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ABSTRACT

This study describes how one university instructor incorporated case method instruction (CMI) into a graduate course to help her students grasp the concept of family centeredness and working with all families as partners. Two major hurdles she faced were the accepted traditional teacher roles and traditional passive student roles in the classroom. She was so embedded in the traditional teacher role and the status quo of teacher-student relationships that she could not envision new teacher and student roles and co-learner relationships occurring in her classroom. She found that her old teaching principles and habits persisted and she wanted to keep some semblance of control as the instructor. She also realized how CMI was helping her grow as a teacher by challenging her to change her ways and what came easy for her. She was concerned over the discontinuity between what was taught in preservice education and what occurred in the real world. When she implemented CMI and reviewed videotapes of her CMI session, she was amazed to see the level of student engagement and how quickly so much time had been used. She felt transformed after her CMI session and believed her students were transformed in their ability to see others' perspectives and their readiness to deal with the unpredictable, complicated lives of students and their families. (Contains 23 references.) (SM)

Transformative Learning Process of One Teacher

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If a new program works teachers get little of the credit; if it fails they get most of the blame. – Anonymous

The implication from the above quote and Fullan's (1982) assertion, "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that" (p. 107), is clear – teachers matter. However, the practice of educational reform tended to not only leave out the teacher's perspective, but concentrate on materials that is "teacher-proof" (Beyer & Apple, 1988; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Cuban, 1993; Kliebard, 1987, 1992; McDonald, 1992; Necochea & Cline, 2002). These "teacher-proof" materials are supposed to provide accountability for students learning math, reading, and science so that differences in teaching competencies do not affect students' success. Today, this focus continues as the society demands accountability from the educational sector as indicated in the legislations such as "No Child Left Behind" and the goal of National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) – providing every student with their educational birthright (i.e., access to competent, caring and qualified teachers, as well as grant funding for evaluative studies of curriculums and literacy/numeracy focused curriculum. Related to the accountability focus is the issue of competition and comparison. One of the goals for "No Child Left Behind" legislation is having U.S. children achieve first place in international ranking for science and math area. In state of Kentucky, students' performance on standardized tests is tied to school ranking and resources – financially and otherwise. Schools, whose students do not test well, are put on probation list, while schools with high test scores receive dollar rewards. Therefore, teachers are under pressure to prepare their students so they will fare better in upcoming standardized test as well as to have their students ready for next grade.

In addition, teachers are faced with a diverse population of students in their classrooms. Legislations such as the American Disabilities Act (ADA), Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142, which was later amended as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1991 mandated educating children with special needs in a least restrictive environment, which meant inclusion. Federally funded programs such as Head Start and Title I focused attention on children from low-income families. These "at-risk" students were to be caught up in terms of their readiness for school. The shift in population in United States has resulted in greater representation of ethnicity and race. A public school pre-kindergarten classroom in Kentucky consists of English speaking and non-English speaking children with and without disabilities, who range in age three to five years, represent all socio-economic levels, and come from a variety of family types/home situations.

Given the above context, today's teachers are teaching in a different educational setting than their predecessors. Because of this vast diversity, there are an eclectic array of curriculum programs and instructional techniques being used by teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students. However, teachers are still being measured only by students' performance, and students' performance level is based on skill acquisition compared to a "norm". And the level of dissatisfaction of public schools and pressure to improve (i.e., reform) schools has not subsided since the days of massive effort for curriculum reform in schools after the Sputnik event in late 50s. As a result, many of new teachers (about 30%) are leaving the teaching field within five years; and in urban areas, the turnover rate can be as high as 50% (NCTAF, 1996). The percentage of newly trained teachers who last only three years is about 21% (NCES, 2000).

