# The Impact of Shadowing Culturally Different Students on Preservice Teachers' Disposition toward Diversity

### By Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu

## Introduction

A critical issue in teacher education today is the mismatch between racially homogenous teachers and students from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds. In the United States, the student population is becoming more diverse while the teaching force is becoming increasingly monocultural, white, and middle class (Sleeter, 1992). Current data on the teaching force also reveal that the prospective teaching population is predominantly white, middle class, monolingual, female, rural and suburban (Banks, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

The impact of this disparity in the socio-cultural mismatch between diverse students and their white and middle class teachers have been well documented to include lowered teacher expectation and teachers' racializaed attitudes towards, and beliefs about students (Garmon, 1996; Haberman, 1991; Ladson-Billings 1995). Studies indicate that compatibility between school culture and student culture facilitates effective communication and positive interactions whereas differences interfere in communication and learning (Hilliard, 1992; Irvine, 1992).

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Numerous studies indicate that a majority of white preservice teachers have negative and racialized dispositions toward diverse students (Law & Lane 1987; Paine 1989; Parajes, 1991; Smith 1998; and Zimpher & Asburn, 1992); that these attitudes coupled with the attendant lower expectations, are major factors contributing to the widespread academic failure among diverse students (Garmon, 1996).

Consequently, researchers and scholars have challenged teacher education programs to provide prospective teachers opportunities for authentic experiential encounters with contextualized diversity where they can be challenged to confront their preconceived notions, and ultimately transform their attitudes. The current study is a response to that challenge.

## Theoretical Framework

Among today's educators and researchers, prevailing teachers' racial attitudes and beliefs about diverse students is a compelling reason to prepare them for critical diversity (Garmon, 1996). A 1989 survey by the Association for Teacher Education revealed that the third highest rated critical issue facing teacher education is preparing teachers for diverse student populations (Buttery, Haberman, & Houston, 1990).

Numerous studies indicate that predominantly white preservice teachers have differential perceptions of how they will experience teaching in urban and suburban school communities. For example, in a survey, Terrill and Mark (2000) found that white preservice teachers tend to expect discipline problems, fewer gifted and talented students, and lower levels of motivation from African American students in urban schools compared to students attending suburban schools.

Further, studies report that white preservice teachers lack the inclination to teach in urban school settings (Haberman, 1991; Zeichner, 1996). Schultz, Neyhart, and Reck (1996) surveyed 300 European American preservice teachers at Kurtztown University regarding their attitudes and beliefs about working in multicultural school communities and found that many held negative attitudes and perceptions toward urban schools. They described urban students as lackadaisical, unmotivated, violent, emotionally unstable, etc. (p.4).

Similarly, Wolfe (1996) investigated preservice teachers' attitudes about diversity in a small liberal arts college in rural Indiana and found that they expected greater discipline problems, racial conflicts, lack of parental support, etc. (pp. 104-105). Thus, a growing number of policy studies and proposals on teacher education suggests that if preservice teachers are to be prepared to transform their racial attitudes, then, they must have authentic experiential encounters with diverse students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 1996) and to gain "pedagogical learner knowledge" (Grimmett & Mackinnon, 1992).

Darling-Hammond (1996) underscores this point when she suggests that

preservice teachers need to have contact with culturally different students and in authentic settings; that such contacts will help them develop positive attitudes, create a sense of comfort, reduce their fear of urban students and school settings, gain new knowledge about the students, and a better understanding of the students' lived experiences.

Gipe, Duffy, and Richards (1989) researched this assumption and found it to be valid, although they were not certain of its lasting effect. McDiarmid (1990) also echoes the value of field experience as an opportunity for preservice teachers to examine and challenge the "web of beliefs" as well as build a foundation on which alternative perspectives can be developed. Doyle's (1997) study suggested that providing field experiences and opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect and analyze their experiences influenced changes in their beliefs.

Recently, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education NCATE (2000) highlighted through its standards the importance and value of field-based experiences in effective diversity and multicultural teacher preparation, and requires that preservice teachers participate in field-based experiences with culturally diverse and exceptional populations.

## Statement of Problem and Purpose

Given the fact that 85 percent of the nation's teachers will be white, working with diverse students (Banks, 1991; Haberman, 1991), and research suggestions that most white preservice teachers harbor racialized and negative dispositions toward diverse students that negatively affect their schooling and academic success (Haberman 1991; Garmon, 1996), the stakes are high for these students who are already experiencing dismal academic achievement. Teachers who do not possess the prerequisite dispositions and "pedagogical learner knowledge" contribute to the poor performance of students.

In most teacher education programs, preparation of preservice teachers for diversity often takes place through the requirement of a multicultural education course. However, several studies have indicated that presevice teachers who have been exposed to multicultural education courses were no more inclined to reject the stereotypes and other preconceived notions they held about diverse students than they were before the course experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1991; Moore & Reeves, 1992).

Sleeter (1992) reported that a multicultural education course she observed did not result in attitude transformation. In her study, Larke (1990) notes that after taking a multicultural education course, preservice teachers continue to reflect much discomfort in working with culturally different students. In many instances multicultural education courses are approached from a survey standpoint because of preservice teachers' multicultural illiteracy (Boyle-Baise, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Ukpokodu, 2002).

