A Study of Student Teacher Experiences in a Multicultural School

or

Learning to Teach Teachers Who Will Teach “Other People’s Children”

Dana Gregory Rose

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Ann Potts, Chair
Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale
Dr. Cecile Cachaper
Dr. Shelli Fowler
Dr. Sandra Moore
Dr. Cheri Triplett

November 4, 2005
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: multicultural, diversity, teacher education, autoethnography

narrative analysis, case study
A Study of Student Teacher Experiences in a Multicultural School  
or  
Learning to Teach Teachers Who Will Teach “Other People’s Children”  

Dana Gregory Rose  

ABSTRACT  

Multicultural teacher education promotes “culturally responsive practice” as a means of meeting the needs of diverse children. This qualitative study investigates four student teachers’ field experiences so as to better understand future teachers’ translation of “culturally responsive practice” during field work. Data sources include individual and group interview-conversations across a semester and the researcher’s own stories from her experiences as a participant-observer in the school. Results are reported as four case studies with cross-case analysis. The researcher makes recommendations for teacher education based on findings from the four cases and group similarities. Results suggest that teacher education should place an emphasis on the complexity of culture, gaining knowledge about specific cultural factors, knowledge of history and present-day conditions, individual talk, and “culturally responsive relationships.”
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my past, present, and future.

The Past

To my parents, who in their small ways acted to change the world they knew.

Marjorie Peatross Rose who, as a twenty year old woman in the 1940’s, sat in the back of the bus alongside African Americans on her way to work in downtown Richmond, Virginia. She didn’t think “it was fair that they had to pay the same amount but were instructed to sit in the back of the bus.”

David Odell Rose who “allowed” a football team with one Black American member to stay at his motel in the 1960’s when there was no “room” for the team that night in any other “inn” in Richmond, Virginia.

The Present

To Tison Butler (pseudonym), my gracious and dynamic new friend, who shared her life with me and in doing so, changed my world in small ways and taught me more than I could ever write about in a dissertation.

The Future

To my sons, Evan David Gregory, Andrew Thomas Gregory, and Michael Lloyd Gregory… may they find their own small ways to change the world they know.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No dissertation is written alone, although my name sits as a soloist on the front page. I thank my chair, Dr. Ann Potts for her constant wise counsel and steadfast encouragement in my journey, both before and during this study. Throughout my doctoral studies and because she “sensed” who I was, she shared research, books, and topics that she perceived might be relevant to my interests and studies. She guided my thoughts without determining them. As a researcher, I was fortunate because she and my committee members, Mary Alice Barksdale, Cecile Cachaper, Shelli Fowler, Sandra Moore, and Cheri Triplett gave me license to follow a qualitative venture and to trust my sensibilities about my topic, the participants, and the context. Our committee meetings were remarkable, for while they gave me advice and critique, I always emerged from our sessions with a sense of direction and inspiration because of their enthusiasm, encouragement, and faith in my judgment. Few doctoral students I know could say the same.

I received help from critical experts and important companions and friends: Russell Gregory, Jan Nespor, Liz Altieri, Liz Barber, and Ann Mary Roberts listened carefully, provided resources, and asked me questions that I needed to answer as I followed a research path that changes as one goes. Carmel Vaccare surprised me with new technology and word formatting knowledge at the heightened endpoint of my writing and helped me solve many editing problems. Tammie Smith assisted me with ongoing editing processes as I prepared for ETD submission.

I thank my “anonymous” friends at Gilmer Park who need to be named, but I cannot. Their friendship and mentoring in the “city” school made my work there possible because they made me a somewhat insider member of the school.

