described in a university catalog or course syllabus. A course is, more accurately, a continuation of the lives of participants as they continue on their own journeys, accommodating new information into the larger frame of the courses of their lives. Considering a teacher education course in this fashion denies the false security of technical solutions to the predicaments of learning to teach and recognizes teaching as a truly reflective practice: a human, political, cultural, and social act, connected in powerful ways to the lives of those who are learning to practice it (Carter & Doyle, 1996).

Monica and Cindy's experiences in communities within this EFE also served to teach common lessons. They both learned to cross boundaries of socioeconomic class and ethnicity within the EFE’s portable classroom community to become "real" to one another. They also experienced firsthand, in a variety of venues, the way in which hope, joy, and care for children are present in a lower socioeconomic area with considerable diversity and both expressed commitments to inquiry into the larger communities in which schools are situated. Their

understandings were created within multiple, overlapping communities, and the establishment and nourishment of such communities is at the heart of learning to teach. If field experiences are fashioned in more anonymous ways, without attention to communities for “critical reflection” that Armaline (1995) advocated, field experiences may, in fact, be miseducative.

The multiple literacies they used in this EFE functioned to turn their ideas into more complex understandings, and also served to illustrate commitments to justice in teaching, even when some of these understandings could not, for a variety of reasons, be comfortably shared on the classroom floor. In addition to their utility in providing spaces for developing understandings of diversity, multiple literacies were important for Monica's and Cindy's constructions of knowledge about themselves as beginning teachers.

One of the most compelling findings in this research was the way in which subtle shifts took place in the voices of each participant over the course of the EFE, both in speech and in writing. Class discussions were dominated by a small, core group where one student was, in some regards, the lone student voice for education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. Three middle-class, White women—self-identified as “gifted”—were the most frequent contributors, and they were also part of a cadre of conservative Christian students in the course who typically raised objections to changes in standard practice (like the transmission model of teaching) and continually questioned the emphasis on diversity in the class. Cindy felt “not as insightful as others” so she did not respond to or initiate discussion. Monica eventually opted out of discussions altogether due to her experiences with people in the class who “didn’t get it” when the talk centered on diversity. As a teacher in this EFE, I sometimes appropriated or relied on that lone student voice for justice and multicultural education in order to raise concepts that seemed difficult to broach within the overwhelmingly conservative group of students in the class. Since I felt a sense of responsibility for trying to make even the staunchest conservatives comfortable so that they did not turn off to multicultural education, as the ones in Ahlquist’s

(1992) course did, it was often easier to let this student do the talking for me. From these observations, I wonder if it might be necessary to have the stronger voices of some function as a form of “scaffolding” (Bruner, 1986) for others, particularly when complex, political, and ideological concepts are raised and under construction in the public spaces of classrooms. Further attention to the ways in which multicultural and social reconstructionist concepts are constructed in teacher education classrooms can inform the field as it continues to struggle with the growing need to prepare teachers for diversity.

Future Research

Rather than charting a grand course for research in teacher education, I am most intrigued with the things I still want to learn from Monica and Cindy. Individually and collectively, the next round of questions I have for them suggest other possible avenues that warrant attention. Returning to Monica, I am curious about the long-term view of her journey from here. I wonder most of all whether her activist voice will return to the classroom floor, or if she will continue to save her voice only for those who listen. Since we no longer share weekly written reflections, I would like to know if she still uses the power of her colorful pens to write about political issues that disturb her. This year is a pivotal year for Monica, as she was enrolled in an intensive elementary block program in the fall and will student teach and graduate in spring of 1999. From there, I wonder how Monica will search for a “principal who doesn’t hate bilingual education” (especially in the current anti-bilingual education climate in the Southwest), in a school where “parents are not intimidated” and she can “shake up the curriculum” with a like-minded team of teachers. Finally, I wonder if Monica will learn the first voice she lost—the Spanish language of her family’s heritage—to become the bilingual teacher she wants to be. Cindy just turned twenty-one years old, and by May of 1999, she will be finished with student teaching. I wonder if she will continue to find people (besides Amy) when she “needs to talk to” someone for guidance. If she gets tired of having the “no life” she predicts will come in student

teaching (and in her first few years as a teacher), will she find support so that she does not give up on her dream? I also wonder what will happen if Cindy begins teaching in a school that is not a “High Peaks” kind of place. Will she be supported as a new teacher as she faces the challenges that might “make her teaching degree mean something” to her? For both Monica and Cindy, I was most struck by the way in which their individual histories and current life experiences shaped (and will likely continue to shape) their paths. We need more cases of how this works for beginning teachers for many reasons, not the least of which is political, so teachers as cultural workers and “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1993) are not continually subjected to formulaic and artificial prescriptions of teaching and systems of surveillance.

As Haberman (1987) argued, perhaps teacher education needs to work on defining and measuring dispositions that appear to be necessary in order to teach in increasingly complex classrooms with culturally diverse students. Dewey (1904/1964) pointed out that: an open mind (one that is accepting and flexible), wholeheartedness (being genuinely interested and committed to learning), and intellectual responsibility (being aware of the impact that a teacher’s decisions make on students) are significant attributes of those who engage in reflective thinking. The dispositions that Dewey suggested, interestingly, were also illustrated by participants in this study. For example, Monica was adamant in her belief that “It takes a special person with an open mind to understand diversity.” She also believed that her “open mind” helped her appreciate cultural differences and her “tendencies to always be nosy” will continue to serve her well as she strives to understand the cultures of the student in her classrooms in the future. Monica’s excursions into the trailer park and Cindy’s travels—including moving across the country to attend this university—suggest an orientation to new and different experiences, which may be important for teachers to have in order to teach in the increasingly diverse classrooms of the nation’s schools. Figuring out how and in what ways these dispositions can be determined in meaningful ways is an interesting avenue for additional research.