Too often, traditional multicultural education courses provide generalizations about cultural groups that tend to reinforce the stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases that preservice teachers already held about diverse students (Banks, 2000). Rarely do multicultural education courses provide preservice teachers with opportunities to experience culturally different students in intimate authentic contexts to help them gain a realistic and humanistic understanding of the cultural and social contexts that shape their experiences.

This is not to discount the value and efficacy of multicultural education in preparing teachers for diversity. Indeed, multicultural education, if done properly, can be a hopeful and humane approach for achieving equity and social justice for diverse students.

As a multicultural educator preparing teachers for diversity, I am constantly reflecting on how best to prepare preservice teachers to work with diverse students. Too often, I have questioned myself about: how might I facilitate the multicultural education course to enable preservice teachers to develop the critical consciousness and deeper understanding of diverse students essential for working with them?

This question motivated the current study that investigated the impact of a diversity field experience on preservice teachers' disposition toward diverse students. Specifically, the study investigated the extent to which preservice teachers' shadowing culturally different students in cross-cultural contexts altered their preconceived notions and negative dispositions toward diverse students and engendered their inclination to work in diverse school settings.

## Method

A mixed qualitative and quantitative research paradigm was used to gather data for the study. A qualitative paradigm was necessary to provide descriptive information related to the efficacy of the cultural experience on participants' learning and disposition. The quantitative paradigm enabled participants to measure the impact of the experience in a more quantifiable way.

The following sections describe the setting, participants, background and context of the study, description of the study project, data collection, limitations of the study, and the data analysis.

## Setting

The study took place in a public university located in a metropolitan urban community in the Midwest of the United States with student population of about 13,000. The focus of the study was on preservice teachers in the teacher education program at one university's School of Education.

A majority of the preservice teachers in the teacher education program were Caucasians, with a small population of African, Latino, and Asian Americans. Over 95 percent of the Caucasian American preservice teachers came from the surrounding affluent suburban and rural communities, which are racially homogenous.

## Participants

Participation in the study was optional. The study involved a project that constituted a significant portion of a required multicultural education course for preservice teachers. The multicultural education course was a foundations course designed to prepare preservice teachers to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions essential for teaching diverse students and preparing all students to function effectively in a multicultural society.

One of the major requirements of the course was a field diversity project. Preservice teachers enrolled in the course had the choice of participating in this study project or another diversity field project. However, all forty-five preservice teachers, including forty females and five males who enrolled in the course in the fall of 1999 and 2000 winter semesters, chose to participate in this study. Thirty-nine of them were European Americans including five males and had come from surrounding suburban middle-class communities in the Midwest. Four were African American females and two were Latino Americans. Eighty-nine percent of the participants were in their second year of their professional semester. Eleven percent were associate teachers seeking teaching licensure.

Participants were allowed to seek and self-select their cultural partners as long as they met the stipulated criteria. Eleven

(24%) Latino Americans and thirty-four (76%) African American culturally different partners were shadowed.

## Background and Context

In 1999, the urban school district with which my university shares a constituency experienced an acute teacher shortage. A pilot, collaborative internship program supported by the state department of education, the school district, and my university was developed. The internship program involved traditional preservice teachers who were in their third professional semester (PS3) of their program.

In this internship program preservice teachers were to spend their third and fourth professional semesters as full-time classroom teachers (with stipend) while completing their remaining classes. As one of the faculty involved in the internship program, I had the opportunity to work closely with the interns for a year. I directly supervised four of the interns as well as taught a yearlong integrated social studies/language arts course to all the interns.

Generally, white interns struggled seriously with culture shock, cultural conflict, and other negative experiences. At the completion of the yearlong internship, only one of the thirteen white interns remained in the district. The lesson learned from this project was significant: Even though all the interns had taken a cultural diversity course prior to engaging in the internship, they could not interact positively with their urban and low-income students.

Prior to teaching in the urban classrooms, these interns had had no contact with urban and low-income students. All they knew about diverse students were stereotypes and biases they had acquired through the societal curriculum, particularly the media. Because the interns had not been prepared to cultivate the critical cultural knowledge, sensitivity, openness, empathy, and inter-cultural competency to work with culturally diverse students, both interns and students were immersed in a learning environment characterized by what Haberman (1991) calls "pedagogy of poverty."

White interns constantly rationalized their ineffectiveness and lack of success by blaming the students' "disadvantaged" home conditions. Many of them exhibited disabled consciousness and in most instances gave up on the students. I recall one chilling experience that stuck to my mind about the white interns as they shared with me their first experience with their students. Several of the interns recounted a shocking experience. Apparently,

on the first day of class, the students, mostly African Americans, a few Latino Americans, Asian Americans and a handful of low-income whites in seeing their new "white" teachers, excitedly rushed to surround them, and supposedly crowded them.

Shocked by the experience, the interns screamed at the students and removed themselves from them. What a powerful negative message to convey to students, who were only seeking physical closeness but only to learn that they were not wanted and that their teachers did not return the affection and excitement they had about them! The interns expressed "feeling threatened by unruly, wild students and feared for their lives."

This experience challenged me to revise my syllabus on the multicultural education course and to integrate a semester-long diversity field project that situated preservice teachers in a cross-cultural learning context with culturally diverse students. The diversity field project was called "shadowing a culturally different partner."

## Description of the Project

Preservice teachers enrolled in the course were to select, partner, and shadow a matured culturally different student currently in a K-12 public school or who had graduated from it. A culturally different student was defined as a member of an ethnic group and US-born or naturalized citizen/permanent resident. However, a non-immigrant student who had lived in the United States for at least ten years, and experienced the American public school—K-12 was also eligible.