I thank my immediate and extended family and personal friends who gave me space and time to write and have forgiven me for time spent away from them. I owe much to them for teaching me how to be more “fully human” as they have shown me about the power of relationships in our lives.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ...................................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................ iv
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................. v
List of Tables ................................................................................................................................... viii
Table of Figures ............................................................................................................................. ix

PROLOGUE ....................................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE ...........................................................................................................2
Problem, Hope, Significance ........................................................................................................... 2
  Problem .................................................................................................................................... 2
  Complexity of Problem and Significance .............................................................................. 12
  Hope: Multicultural Studies ................................................................................................. 13
    Personal, Axiological, and Ethical Significance .............................................................. 20

CHAPTER 2: SUPPORTING THEORIES AND RESEARCH ....................................................27
Multicultural Teacher Education: Premises and Programs ............................................................ 27
  Premises ................................................................................................................................. 27
  Programs: Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers ...................................................... 28
  Obstacles .................................................................................................................................. 29

MCTE Research: Knowledge, Practice, and Teacher Learning .................................................... 30
  The Knowledge Question ...................................................................................................... 31
  The Practice Question .......................................................................................................... 31
  The Teacher Learning Question .......................................................................................... 32
  My Assumptions about “Culture” ....................................................................................... 33

Research Directions and Influences on this Study ................................................................. 34
  Research in Naturalistic Settings ......................................................................................... 34
  Generating Knowledge through Small In-depth Studies .................................................... 35
  The Role of Dialogue and Narrative in Research ............................................................... 37
  Direct Effects on this Study .................................................................................................. 44

CHAPTER 3: GENERATING KNOWLEDGE ............................................................................45
Research Design and Methodology ............................................................................................... 45
  Research Design .................................................................................................................. 45
  Phase One: My Immersion as a Participant-Observer “Student Teacher” ....................... 52
  Phase II: Student Teacher Experiences ............................................................................. 62
  Phase III: Analysis Process and Writing ............................................................................. 70
  Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Reliability ..................................................................... 78
  Ethics ...................................................................................................................................... 79
  Researcher Note: Labels and Terms .................................................................................... 80
  Postscript ................................................................................................................................ 80

Research Context ........................................................................................................................ 82
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 82
  First Impressions ................................................................................................................... 83
  The City ................................................................................................................................. 84
  School and Neighborhood ................................................................................................. 84
| Theme 3: Cultural Identities as Significant-Gaining Knowledge about “Within Group” and “Between Group” Cultural Factors | 201 |
| Theme 4: Understanding Cultural Identities: Tension between Stereotypes and Cultural Knowledge | 212 |
| Theme 5: Cultural Identities: Effects on the Social Construction of “Realities” and “Normal” | 214 |
| Theme 6: The Effects of Cultural Identity on Relationships | 215 |
| Theme 7: Teaching Differently | 222 |
| Final Word | 229 |
| Epilogue | 230 |
| References | 232 |
| Appendix A – Critical Multicultural Studies Propostions | 243 |
| Appendix B – Consent Form for Research Informant – Tison Butler | 244 |
| Appendix C – Relationship with Research Informant – Tison Butler | 245 |
| Appendix D – Consent Form: Research Informant – Community and School | 250 |
| Appendix E – Interview Record: Tison Butler and Research Informants | 251 |
| Appendix F – Interview Record: Research Informants – School and Community | 252 |
| Appendix G – Consent Form: Student Teacher Participant | 253 |
| Appendix H – Interview – Conversation Record with Student Teachers | 254 |
| Appendix I – Bus Tour of School and Community | 255 |
| Appendix J – Brief History of School Neighborhood | 257 |
| Appendix K – City Demographics | 258 |
| Appendix L – Income Levels in the School Neighborhood | 260 |
| Appendix M – Immigrations and English Language Learners | 262 |
| Appendix N – Susan’s Examples of Culture Despite Race – Isom’s Home Culture | 264 |
| Appendix O – Susan’s Examples of Culture Despite Race – Jared’s Home Culture | 265 |
| Appendix P – Susan’s Examples of Culture Despite Race – Sina’s Home Culture | 266 |
| Appendix Q – Summary of Questions | 267 |
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Relationship between Epistemological Assumptions and Research..........................47
Table 2. Phases of the Study ..................................................................................................51
Table 3. Research Principles and Methodological Choices ..................................................63
Table 4. Interview Schedule with Student Teacher Participants .........................................65
Table 5. Questions for Individual Interview 1 .......................................................................66
Table 6. Questions for Group Interview 1 .............................................................................67
Table 7. Question for Individual Interview 2 .........................................................................68
Table 8. Questions for Group Interview 2 .............................................................................69
Table 9. Questions for Individual Interview 3 .......................................................................70
Table 10. Beginning Themes and Codes ...............................................................................74
Table 11. Beliefs about Diversity Scale ..................................................................................81
Table 12. Gilmer Park Enrollment .........................................................................................87
Table 13. Deeper Meaning: Features of Culture .................................................................194
TABLE OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Relationship between Researcher’s and Participant’s Lives</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Within-Group Comparison: “Sameness” and “Difference”</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Between Person Comparison: “Sameness” and “Difference”</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Between Group Comparison: “Sameness” and “Difference”</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>We are both or either “Same” and “Different”</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 &amp; 6a</td>
<td>Holistic View of “Same” and “Different”</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Within Group Comparisons</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROLOGUE

A year long study produces many stories. I have notebooks full of research data that include my journal and transcribed interviews. My research data became “circles within circles” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991), for as I set out to study student teacher experiences, my own experiences placed me as a social actor on a stage with people in a multicultural school. As a result of this immersion, I had many decisions about what to include and omit. I could have described more fully my friendship with Tison Butler and what she taught me about her world and mine. I could tell stories about my relationship with Ms. Jade and Mr. Johnson, the other African American teachers on my hallway who came through our room in the afternoon and stopped to talk for hours. I could write about what the children in my class shared with me about themselves. My experiences became broader than I could ever have imagined when I designed my methods to study student teacher experiences.

For this task, my dissertation, I had to choose and set stories aside because all of my accounts would have provided enough data for several volumes. Therefore, this dissertation is only a part of the whole story of my school year as I re-learned what it is like to teach in a diverse setting. However, I believe that this dissertation is a whole and thorough story, the story in which I listened to four student teachers and myself and the questions and understandings we had about teaching “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995). I have chosen representative chunks of the story and believe that these selected “slices” of the life we lived will represent all of the small and large issues that I found in the data and influenced the recommendations I eventually make.

It was a remarkably rich year, life changing and professionally changing because I know that I have made another step towards “getting it” or “getting smart” (Lather, 1991) in my everyday interactions and in my desire to be fully human. I know now that although my research experiences have afforded me these new understandings about people who are not “like” me, there are perspectives I can never truly “get” because of my own personal history and socio-cultural identity as a “first-world woman” (Lather). It is this realization that I cannot assume to totally know anyone different than me, that will actually help me honor and teach “others.” My duty will now be to share these insights with future teachers.
CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE

Problem, Hope, Significance

Problem

We can no longer afford the luxury of designing curriculums and educational programs at which only a favored segment of our society can succeed. (Purcell-Gates, 1995, p.191)

This study is set within the historical struggle for equal opportunity for all people in our nation. In particular, this study acknowledges the potential that American public schools have to be both a place and agent for change in providing and promoting equal opportunity for all people through equal education. Since the Brown vs. the Board of Education Act (1954), our laws have stated that all people should have equal access to education with the intent that this equal access would provide an equal education and presumably equal outcomes in achievement. However, differences in achievement between groups of children based on their cultural and socio-economic heritages reveals that our nation has not accomplished this goal of equal education.

This achievement gap is confirmed and reported through national testing statistics that document differences in literacy and math achievement levels between White and non-White students and between children from middle or upper-class homes and lower socio-economic homes (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2003; Profile of College-Bound Seniors, 2003). This difference in achievement or school learning has been a widely discussed problem historically and currently in our nation’s public school system and the larger public discourse on our nation’s democratic principles and future.

For the scholarly field of educational research, this “achievement gap” is a primary focus of study. While differences in achievement based on cultural factors declined between 1970 and 1988, differences between groups have become wider in ensuing years and are evident in testing data and dropout rates (Nieto, 2004; D’Amico, 2001). There are educators and others who view this achievement gap as a social justice issue because of the belief that in a democracy, education is a site and process whereby all children should have equal access to opportunities in school and beyond, opportunities in life that an equitable education provides.