One of the fallout of the "failing" of public schools for students and teachers is the demand for teacher education programs to graduate students who are better prepared to be teachers in the public school system. A better prepared teacher means knowing not only what and how to teach, but also why as well as when. A competent teacher can take the theory along with discrete, teaching skills and apply them in practice with all children appropriately. Therefore for teacher preparation programs, developing dispositions such as critical evaluation, inquiry, and collaboration in their students is a must. In other words, instilling principles of being a "reflective practitioner" (Schon, 1983) and life-long learner is critical for success of future teachers-to-be. In fact, one may even state that teacher preparation programs are charged with supporting their students' and future-teachers' "transformative learning" (Mezirow, 1991) process because transformative learning process enables teachers to "look at things [teaching and children] in fundamentally new and different ways, examine actions they can take to change their [work] lives in essential ways, and take action based on new assumptions when making important decisions" (Christopher, Dunnagan, Duncan, & Paul, 2001, p. 134). In other words, transformative learning goes beyond reflection-in-action discussed by Schon (1983); transformative learning process involves critical self-reflection of self and examination of classroom situation so that classroom participants, students and teachers' lives are transformed. Teachers and students can then become advocates of their own learning, development, relationships, and situation. Transformative education empowers all learners (students and teachers) so they can gain control of their own situations.

THE STUDY

The following study is one example of what higher education institution faculty is doing in their teacher preparation programs. This story is about one university instructor, who will be referred

to as Kathy. During summer of 2001, Kathy incorporated a new teaching technique (Case Method Instruction) in her graduate early childhood intervention course. Kathy wanted to use Case Method Instruction (CMI) in this course because she wanted her students to fully grasp the concept of working with all families as partners and principles of family-centeredness, so that her students will become better equipped for challenges that lie within today's complex educational setting.

Case Method Instruction (CMI) is a teaching method that "focuses on the teaching of application and decision-making skills within the context of real-life situations" (McWilliam, 1995, p. 31). The CMI approach involves (1) having students read an open-ended case story based on real people and actual situation thoroughly, (2) discuss characters in the case story, (3) delineate issue(s), and then (4) resolve the issue(s) or dilemma(s). When CMI was used as a teaching strategy, students' ability to problem solve a novel but realistic situation according to best practice increased significantly (Snyder & McWilliam, 1999; Snyder, McWilliam, Lobman, & Sexton, 1998). To Kathy, CMI means perspectives, listening, and "aha" experiences instead of one right answer.

Understanding the effectiveness of Kathy's attempt at incorporating the Case Method Instruction (CMI) in her class for the first time mandates getting at Kathy's perspective and meaning-making because she is not a technician who transmits information passively. Kathy also does not make meaning in a vacuum. Kathy's meaning-making is affected by her interaction with the classroom environment, her students, her own reflection, level of preparation and knowledge, and her past experiences. These aspects, in turn, influences Kathy's actions in classroom. Therefore, obtaining the insider perspective – what Shulman (1986) calls "classroom ecology" paradigm - is critical in understanding Kathy's experience and suggesting implications for teacher education programs as well as school reform. As Yonemura (1986) asserts, Kathy gives meaning to her "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1984) – Kathy's knowledge of the classroom - as well as "practical knowledge" (Elbaz, 1983) – Kathy's response to each situation and experiential knowledge based on theory and practice- through her own values and history. Who Kathy is as a person informs and influences her actions and interpretations as a teacher. Therefore, Kathy's struggles and revelations were explored through the interpretive, phenomenological research lens.

Who is Kathy?

Kathy has been in the practitioner's field as a Speech Language Pathologist for over 25 years and in the academic world as a clinical faculty and tenure track faculty. She has worked in Florida, Georgia, Colorado, North Carolina, Kansas, and Kentucky. Kathy is currently in her fourth-year as a faculty in teacher preparation program at a higher education institution.

As a Speech Language Pathologist, Kathy has worked with all ages – infants to elderly. She has provided speech therapy at all settings, including public and private schools. Kathy has had her own private practice as well as worked for community agencies as a Speech Language Pathologist.

As a clinical faculty, Kathy taught clinical practicum classes for undergraduate and graduate students in the Language Pathology program as well as developed new courses. Her supervision experience ranged from the traditional one-on-one format to a team format where six practicum students functioned as a team and delivered services to 30 to 35 families. As a tenure-track faculty, Kathy teaches interdisciplinary early childhood education courses to undergraduates, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students.

Kathy enjoys teaching and she specifically sought out a position at a teaching institution so that she could do what she loves – teach. Although Kathy likes being engaged in research, what she especially likes is to make research come alive for her students through her teaching. Kathy's primary goal in life is to be a teacher.