The rationale for shadowing a U.S.-born student/resident was to enable preservice teachers gain perspectives about U.S. minority students as opposed to international students, the public school system, teaching and learning practices and student cultural and lived experiences in the U.S. society. Before preservice teachers began the project they were engaged in an extensive exploration, examination, and discussion of the worldview of microcultural groups in U.S. society—Native Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans and European Americans (white Americans).

Each of these microcultural groups was critically examined relative to their worldviews—family orientation, individualism vs. groupism, historical experiences, values, beliefs, language, communication patterns, personal space, concept of time, locus of control, learning styles, educational experience, contribution to society, etc. In

addition, videos that depict the historical and cultural experience of diverse cultures in the US were used to reinforce class discussions. It was vital to help preservice teachers gain background knowledge to guide their interactions with their cultural partners before they met them. However, they were cautioned about using the generalizations as a point of reference rather than the exact prototypes of the generalizations discussed in class. They were cautioned to take each student as an individual and not as a representative of the cultural group.

In addition, preservice teachers were cautioned about the difference between shadowing and interviewing a partner. For example, in an interviewing experience, the interviewer meets briefly with the interviewee, asks predetermined questions, takes notes, and "thank-yous" and "good-byes" are exchanged. On the other hand, in the partner shadowing experience, preservice teachers were expected to meet with their partners throughout the semester, in different socio-cultural contexts— student's home, school, extra-curricular activities, out-of-school activities, place of worship, etc.

These contexts serve as authentic meeting places that naturally lend to communication exchange, opportunities for conversations, talking, inquiry, and authentically learning about the cultural partner and gathering pertinent data. Throughout the semester, in class, preservice teachers were invited to share about the on-going cultural learning experience.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Two sources served for the data collection. The first source involved using qualitative methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to analyze participants' projects— written reflective summaries of their cultural learning experience. Participants were provided a self-constructed guide to facilitate data collection. The guide was composed of items that helped participants generate information about their partner's biographical and family data and schooling experience, such as: residence, future goals, parental education, occupation and involvement in their education, neighborhood friends, role models, etc.

Questionnaire items related to schooling experience included: liking school, favorite teacher/principal/counselor and qualities, favorite subjects, learning motivation, curricular experiences, learning environment, relationship with teachers and peers, etc. Each participant submitted a written reflective summary report of

the cultural experience as part of the course requirement. To authenticate the content of the report, participants documented their meetings and interaction with their partners and submitted rough notes of the meetings.

In addition, to assist participants in accurately and reflectively analyzing the experience, a self-constructed guide was provided. It required them to (1) analyze partner's demographic data in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and grade level; (2) Compare and contrast self and partner's cultural and schooling experience; (3) Explain the beliefs, perceptions and assumptions previously held about partner's racial/ethnic membership and what was dispelled or affirmed; (4) Describe the influence of specific observations and experiences that fostered critical knowledge and thinking about the cultural partner and diverse students and teaching them; (5) Describe how the experience influenced interest and desire to teach culturally diverse students and in multicultural school settings; (6) Describe the extent to which the experience will contribute and influence competency to work with diverse students; and (7) Describe the strengths and challenges of the diversity field experience.

The data collected from the participants' reflective summary reports were descriptive in nature and so were subjected to a qualitative content analysis (Simpson & Nist, 1997). Participants' reflective summary reports were carefully read, coded, and analyzed, and common patterns of thoughts and themes were established and generalizations inferred.

The second source of data was derived from an end-of-semester questionnaire administered to the participants. The questionnaire was designed to measure the extent to which the diversity field experience was beneficial to participants relative to altering the preconceived notions and negative dispositions they previously held about diverse students and multicultural school communities.

The data from this source allowed for a quantitative analysis of the efficacy of the cultural experience on participants' views and notions of diverse students and teaching in diverse school settings. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) allowed preservice teachers to indicate the extent to which the experience was beneficial (see appendix 1). An analysis of the data consisted of a frequency count and percentages.

## Results

The Appendix presents the results from the quantitative analysis. A statistical analysis of the participants' responses showed that preservice teachers unanimously agreed that the experience was beneficial. An overwhelming 100% (n=45) of the participants agreed that the experience allowed them to dispel stereotypes, misconceptions, and preconceived notions they previously held about culturally different students.

In response to the question if the experience enabled them to develop a new positive view and understanding of the socio-cultural and schooling experience of diverse students, 100% of the participants gave a resounding affirmation. Participants' responses regarding the extent to which the experience reduced their level of fear of urban school settings showed that 88.8% (n=40) felt that it reduced their level of fear while five (11%) respondents indicated they were unsure.

When asked the extent to which the experience increased their inclination to work with diverse students, a majority of the respondents (77.7%; n=35) felt positive about teaching diverse students. Four percent (n=2) disagreed that the experience increased their interest to teach diverse students and 17.7% (n=8) were unsure. Also, results indicated that only 33.3% (n=15) of the respondents agreed that the experience increased their inclinations to work in diverse school settings. Twenty-one respondents (46.6%) indicated that they were unsure while 20% (n=9) disagreed.