Given the exalted place of field experiences in teacher education, it is also imperative that more is known about both the pedagogical processes and the actual experiences of the preservice teachers in EFEs, especially as EFEs are used to challenge preservice teachers beliefs about diversity. Additionally, as recruitment efforts targeting under-represented groups increase, the voices of preservice teachers of color in teacher education programs must be heard if the field ever hopes to right the growing imbalance in teacher and student populations. Finally, as the evolution of professional development schools continues, research that documents the trials, successes, and challenges of such efforts from the perspectives of those most closely involved are important.

Implications for Teacher Education

This research uncovered promising directions and possible pitfalls for curriculum and pedagogy in EFEs, particularly those designed to confront the complexities of preparing future teachers to teach all children in a diverse society. Although not a focus of this study, the findings also uncover implications for recruitment of under-represented groups into teaching.

Promising Directions

Promising directions in curriculum and pedagogy drawn from this research include creating “communities of memory and hope” (Wood, 1992) in both teacher education programs and individual courses, and further expanding the context of EFEs into schools and neighboring communities. Although each preservice teacher in the study experienced communities in multiple ways, the common social ground shared on a daily basis provided a most fruitful space for constructing understandings of concepts and building relationships of “affection” and “intelligent sympathy” among members (Dewey, 1916/1997). Together, as a group of prospective teachers of all kinds, they created memories and built hope, even in the midst of

struggles and words left unsaid. When the group gathered on the last morning in the portable classroom, nearly everyone present expressed a sense of having participated in “something greater than themselves” (Wood, 1992, p. 118). The significance of this shared bond continues. Soon after the spring semester began, I heard a story from Cindy and Monica about the first day of class in a large lecture hall where nearly a dozen members of this EFE found themselves together again. Cindy exclaimed, “You should have seen us ... we were hugging and screaming like long lost relatives!” Perhaps this sounds too sentimental and sweet for teacher education research. However, if teachers are to function as a force in creating a more just society, then building communities in preservice teacher education may be the best hope we have of ensuring that similar communities—in classrooms, public schools, and public life in general—are created for the benefit of children, families, and the larger society.

The value of moving EFEs from the isolation of individual classrooms to a continually widening circle of classroom, school, and community experiences as Zeichner (1996) suggests, was apparent in this research. From engaging in larger issues, like Monica did in her investigation of the Hispanic studies curriculum, to having experiences that enabled preservice teachers to gain a more expansive view of students, like Cindy did in the kindergarten and the ESL childcare, the wider contexts in this EFE—along with reflection on the experiences in these contexts—moved early field experiences into a more educative role. In addition, the real struggles evident in these schools provided opportunities for foundational lessons to be learned.

Pitfalls in Curriculum and Pedagogy

The curriculum and pedagogy implemented in this program also highlight problems for EFEs in teacher education. Although costs to maintain a separate facility were incurred by the school district in this partnership, the financial issues associated with school-university partnerships need to be addressed. In addition, in this EFE, two instructors team-taught without

the benefits of a reward structure in teacher education that honored the extra time it took for each person to be involved in both courses and the accompanying field experience. Further, completing the "mini-ethnographies" and grassroots projects required additional personnel in order to insure that the preservice teachers were comfortable in engaging in neighborhood work in unfamiliar (and potentially dangerous) areas. The development of school-university partnerships where this type of EFE can occur also takes tremendous amounts of time. In my field notes, the category of "school business," which included meetings with teachers and administrators, was the second largest content category. I spent considerable time organizing field placements in classrooms, managing community and school projects, and maintaining collegial and friendly relationships with faculty and staff at the schools.

Recruitment of Under-represented Groups into Teacher Education

This study also points to several implications for recruitment of members of under-represented groups into the field of teaching. For example, the strength of the "confianza" between Monica and Carmen, which began at the community college and existed in their networks with Hispanic women in the community as well, illustrates the need for teacher education institutions to build stronger relationships with community colleges in order to tap into these networks for recruitment. In addition, establishing early career recruitment plans (particularly at the middle school level) that are linked to service in diverse schools and communities, providing academic guidance and scholarships to participants in such programs, and strengthening school-university partnerships to make these efforts possible are critical. The potential of partnerships as a vehicle for recruitment was especially evident in the sixth grade newsletter project in this EFE. Over the course of the six-week project, several of the sixth graders who were members of under-represented groups expressed strong interest in teaching after spending time with Monica in this context. Teacher education institutions would do well to consider establishing more partnerships with the joint, complementary goals of recruitment of

children from under-represented groups into teaching and the education of preservice teachers for teaching in culturally diverse schools and communities.

Conclusion

As a result of this journey towards understanding the experiences of Monica and Cindy in this particular EFE, I am both hopeful for the future and more fully cognizant of the monumental task ahead in preparing future teachers for diversity, particularly through early field experiences in diverse settings. Most of all, I have altered my notion of a course through walking side by side with them on a portion of their individual (and connected) courses towards becoming the teachers they want to be.

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