Kathy perceives herself as a person who tends “to take a broader base view of intervention and assessment,” but is “real lock-step” in her teaching. Kathy lists being detailed, organized, and prepared as her teaching strengths. One of Kathy's teaching goals or hopes is “to shake [students] up.” Kathy defines “shaking students up” as wanting her students to really know that it is okay in some places (and that they are going to have the flexibility) to really think and do things differently. Kathy wants to provide her students with a good grounding so they can think and survey the situation in order to stand up and say, “What we are doing isn't right” because she has, herself, has been frustrated as she experienced resistance from her colleagues and the system as she tried to change practice to implement best practice.

Kathy's Struggles

Two major hurdles Kathy struggled with and continues to struggle with are the accepted, traditional teacher role (which comes easy for her) and the traditional passive student role she is faced with in classrooms. At the theoretical level, Kathy has no difficulty in explaining what the new relationship should be like between the instructor and students:

...here's the ultimate thing where they can lead their own CMI. The ideal thing is where the instructor becomes just another participant and the students themselves can be facilitators, where students can take it [CMI questioning and discussions]. I mean wouldn't that be the ultimate learning? I mean that would be co-learning. (8-20-01)

Kathy sees this new teacher role and student role as being equal and learning together. The ultimate classroom dynamics would involve a community of learners where there is no permanent instructor but where who occupies the teacher role varies depending on the question explored or topic under discussion. For Kathy, position title itself does not make a person the instructor. Kathy believes that the person who has the most relevant experience is more “authentic,” regardless of whether that person’s title in the classroom is a student or an instructor and that person with more “authentic” experience should be the teacher at that moment and take the lead: *“I want her [student who is a teacher in a school system] to say how hard it is. She’s out there living it day in and day out. I’m three years removed from it [working in the school system] now and even that seems to make me feel much less authentic”* (7-18-01).

Kathy sees the new teacher role as the facilitator of students’ learning, not the person who students view as the holder of the right answer. A facilitator allows students to take ownership of learning and helps them find their own answers: “Now as a facilitator, I might say, “What do you think you need?” “Where can you get that information?” (7-16-01). Within the old teacher role, Kathy functioned as the resource and guidance person. With both of these functions, Kathy controlled students’ learning process:

Well, a resource person ... [when] we are getting to the stumbling block of what the child’s physical needs may be, I will make sure they’ve got the AEPS or the Carolina Curriculum or I will say, “Have you thought about looking in your textbook?” so that when they leave here, they know where to go find those things ... Well with guidance, if I see them from going down the wrong path, I can see my role then as saying, “Okay, let’s think about typical development. We know this child is such and such. Do you think this is a reasonable goal? Do you think it’s likely that a child is going to be successful here or do you think you need to come back a couple of steps? Let’s think about this differently. ... So I will stop them before they go off on such a tangent. It’s going to take longer to unwind. (7-16-01)

However at the practical level, Kathy has difficulty in letting go of the status quo in terms of teacher role behavior. In fact Kathy’s fears in relation to CMI concerns her and students’ expectations of Kathy in the teacher role:

Of the impact of teacher’s words - -

“...there’s always that fear that I’m going to be swaying the students rather than being the facilitator” (7-16-01).

Of traditional student behaviors - -

1. *That is hard to stand up here and lecture and give lots of information, dive in where I want [students] to go and then all of sudden I'm going to step back now and present this to [them] and see where they go. I'm real hesitant. That's just really scary. (7-16-01)*
2. *What about students who don't speak up. Does that mean that we aren't thinking and feeling. How do I tap into what they really have to offer? (7-16-01)*
3. *A fear that they won't be where they ought to be. That they will still have their judgment and their black and whiteness even though I'm hoping by the end of the last week that we will have gotten through that. (7-16-01)*

Of the traditional evaluative system in education - -

Another fear ... that keeps me from thinking, "Oh this would be the way to be all the time," is how do you attach a grade to this? If I don't use it all the time but suppose I want to figure out if I'm going to use it once or twice or I'm using it even as a final, summative kind of exam for the students, how do I grade it? (7-16-01)