Responses regarding the extent to which the experience engendered a sense of empathy and caring attitude toward diverse students showed that 100% of the respondents felt that they learned to be empathetic toward and caring about diverse students. The question regarding whether the experience allowed them to gain insights and perspectives about the most effective ways to successfully work with culturally diverse students revealed that 100% (n=45) believed that they did. Finally, when asked the extent to which the experience enabled them to think about their competency to work with diverse students, 100% (n=45) of the respondents agreed that it allowed them to reflect on their qualification and confidence to teach culturally diverse students. Overall, 100% of the respondents felt the experience was very positive.

The participants' written reflective summary reports provided the most compelling evidence of the impact of the experience. In this report, participants described, analyzed, compared, and reflected while noting specific insights and perspectives of their interactions with their partners in various contexts such as home, school, place of worship, and other out-of-school extra-curricular activity centers. The following patterns and themes emerged from analyzing the participants' reports of their cultural experience.

### (1) Value for authentic cross-cultural experience.

Overwhelmingly, the participants viewed the diversity field experience a valuable and positive one for several reasons: gaining an opportunity to step outside their comfort zone and learning to interact with culturally different individuals, an experience many had not had. As one participant noted: "those of us that grow up in homogeneous suburban communities rarely have opportunities to meet and interact with persons of different cultures and skin color; I am very thankful for this field experience for allowing me to meet and get to know a person of color and the beautiful friendship that we have established." Another participant commented:

I have seen myself grow as a multicultural teacher this semester. The course experience has had a powerful impact on my teaching philosophy and practice. I believe it is one of the most important in the teacher education department. I enjoyed the lively interactions in class as well as my extensive reading time. However, my time with Keyren (pseudonym) is the most significant part of my field experience though. I hope to be friends with him forever. He has been a part of my personal healing process internally. He has shattered stereotypes I didn't know I had. He taught me methods to inspire and captivate my students with diverse learning styles and attitudes.

Several participants expressed that, as teachers, if they have to learn to work with diverse students, then they needed to immerse themselves in the lives of those they will teach. Several noted that because of the stereotypes and preconceived notions they have harbored over the years they had learned to be afraid of diverse students, but that the cultural experience helped them to breakdown their fears because they learned that their cultural partners were "real" individuals and not the criminals that the media often portray them to be. One participant's comment sheds some light:

I grew up in a relatively quiet working class community with no diversity. When I chose to participate in this project, I was a bit afraid. My husband was not

thrilled either. My husband and I had, and probably still have, some negative images of schools in the inner city; images of rough, rowdy, even criminal students were in our minds. I am ashamed to admit that I was frightened to go because I had seeds of stereotypes lingering in the back of my mind. But I am more ashamed to admit that none of my preconceived notions were true.

*(2) Unpacking preconceived notions about diverse stud ents and their families.*

Overwhelmingly, participants reported that the experience allowed them to dispel many preconceived notions they held about diverse students, their families, and their school communities. One respondent's comment sheds some light:

> When I first thought about this assignment, I was not sure that I was going to gain anything from it. But I came away from it very enriched and knowledgeable. First, I realized that my cultural partner and I had similar values. I recognized that my previous images and perceptions of the race of my cultural partner were inaccurate. I understand now that I have to apply an open and accepting mind toward students of other cultures.

Several preservice teachers indicated that before they met their cultural partners, they had developed a list of what they thought they would look like, act like, and sound like. For instance, one preservice teacher explained that she worked with the daughter of a classmate who was equally enrolled in the cultural diversity course. Because she knew that the parent of her cultural partner originated from Nigeria and so spoke with an accent, she expected her cultural partner, who was a senior in high school, and U.S.-born, to speak with an accent, and to function minimally in the English language, and so was nervous about communicating with her.

She also expected her partner "to be loud and rambunctious because all black people act that way." Further, she expected her partner to be struggling in school, not smart, to have an attitude, pushy and rude. In her report, she stated none of her preconceived notions were confirmed, which has cautioned her against stereotypes and preconceived notions. For one, she found that her cultural partner was an honor roll student, spoke eloquently and in perfect Standard English with an American accent, and was soft-spoken, very respectful, as she always responded with "yes mam."

One other participant drew this conclusion: "So much of what we know is based upon television and other media portray-ers of the stereotypical minority person; my experience with Kenyan (pseudonym) was quite revealing; he does not fit the mold I would have put him into, before getting to know him."

One misconception that is often held about families of diverse students is that they place little or no value on education or interest in their children's education (Lopez, 2001). Several preservice teachers held this notion until meeting and interacting with their cultural partner. Consider this comment:

> I was pleasantly surprised at how influential his family is on his educational aspirations. My concept of the African American family did not include such a high level of importance being put on schooling. Now I think that maybe more families of diverse students are like this but it is just not evident to me from the surface perception.

One other preservice teacher shadowed a 17-year old African American high school student, who lived in the heart of the urban community. Prior to visiting the partner's home, his preconceived notions and imaginations were: "a dirty home with an awful odor; sounds of siren in the neighborhood, active neighborhood crimes—gang, drug dealing, loud sexist and violent music, and Ebonics-speaking family members."

To his greatest surprise, he observed a different environment. He said, "For the first time in my life I went to a black neighborhood, it was unfamiliar though. The house was run down but modest, although substandard compared to the house I grew up in, but nevertheless was neat and tidy. I was greeted by my cultural partner's mother and sister, who were calm, soft-spoken, and articulate." His positive experience led him to conclude:

> Taking the time to know people who are culturally different is the best experience anyone can have in a diverse society. It is productive and worthwhile. Differences can be understood and more importantly, one discovers that constant similarities exist across all cultural boundaries, misconceptions can be broken down and the truth can be left to stand on its own. But it takes time and effort, and involves going outside one's comfort zone.