The failure to achieve universally effective education in our society is known to be a correlate of our failure to achieve social justice. By almost any measure, there continue to be serious differences between the level and quality of educational achievement for children coming from rich or from poor families and from ethnic-majority or from ethnic-minority groups and families. (Gordon, 1999, p. xiii).

Many school reform efforts and federal policies have focused on increasing all children’s achievement levels, in particular, those children who have historically experienced less school success. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 uses words that connote an interest in all children’s learning, despite many scholars’ refutation of the bill’s ability to achieve such a goal (Allington, 2002; Bracey, 2003b; Coles, 2003; Kohn, 2000).

My belief in this social justice endeavor and my belief in teacher education’s role in the realization of social justice compels my work. There are many scholars who have studied, analyzed, and written about the complex factors that influence or cause differences in
achievement, scholars that I will cite throughout this work. Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton (2000) state, “A passion for the public good focuses our collective energy on making our country a fair and just place to live and learn” (p. xii). Through my study, I raise my voice in concert with these scholars as I investigate ways to understand how I can influence, as a teacher educator, teachers’ understandings of the social justice issues that are embedded in classrooms and schools.

Explanations for the Problem

As a means of correcting this educational issue, scholars and researchers look for causes or explanations for differences in achievement in order to suggest reform and changes in schools. “Why does this gap persist?” is the broad research question that researchers pose in attempting to solve this educational and social justice issue. Scholars attempt to find answers in many educational domains that include classroom pedagogies, beliefs about our country’s social systems, and underlying assumptions about schools and people.

Explanation and answers: classroom pedagogies.

Classroom teaching and learning practices (pedagogies), or technical reforms (Baum, 2003), are a primary site of the research investigation to understand why there is this difference in achievement. The classroom is the place where students and teachers interact, so therefore the classroom is considered a place for possible change. Studies have also shown that one of the most significant factors in shaping student achievement is teacher expertise and knowledge or “high quality teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Students who attend schools that are not mostly middle-class and White have been proven to have less qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1998; Oakes, 1990). Children from African American backgrounds, for example, have “substantially different school opportunities, in particular greatly disparate access to high-quality teachers and teaching” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 613).

Teachers that have the most success in providing high-quality teaching for diverse students are teachers who use pedagogies that “are much more sensitive to students’ needs and individual differences; they are more skilled at engaging and motivating students; and they can call upon a wider repertoire of instructional strategies for addressing student needs” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 615-616), all of which require cultural sensitivity and understanding on the part of the teacher. Some reform efforts investigate ways in which to prepare such “highly-qualified teachers” and therefore change classroom pedagogies.

Lower achievement is also correlated with assumptions that teachers can have about children as learners. For example, scholars have discussed the impact of negative images and assumptions about African American male students and how these assumptions about a gendered and raced identity affects African American males’ success in regards to academics and behavioral outcomes (Hilliard, 1991; Noguera, 2003). Nieto (1999) cites research that discloses teachers’ more positive attention to White children than African American children in the classroom. Scholars have examined school testing and observation practices that result in the over-identification of ethnic and class minority children for special education and lower ability classes. This over-identification includes higher incidences of labeling them as mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, or learning disabled (Ladner & Hammons, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002).

In examining the common school process of grouping and tracking students according to ability, research reveals the harmful results of such grouping on children from groups with “minority” status. Tracking and labeling act to segregate diverse children into lower ability classes. If a child participates in a lower ability class, that school experience will limit a child’s
learning and educational opportunities because of less high-quality teaching, (as described earlier), the use of minimal resources and texts, and a rote-style teaching and learning environment that does not provide for deep engagement with cognitive processes or prepare students for college coursework (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Oakes, 1997).