Of traditional instructional responsibilities - -

1. *I hope I'm going to recognize when I need to get them back where I want them to be without stifling and stopping what may be going on. And what if it's better than where I wanted them to be, then what am I going to do? What if we are at the end and I still need for them to get some resolution? I may have to leave them with a question when they leave the room, and just have them leave and think about that. (7-18-01)*
2. *My fear is of the unknown. Where do we leave this? What if we run out of time? Is it okay to leave it unresolved? (7-30-01)*
3. *Mechanics scare me - of being able to listen and keep this going. I'm just not sure about the technical parts, the mechanics. (7-30-01)*

Thus, Kathy's fears illustrate that Kathy is so embedded in the traditional teacher role and the status quo of student-teacher relationship that Kathy could not envision the new teacher and student roles, new co-learner relationship taking place in her classroom. The transformative learning process that is supposed to take place for Kathy's vision of "ultimate learning" to occur was just that, a vision because of her practical knowledge and personal practical knowledge previous to CMI experience. Kathy found that her old teaching principles and habits (as well as expectations) did not die easily. Kathy still wanted to keep some semblance of control as the instructor. She found herself wanting to function as the

resource and guidance person who intervenes and directs students' learning rather than as a facilitator of students' own learning:

Of keeping up and remembering which point to get back to - -

At one point, we were generating a lot of things including solutions, and I wasn't sure if I was keeping tabs on getting back where we needed to so that role play was going to make sense to them. ... When we were trying to talk about the issues and I was trying to get back to the point of the word "strictness" and that big kind of focal point, I'm not really sure if I ever solidified that. It seemed the harder I tried to, the muddier it got. And my motive was I wanted to be sure and get to the role play. (7-31-01)

Of setting boundaries and keeping the process going - -

I don't know if control is the word, but maybe just keeping within our boundaries so we could get through the process. I guess that control pretty much. I guess I had that control then to keep us going where we need to go. I only felt like I had to move them along in order to get things jelled because of where I wanted them to be and I only felt that way with that turning point on getting back to Gwen on that piece of red, with the red writing, just that one time. ... But I also discovered that if I just stood there, pretty soon when they were finished they were back up looking like, "okay now what's next?" And I'm not sure if that's good but that's what happened. Yeah, when there's a lull, what's next? I guess my fear of by first time doing this is what if there was a crucial thing that I lost in that conversation because of the boundaries I set for the group? (7-31-01)

Of maintaining mechanical aspect like listening, sorting, praising, wait time - -

I know I didn't wait long enough and I know that I pushed them to get their break because when I said you could get your break and then T said, "Well, I want to say something." And then S said, "I want to say something too" so then I knew that I had probably shut down some good sparks that were going. But it was 25 till 12:00 pm by then. I'm still not pleased with my ability to listen and sort things out for them. My plan was to kind of color code things so we that we could see where the concerns for Gwen were and when I look over at the issues as they were trying to give me a word that would describe someone and then I would have that marker in my hand so when I went over and said, "That sounds like an issue" instead I was trying to in mind see where they were going with this. Were these Rachel issues or Sandy issues or the family what's going on here? And that fell about for me. I think I was just trying to do too much at one time. [So it was just too hard to focus and] keep listening and keep the ball going so we can come back to it. For some of those things [what students were providing for descriptions of characters], it's not all that important. But some of the things they were saying were the red flags that I knew I wanted to make sure it got over here. And that part [restraining] was just difficult for me and I didn't want to miss

something else and not jump on it because the other, my fear, was to say, "You are right. That's great. Let's star this one." And it wasn't time to do that yet. Oh, I tried. But a part of me just wanted to jump up and down and say, "Yes, yes, yes. You are doing this so well." I felt like I just wasn't giving them enough time. It's my tendency if they haven't answered a question in enough time, I either rephrase or jump right in. And I just needed to be quiet and let them answer or let one person answer and be quiet and let someone else respond to that. I probably needed more time of silence overall. (7-31-01)

As indicated in the last transcription, she observed her struggle with the new teacher role and the old teacher role when Kathy reflected on her CMI attempt, but she also realized how her CMI experience is helping her to grow as a teacher by challenging her to change her ways and what comes easy for her:

I like to plan and have everything all planned out. And I feel a little hesitant about the direction it [CMI] can take, depending on the views of audience. And perhaps that's my own lack of ability to make sure we get where we need to be. I know I can be the bridge and we can go in lots of different places. A part of this is for me to let go of my control over that you can only get it my way. ... I have to plan, I feel like I have to plan 50 different routes so I'll know which one they are going to end up taking so we end up at the same place. Does that make any sense? And that part of it feels scary to me because I really do like to plan and I want the students to know that I'm organized and I'm structured, unstructured-structured but that we are getting some place. I just don't like that feeling of lack of control. And that's why this [CMI] is so good for me because it's teaching me to let go of some of it too. (8-30-01)

Kathy is clearly struggling with the old and the new teacher role. Kathy has to overcome her own definition of a good teacher according to the old teacher role standard. As Kathy indicated, being organized with her lesson plans is easy for her and that she is very good at it. In fact, she herself confesses that she loves to plan for her teaching sessions. Kathy's syllabus reflects her teaching that is very well choreographed with many transparency overheads, PowerPoint slides, scheduled guest speakers, and "hands-on" experiences. Kathy calculates her teaching to be 60% lecture where she presents and reviews information to students. However, one of Kathy's concerns is the discontinuity between what is being taught at the teacher preparation programs and the real world. Kathy firmly believes in getting students ready for the real world after school. From her own practical and supervision experience, Kathy knows that dispositions students must acquire are flexibility and being able to think outside of the box, if students are to be successful in the messy world of teaching children and working with families. Kathy realizes the benefits of CMI for her teaching as

well as for her students and struggles to make sense of the CMI and is committed to doing the CMI again:

I think it's that good of a teaching tool - that it's that challenging to me. For one thing, I'm learning that I probably need to be a little less controlling. I have to give my students credit for thinking on their own. I mean, which I say I do and I write that I do when I'm doing my reappointment and all of that, and yet I guess I have to trust them and maybe trust myself enough that this is going to weave itself where it needs to be and maybe when I do this more, I'll learn those tools and techniques to be able to get to where we need to go. But it seems to me, I need to have at least a direction so that I know what I want to accomplish by having the students go through all these objectives in hours. I want them to get the concepts but I feel like I have to give them all the details to get to the concepts. Maybe all of this is challenging me to just look at these concepts and this little boiling pot that's in me. It's very easy for me to be detailed. It's not easy for me to be less detailed. And I feel like through CMI, that at least what I want to accomplish, I need to be less detailed. Otherwise, what I tend to do is start judging what the students are saying and that's exactly what I'm trying not to do and why I want to use the CMI. (8-30-01)

Kathy's Revelations

When Kathy implemented the CMI and reviewed the videotape of her CMI session, she found that there were some “aha” moments for her. Kathy was amazed at the level of student engagement and how fast and how much time has been used:

Of student engagement - -

Let me describe how I felt when things were clicking. How I knew things were clicking was because students were talking to each other instead of to me. I found myself writing less as their ideas were being generated and they seemed to be playing off what each other were saying. So there was some real conversation going on. A lot of “yeah, I agree” “Yes, but this is what happened.” There was a nice click in there. ... I felt less burdened and I felt like I wasn't needed as much. That the students had finally gotten to the point where they needed to be and at that point, I didn't know what my role was. I guess just to get us back to solutions. I'm not sure that's ideal but I guess if the point is for the students to be in charge of their own learning and to give voice to it and their opinions and to be able to express themselves then that's what they were doing. (8-30-01)

Of time passing - -

I was shocked when I looked up and realized we had gone 30 minutes past the break time. So that part I think was good. We were really getting into it, and the students were beginning to talk among themselves. But I did really did want to try to get into the role play too. And I wish I had longer to let the students to

really get into that and explore and come back. I guess another good hour probably could have gotten to the solution part. We just touched on things but I would have liked for us to have gotten to the solutions as a group. But there was simply no time. (7-31-01)

These “aha” moments provided impetus for her transformative learning; Kathy saw transformation in her students as well as less pressure on her to be the teacher. Kathy even pointed out that she was not needed and as a result, she did not know what to do (i.e., what role to play). In addition, Kathy even had a bit of fun herself during the CMI:

[Did you have fun?] Yes, I did. And I will do this again. I really enjoyed where we ended up. It was the process. It was where we started and where we ended up and that's what made it fun. And right now, I can't think of any other thing that would have gotten us to that point other than using the CMI. To think that in two hours time, we start out laying out characters to really getting to some “aha”s which was what I wanted them to do. I wanted to shake them up. And I really think this one did it. To say, “Yeah, there's a reason this mom acted this way. I understand now. I'll quit judging her.” I think Kathy summed it up when she said, “After I heard what her day is like, it's minor what I can do with my classroom.” (7-31-01)

Kathy felt transformed after her CMI session and she felt her students were transformed in terms of their ability to see others' perspectives and being ready to deal with the unpredictable, complicated lives of children and their families in the teaching field. Kathy was able to see that CMI provides her with an avenue to achieve her ultimate goal of co-learning where students take control of their own learning and Kathy becomes a facilitator of students' own learning. This revelation provided an even a bigger push for her to assimilate and accommodate CMI into her personal knowledge and personal practical knowledge.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

What was important for Kathy when trying a new teaching technique was that her CMI attempt resulted in what Cuban (1993) identifies as a “fundamental reform,” not “incremental reform.” Kathy and her students experienced transformation of the teacher role and student-teacher relationship. In fact, CMI attempt brought about messiness and doubt instead of organization, efficiency, and confidence in her classroom teaching. However, Kathy utilized incremental changes in her attempt to understand CMI and prepare herself as well as her students. Some of the strategies Kathy used that are of “incremental reform” nature are in-service workshops on CMI, classroom set-up rearrangement (physically and instructionally – topic and format), classroom management techniques, and “good old” preparation technique of studying the teacher's manual and plodding

through notes. Familiar incremental changes provided a structure, a system of tackling the new, unfamiliar teaching technique for her and her students so their preparation level would at the maximum level. In other words, Kathy began with the course with lecturing (most familiar and comforting for both) then hands-on activities that included family interviews and service project work with a family, before attempting CMI with the students. This way, the comfort of familiar incremental changes allowed Kathy a semblance of control when she felt chaotic as she entered a new way of teaching. Throughout the CMI session, Kathy was color-coding what students said and what she was trying to facilitate. This act of color-coding provided Kathy with a level of comfort and confidence in her competency. Kathy summed up her experience of attempting CMI as “We always get there but it’s not always a pretty sight. That’s how I feel right now.” Even this summation reflects Kathy valuing organization, structure, and efficiency and how she evaluates her own teaching.

Therefore, linking instructor’s existing teaching strategies and personal values with the new teaching method is critical in success and continuation of any teaching or school reform so that teachers can make sense of the new method and incorporate it into their personal practical knowledge. Advocating the strengths of the new technique or method to the instructor is also helpful, but only if the strengths are linked to what teachers see as a gap in their teaching. For example, Kathy wanted to better prepare her students for the messy real world and she was frustrated by the lack of connection between theory and application. CMI provided a way to fill this gap for her. As a result, the outcome of Kathy’s CMI attempt was “fundamental reform” (Cuban, 1993) and “transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1991).

Another strategy that facilitated Kathy’s transformation and not only “reflection-in-action” (Schon, 1983) was Kathy reflecting on the nature of CMI, her preparation of CMI during our interviews and Kathy reviewing the videotape of her CMI session. Kathy was engaged in “textmaking” and “gripping” of McDonald’s (1992) “Reading Teaching” method. Kathy was making meaning of her experience individually as well as socially through our talks. Therefore, listening to teachers’ voices is important because teachers, themselves, are tools for teaching (Wadsworth & Coleman, 2001). If teacher preparation programs are to facilitate future teachers and students’ development and learning in midst of a complex society (i.e., create a teaching reform), making explicit surface content and organizing content of curriculum (Bussis, Chittenden, & Ameral, 1976), one’s values, hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1979), and subjective meaning through sharing is critical because as Nias (1985) asserts, “it is through talk that participants create and make sense of a shared social order” (Nias, 1985, p. 115).

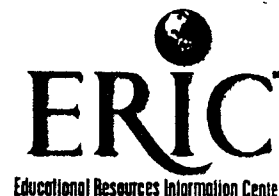
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