Many participants expressed being surprised by what they learned about the families of diverse students. Contrary to the popular view that African American males lack role models and hence are academic and social failures, many discovered that their partners had positive role models that taught them values and what it means to be upright. For instance, one par-ticipant was pleasantly surprised to learn that despite the lack of a consistent father figure, his partner spoke proudly about his uncles who taught him "how to be the man in the house" and how to "survive" in the world. In addition, several pointed to the heightened spiritualism in their partners' orientation.

All participants who shadowed African Americans and Latino Americans were able to point to the value of religion in their partners' lives and their families, and were surprised how they referenced belief in higher power and higher principles they believed in. Further, some participants documented the power that family members weaved in the family unit, especially African American women. As one participant noted, "I noticed the high intensity with which his mother was devoted to him and raising him with a backbone of faith and love."

*(3) Gaining new understanding and critical cultural knowledge.*

Overwhelmingly, participants shared that the experience enhanced their knowledge about culturally different students, that it gave them a first-time, first-hand experience with "real" people of different cultural backgrounds; that most of what they had known about such groups came from TV and movies. One participant noted; "by shadowing my partner, I was able to get beyond the clichés and stereotypes presented by the media." Another noted that even though he had friends and acquaintances from his partner's culture, and that he was well versed in the popular culture of hip-hop, rap, and R & B, he found that he did not know anything, and as he notes, "learning about my partner's family, culture, education, and perspectives has taught me an immense amount about the real African-American experience and it has been a truly transformative experience."

Most participants noted learning about the cultures and experiences of diverse students such as, why they put up a strong front or have an "attitude," survival skills, extended families and obligations, etc. Many noted that as they sat in their partners' classes to observe their learning participation, teachers' instructional practices and later discussed with them about their perceptions of their teachers' practices, they were able to gain critical knowledge about diverse students' learning behaviors. For example, one participant, in visiting her partner's classroom, observed that throughout the class period, her partner never spoke in class. Upon inquiring, she discovered that some African-American females play passive because they did

not want to be viewed as "smart" because of fear of teasing and ostracization by classmates. So, she learned that her partner's passivity was a defense mechanism to ward off any teasing and alienation.

Delpit (1992) once pointed out that if educators do not have some knowledge of children's lives outside of their classrooms, they cannot know their strengths. More importantly, some participants used the opportunity to gauge how culturally different students felt about them, their race, and learned that their partners described their race as "snotty" and exhibiting superior attitude and learned what a snotty or superior attitude was and used it to assess if they fitted the prototype. Others said they were relieved when their partners told them that they did not hate their race because they had been raised to love and get along with all people.

*(4) Assessing competency to work with diverse students.*

One assumption about field experiences with diverse students is that it will allow prospective teachers to "develop a positive attitude, a sense of comfort, and perhaps some knowledge" (Grant & Gomez, 2001, p. 337). Participants mentioned that the experience enabled them to think deeply about their competency to work with diverse students and in multicultural schools. Prior to the experience, many of the participants expressed giving no thoughts to what it means to teach diverse students let alone teaching in a diverse school setting. Consider this comment:

> Honestly, I never really gave much thought to all the issues regarding diversity. Even though I am interested in teaching in an urban setting I have never dug deep to see what lies beneath the urban setting. This field project helped me to engage in that excavation to learn about urban students, urban schools and my qualification to work with them.

In addition, many reflected on their discussions with their partners about what makes an effective teacher for diverse learners and the strategies that work for them. The data collection guide included items that asked cultural partners who their favorite teachers were and their qualities. For instance, one participant described his partner's description of an effective teacher:

> My partner's concept of a good teacher reads like a teacher education methods book, he enjoys teachers who focus on interesting stories and information rather than worksheets; teachers who are communicative and ask questions that you get involved in, teachers who

are real, teachers who let you speak your opinion. Specifically, I learned that my African-American partner and peers like to talk, unlike my European-American students who would like for me to shut up and let them do their work, and hearing and learning these views has caused me to reorganize the way I now teach, especially using cooperative learning strategies."

One critical example of the participants' sense of reflection is vividly captured in the following comment:

> The biggest lesson that I learned from this shadowing experience is that I have a long way to go in my multicultural journey. I thought that just not hating people based on their skin color or ethnicity was enough, and even patting myself on the back for knowing a few African Americans, while not enough, a good start on being multicultural; however, I have never had any of these African Americans to my house or gone to their homes to know who they really are. So now I realize that I have a long way to go before I consider myself "qualified" to teach in a multicultural school setting. I will need more experiences like these before I will feel at ease with myself.

Another participant questions:

> Can I really become a true multicultural educator? Would I be able to get past the images I have harbored about minorities? Don't get me wrong! I know I have to have an open mind but here is what I am talking about. During one visit to my partner's school and at lunch time, I stepped away to buy a soda for my partner and I. I had to make a conscious decision to leave my purse on the table with my cultural partner and her two friends. As I walked away, all kinds of negative thoughts went through my mind. I questioned if I made a wise decision to leave my purse with my partner and her friends—all African Americans. Immediately, I got to my car to leave, I quickly opened my purse to check to make sure that everything was intact. To my surprise, nothing was missing. I felt very guilty. After my visit, I shared my experience about the purse with my husband and wondered if I would have behaved differently had I been with white girls? This experience reminded me of the movie we watched, *Higher Learning*, where the female student pulls up her bag when the black male student got on the elevator. I was wrong! So I wonder about my capability to transcend these images and if I would be able to truly work with my culturally different students.