Literacy educators believe that literacy is a tool and process that educates citizens for democracy and gives people equal access to knowledge and life opportunities (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Edelsky, 1999; Shannon, 2001). A child’s literacy ability is also a primary data source for determining achievement in schools and that demonstrates the differences in achievement, based on cultural factors. Literacy educators (Allington, 2002; Routman, 1996; Shannon, 2001) debate specific technical reforms (Baum, 2003) in classroom literacy practices or pedagogies and describe beliefs and empirical evidence that support numerous literacy instructional approaches to make “every child a reader and writer.” In an attempt to identify teaching strategies and processes that support all children’s literacy learning, scholars’ suggestions include, but are not limited to providing:

- whole language instruction (Goodman & Goodman, 2003);
- skills-based, direct instruction (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001);
- balanced or comprehensive instruction (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Routman, 2000);
- guided instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001);
- cognitive strategy instruction (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992);
- inquiry and workshop instruction (Calkins, 1994; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1995); and

Each of these listed pedagogical frameworks and their related research claim to identify teaching pedagogies or processes, based on particular beliefs about literacy development and learning. They explain differences in achievement by inferring that children have experienced different pedagogies, and these educators propose a pedagogy as an “answer” to teaching all children to become “literate.” One primary goal in this pedagogical and classroom endeavor to teach all children, is to eliminate or minimize the achievement gap.

Explanation and answer: influences of broader social systems.

While school practices are a logical and necessary point to investigate, some scholars acknowledge that schools, classrooms, teachers, and children are tied to a larger system, or a social, cultural, political, and economic network, and that school reforms for this achievement problem cannot be successful without an awareness of the socio-political context and influences of these systemic issues on a child’s school experience (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Nespor, 1997; Oakes, 1997; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000). The effects of these larger social issues permeate schools. Schools are not closed entities; they are public institutions that reflect and enact public policy and belief. Despite the belief that our country provides equal educational opportunity for all children, educational funding, resources, and opportunities are different for ethnic, class-majority and ethnic, class-minority schools (Kozol, 1991; Oakes, 1985). Reform efforts must examine the broader network of social systems in order to acknowledge that there are “tremendous inequities” (Nieto, 2004) in our schools and communities.
For example, laws have been changed with the intent to provide equity of treatment to all people. However, in reality, equity in treatment of non-White, non-middle-class people in everyday social and legal interactions and policy outside of schools has not been realized in areas such as economics, education, housing, jobs, and the legal system (Hayduk, 2003; House, 1999; Wacquant, 2002). People outside of White, middle or upper-class groups have less access to economic, social, and “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) by virtue of their classed and raced identities, and therefore continue to live with the reality of having fewer resources and opportunities.

There is an intersection and correlation between race, class, achievement, and cultural capital (hooks, 2000; Moss, 2003). Some research suggests that children’s lower socio-economic status causes children to come to school with developmental differences and less preparation for school success. The reciprocal effect of coming to school with less school literacy knowledge creates a downward spiral for a child. The result is that these students’ achievement suffers; essentially, “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” (Stanovich, 1986).

Public schools also receive unequal funding based on the school’s local tax basis and socio-economic status. This disparity in funding for schools translates into less high-quality and experienced teachers, fewer resources, and lower levels of academic opportunity by virtue of how these inequities reduce class offerings, support services, and students’ attachment or motivation towards school and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

A child’s lack of access to appropriate pedagogies through “high quality teaching,” as previously discussed, is equally related to a child’s worsened achievement over time. However, Darling-Hammond (2004) explains the more complex social system causes for the lack of “high quality teaching.” Darling-Hammond reports that children in low-income and urban settings “are most likely to find themselves in a classroom staffed by an inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill-qualified teacher because funding inequities, distribution of local power, and labor market conditions conspire to produce teacher shortages of which they bear the brunt” (p. 613). Darling-Hammond explains that schools in low-income areas have the most difficulty in filling teaching positions, and that because of teacher shortages, such classrooms are staffed with “unqualified teachers, substitutes, or teachers from other fields” (p. 613). Teachers choose to go elsewhere because higher economic areas pay higher salaries, have better working conditions, and more “autonomy.” Darling-Hammond summarizes: “The pattern of systematic underexposure to good teaching tends to put all children in high-minority schools at risk” (p. 614). Another solution to the shortage of teachers is to increase classroom size which also changes the quality of classroom instruction.