*(5) Discovering similarities and differences.*

Research suggests that when people

cross borders and engage in cross-cultural encounters, they often discover valuable things they had not anticipated (Grant and Gomez, 2001). Surprisingly, for many participants, the experience allowed them to discover similarities between them and their partners while also recognizing differences.

As they compared their experiences with their partners, many discovered similarities in family orientation, family and cultural values, traditions, religion, celebrations, hobbies, likeness for subjects, music, relationships, birth order, attitude and behavior (teenage phase), love of family, learning styles, fears and anxieties about school and learning, and educational and future goals. Consider this comment:

> I discovered similarities between Reggiae (pseudonym) and me. Both our families are devout Christians and hold our faith in high priority, and single parents. We both rely on religion to provide us with strength and hope to overcome obstacles. Our parents are both college graduates who foster a very strong work ethic. They are involved in our school and work and hold high expectations for us. We both enjoy school. I couldn't help bonding and connecting with my partner.

Several differences between participants and their partners were also documented.

> While my mother packed my lunch everyday, my partner just ate school lunch. My mother consistently displayed my report card on the icebox but my partner's mom did not. My father played a huge role in my life but my partner's father was a casual acquaintance. My father was the leader and provider of my family whereas my partner's mom anchored the family. My partner's grandparents were part of his daily life whereas my grandparents were just for holiday pleasures. My mother did not work outside of the home when I was younger and so stayed home to nurture, supervise homework and we ate as a family at supper time. In contrast, my partner was always home alone with his younger siblings. He always came home to an empty house since his mother worked all the time and he had to take responsibility for preparing meals and many times they would go and get fast food. My partner told me how he does laundry for himself and his siblings. I don't even remember doing laundry when I was in school.

*(6) Engendering caring and empathy.*

Research suggest that many white preservice teachers lack the empathy to work with culturally different students and that after a course in multicultural education, many still lacked the empathy needed to successfully work with diverse students

(Haberman, 1991; Howard, 1999). In this study, participants expressed developing empathy for and caring toward diverse students. Most expressed that engaging in the project and reflectively analyzing the experience engendered their ability to understand more deeply the realities of diverse students. Participants noted that observing the inequities in urban schools, the differential schooling experience and their family conditions engendered their empathy for diverse students.

One participant noted, "Listening to my partner's sharing about her experience as a language minority student, knowing the lack of simple resources at his school, the family conditions, the lack of decent needs and supplies such as nice clothes really helped me to develop empathy for him and other minorities." As one participant noted: "I started to develop empathy for my partner after hearing his stories about his home conditions—coming home to an empty house, having to make his own meals, having no father to do simple things with him such as fishing, playing ball, no private tutoring as I had, and lacking quality education—all helped me to start to really have empathy for my cultural partner and other students from different cultures." One other participant explained:

> Getting to know Keyan Rogers (pseudonym) has reaffirmed my belief in the factors that are important to success for people of any culture. I know that families of culturally different students do value education and want the best for their children. I have also come to understand that circumstances may prevent parents of my culturally different students from active involvement in their education. I now have empathy for my culturally different students, and I can be more patient, flexible, and more caring toward them.

### (7) Little shift in the inclination to work in multicultural schools.

One critical issue that was important to this investigation was the extent to which the experience engendered preservice teachers' desire to work in multicultural school settings. Research suggests that many preservice teachers have a fear of multicultural school settings (Kivel, 1996; Gripe, Duffy, & Richards, 1989). Multicultural schools are often viewed as wild and dangerous. Most participants expressed that sitting in their partners' classes, and listening to them express their perceptions of what makes an effective teacher, broke down their fears and increased their comfort level in work-

ing with them. Also, many discovered that the schools were safe, although they had to go through metal detectors, but observed no gang activities, and so felt safe working there.

However, several participants explained that, although the experience was positive, it was insufficient to help them make a conclusive decision about teaching in multicultural school settings. Others expressed that they were not confident enough, nor pedagogically competent to undertake that responsibility; that they would need more of this kind of experience to increase their confidence and competence.

As one participant stated, "I would have to test it out several times and if the experience continues to be consistent and positive, then I would be convinced." For a majority of them, being close to their families in their home communities was a major factor for the lack of inclination to work in multicultural school settings.

### (8) Becoming culturally self-aware

Multicultural educators have emphasized that, to become a multicultural person, one must become aware of his own culture (Nieto, 2000). Participants indicated that the experience enabled them to gain a new and increased awareness of themselves as cultural beings and ethnic identity. Many commented that as they interacted with their partners and reflected on what they had shared and observed about their cultures, they became more aware of their cultural and ethnic membership; things they had taken for granted or were not even aware.

### Limitation of the Study

This study is limited in its ability to over-generalize. First, it should be noted that the study sample is small and limited to the program at one university and geographic area and so was not representative of national preservice teachers and since the participants were drawn purposively from one course.

In addition, because the study was part of a project required in the multicultural education course, it is possible that students' reflections might have been influenced by their perception of what they thought the instructor wanted to read. However, the personalized and conversational manner with which insights and perspectives and comparisons were related and reflected upon in the reports should give credibility to the participants' analysis and report.

Nevertheless, the long-term effect of

the study and transfer of student learning to real classrooms and their future students cannot be inferred in the absence of follow-up studies. Second, the study did not analyze any differential experiences of the participants due to variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, and regionality.

Although broad generalizations cannot be drawn from the study, the insights and perspectives revealed seem genuine and should be of vital interest to multicultural educators, researchers, and teacher education in general, and should serve as a context for advancing conversations and further research on the most effective ways to prepare preservice teachers for diversity. This is a critical challenge as research suggest that preservice teachers' cultural stereotypes that are left unchallenged, unexamined, and unmodified may seriously affect their ability to make sound and informed judgment needed for working with diverse students and their families (Parajes, 1992).

### Discussion & Implications

The results of this investigation clearly reinforce the notion that authentic field-based cross-cultural experiences can powerfully impact preservice teachers' ability to modify their racial and stereotypical dispositions toward diversity and diverse students. Unlike studies that suggest that field experiences may reinforce preservice teachers' negative dispositions, the preservice teachers in this study suggest otherwise.

First, most participants acknowledged that this was the first time they interacted with culturally different individuals; that they found that their preconceived notions of diverse individuals were inaccurate. Although preservice teachers were only able to partner and shadow one culturally different student, many admit that the experience was positive by allowing them to challenge and contradict the preconceived notions about diverse students and their families.

This confirms what Grant and Gomez (2001) perceptively noted, that individuals' stereotypes do evaporate as they get to know their culturally different individuals and experience contradictions in the preconceived notions they came with. Because this experience was semester-long, immersion-based, and involved constant interactions between the participants and their partners in diverse social contexts, it allowed participants to see their partners in real-life contexts.

Thus, the study contributes to the limited research on the value of field experi-

ences with diverse students for preparing teachers for diversity.

Second, to foster positive multicultural teaching, the participants affirmed the need and value of developing "pedagogical learner knowledge" (Darling-Hammond, 2000), which is, knowing students, not just by names and faces but as socio-cultural beings who are tightly connected to their families, cultures, and communities. Such knowledge breaks down misconceptions, biases, preconceived notions and allows teachers to know the frames of reference of their students, their ways of learning and how best to teach them.

One white teacher who enrolled in the cultural diversity course had been teaching 7th grade science for three years. His frustration teaching his culturally different students motivated him to enroll in the cultural diversity course. He appreciated the field experience because he now learned about the importance of knowing his students, not by names and faces but who they really are and how they learn, what motivates them to learn, and how to gain their trust. His comments are worth sharing here:

It is sad to say that I have been teaching students from diverse backgrounds for about three years, and yet, this is the first time that I have actually gotten close to know one of them very well as to be able to reach and teach him. Since working with my student, I have found an ally. My partner now serves as an excellent interpreter of the feelings and concerns of his fellow classmates for me. There are times when he had come to me after class and told me things like "you need to find something to make this more real to the class, like pictures or examples or something." What strikes me is that his simple words of wisdom are often a reflection of the teaching methodologies I have learned in many of my classes; but as we all know there is a big difference between having knowledge and being able to apply it to real situations. I now have a new view of students who are culturally different. Contrary to the perception that they are not smart, can't think, I have learned otherwise. They possess a wealth of experience, wisdom, and intelligence that I did not know or believed they had. This alone is a worthy outcome of this cultural learning experience. I have found that their families have rich cultural values, that they place such a high level of importance on schooling and education. Now I think that maybe more families are like this but it is just not evident to me from the surface perception.

Third, this study suggests that preservice teachers can learn to develop empathy and a caring attitude toward diverse students if they have a genuine understanding of their home and schooling realities. Because participants were able to obtain first-hand information of the realities of diverse students and their schools, they learned to become empathetic toward them. For instance, several participants expressed that in contrasting their schooling experiences with their cultural partners, they became aware of the differential schooling experiences and inequities between urban and suburban schools such as tracking and lack of resources as well as the differential home experiences between them and their cultural partners relative to family stability, support system, and resources.

Several participants noted that while they had stable family environment with stay-at-home moms who were available to supervise their homework, or had the privilege of private tutoring or schooling, their cultural partners were often on their own as their parents were either unavailable or did not have the educational skills to help them. Thus, participants agreed that this new awareness of unequal playing field engendered their empathy and caring toward diverse students.

Fourth, the fact that more than half of the participants still expressed lack of inclination to work in multicultural school settings is a concern as the nation's student population increases in its diversity and teachers continue to be white. Who will teach these students when those in teacher preparation programs, who are predominantly white do not have the desire to teach in diverse school settings?

Although this finding is consistent with research reports (Haberman, 1991) suggesting that preservice teachers prefer to not work in diverse school settings, the reasons cited by these preservice teachers differ. Unlike previous research reports that cite negative attitudes of preservice teachers and fear for lacking the inclination to work in diverse school settings, the study participants indicated a lack of confidence and competency as well as fear of moving away from families instead. The implication is that if preservice teachers are exposed to more positive field experiences with diverse students and in diverse school settings, it is possible to build their confidence in their abilities to teach them and to increase their inclination to work in diverse school communities.

Fifth, evidently, one experience is not enough to transform the deep-seated negative attitudes of white preservice teachers. This is an important implication for teacher education programs as they prepare preservice teachers. For preservice teachers, whose fear of urban school communities have been fueled by the media, one experience, however positive, is not sufficient to alter their long-held dispositions. Generally, preservice teachers who have not experienced multicultural school settings view them as dangerous and feel vulnerable being there.

As Kivel (1996) points out, people suffer from the geography of fear and tend to think that they are more vulnerable in certain places. Several participants indicated that the diversity field experience was the first opportunity they have had to actually interact with culturally diverse students. Although in visiting their partners' schools, these participants discovered that the schools were safe and did not observe any gang or violent activities but pointed out that one such experience is insufficient. Consider this comment:

I have a long way to go to be what I would consider "qualified" to work with diverse students and in urban school setting. I will need many more experiences of this nature before I will feel at ease with myself. I would not want to shortchange any students. I want to have extensive experience and full confidence before I can adequately work with them, but how will I gain this experience if I do not put myself in a situation where I will encounter diverse students? This assignment has influenced my interest in teaching in an urban or diverse school setting but I need more experience and more contact.

Ladson-Billings (2000, p. 209)) underscores this point when she states "no single course or set of field experience is capable of preparing preservice students to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Finally, integrating a sustained field experience into a multicultural education proves to be powerful in challenging preservice teachers to delve into unfamiliar environments essential for gaining authentic knowledge about diverse students and multicultural schools. However, this can be challenging for instructors who require these kinds of experiences as some preservice teachers may resent them.

For white preservice teachers, the biggest challenge they face is getting out of their comfort zones to meet and interact with culturally different individuals. In this project, several participants approached me to help locate and match them with culturally different students because they had never gotten close to a culturally different person. Of course, this request was denied because, as I explained to them, one of the goals of the project was to get them to move out of their comfort zones and to experience diversity firsthand. Several par-

ticipants felt challenged by this response and even though they agreed that the experience was beneficial, they cautioned against "forced interaction." Consider this comment:

> The time spent getting to know an African American student as an assignment for this class really helped me gain valuable knowledge about diversity and the potential for growth. Really, it is not so hard once we are able to struggle through our past stereotypes and misconceptions. It is a matter of going out and making contact on our own terms. An observation I want to make about this contact, though, is that educators must use care when encouraging contact. Human beings do not like to be forced into doing something. The most progress is made with diversity when people discover it for themselves, and not when it is forced on them.

While it is true that people should not be forced into doing things, the fact is that most white preservice teachers if left on their own will not move out of their comfort zone to interact with those unlike them. Indeed, it is human nature. Individuals seek to preserve what is comfortable and resist disequilibrium. Imperatively, teacher education must be aggressive in its efforts to provide and mandate diversity field-based experiences that are integrated into preservice teachers' professional courses. Although this recommendation may be problematic for smaller colleges and universities located in rural areas removed from urban environments, facilitating the same experience through the use of technology can equally lend to the same results.

## Conclusion

According to Lisa Delpit (1995, p.182), "if we are to successfully educate all of our students, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism. We must work to destroy those blinders so that it is possible to really see, to really know the students we must teach…."

Since preservice teachers often harbor preconceived notions about diverse students, one way to assist them to examine and challenge the "web of beliefs" (McDiarmid, 1990) is to construct and immerse them in authentic field experiences with diverse students where they learn to shift their views and develop alternative perspectives and possibilities. It is clear from this investigation that providing opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with culturally diverse students

made a significant difference in assisting preservice teachers in removing the blinders built on preconceived notions and enabling them to alter the negative perceptions and dispositions they held about diverse students.

The preservice teachers investigated in this project realized that ignorance can be a stumbling block in cross-cultural understanding but once opportunities exist to really interact with those who are different, true transformation can occur. As one participant commented, "I have taken tons of stuff from books, professors, and conferences, but nothing compares to the real thing when creating understanding across cultural groups."

Grant and Gomez (2001, p. 345) underscored this point by stating that, "field experiences can provide the opportunity to plant seeds of awareness that may continue to grow and develop… and pull the weeds of ignorance and misconception that all of us have about groups of which we are non-member." Indeed, preservice teachers can read all the books about diversity, engage in simulations, but unless they have opportunities to interact with culturally different individuals in authentic settings, they will not gain the critical knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to successfully work with them.

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# Appendix

### Participants' Responses to the Questionnaire

*Item Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree Not Sure & Agree & Disagree N%*

I benefited from this cultural experience 45 (100) 0 0

I developed a new positive view and understanding of the socio-cultural and schooling experience of diverse students 45 (100) 0 0

I dispelled the stereotypes and negative notions I previously held about my culturally different student 44 (100) 0 0

My level of fear of urban school setting was reduced  40 (88.8) 5 (11.11) 0

My inclination to work with diverse students was increased 35 (77.7) 2 (4.4) 8 (17.7)

My desire to work in diverse school setting, especially urban schools, was increased 15 (33.3) 9 (20) 21 (46.6)

I developed a sense of empathy and caring attitude toward diverse students 45 (100) 0 0

This experience helped me think deeply about my competency to work with culturally different students 45 (100) 0 0

I gained insights and perspectives about the most effective ways to successfully work with culturally diverse students 45 (100) 0 0

Overall, the experience was positive 45 (100) 0 0