Other social system problems affect classroom performance. The children of the “working poor” live in homes in which parents are in the midst of what is referred to as “time poverty.” This term refers to a person’s lack of time outside of work because they are forced by current social and economic conditions to work multiple jobs in order to bring in the financial resources needed for the family’s survival (Newman & Chin, 2003). This “time poverty” makes it extremely difficult and sometimes impossible for families to provide a child with assistance with schoolwork and learning. Time poverty also causes families to have less time to engage in family literacy interactions, such as talking, listening, writing, and reading together, activities that relate to a child’s school and overall learning performance. Studies have also shown that children from cultural minority and low-income groups, have a higher rate of mobility; they change schools more frequently than White, middle, and upper-class children. This mobility has
a “slowing effect on basic skills acquisition” and “has the long-term effect of increasing the chances of school failure” (Hartman, 2003; p. 231).

Some scholars believe that this evidence of difference in school experiences and opportunities demonstrates that our social system uses school as an institution to replicate the prevailing social order, a social order which actually stratifies and segregates classed, raced, and ethnic identities (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; House, 1999; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Schools “maintain and solidify class divisions” (Nieto, 2000a, p. 41) through such institutional practices of labeling, tracking, and unequal funding. Nieto states that U. S. public schools are not the “great equalizer.” “Rather than eradicate social class differences, then, it appears that schooling reflects and even duplicates them” (p. 40). Varenne and McDermott agree and state that schools...

Have made individual learning and school performance the institutional site where members of each new generation are measured and then assigned a place in the social structure based on this measurement. Learning has become an instrument for so much else than education. (1998, p. xi)

Therefore, many of these researchers would say that the achievement gap is another statistical representation of social class and cultural differences.

*Explanation and answer: assumptions about “deficit” cultures.*

Whereas these scholarly conversations about classroom pedagogies and inequality in broader social systems are critical points for research, on closer examination, there are other significant factors that are both discussed or hidden within academic discourse that are related to these pedagogical and social system issues. The most noteworthy factor is the cultural belief that some children and families are positioned in a “deficit culture.” “Deficit culture” is a term that implies that a culture that is different from White middle-class standards is “less than” or “deficit to” cultural standards that are based on White middle-class norms. Therefore, despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ensuing changes in the U. S. national cultural and social milieu since the 1960’s, groups and individuals from non-White and non-middle or upper-class groups are sometimes considered to be operating and living within a “deficit culture.”

This notion about “deficit culture” is the issue to which Hayduk (2003) and House (1999) alluded. This belief becomes a cycle or recursive assumption, for as schools and teachers make educational decisions about a child based on beliefs that the child’s culture is “deficit,” these children then achieve less in school. Consequently, children from “deficit cultures” have fewer life chances because of their lessened educational experience and success, and thus seem to fit the stereotype that our culture believes to be true about being less able. What transpires is a “self-fulfilling prophesy.” For as mostly White groups continue to attain higher achievement in schools, and minority groups continue to achieve less (according to test results), this difference in achievement becomes naturalized in broad cultural assumptions about and expectations for people.

There are multiple factors related to these deficit assumptions about people from outside the dominant group, factors which scholars believe also influence the achievement gap. These assumptions also become recursive, for in each instance, as the dominant group believes these issues to be true or normal, they place minority groups in a position of being judged based on, or in relation to, the dominant group’s values and assumptions. These factors include assumptions from wide-ranging conceptual and empirical evidence and include beliefs about race and class, the nature of the institution of public schools, ideas about how people interpret and use testing as
scientific evidence, assumptions about children’s families and homes, and theories about language and cognition.

**Underlying factor: racism and classism.**

Pollack (2004) claims that race is both the “proud building blocks of our nation’s diversity and the shameful foundation of our most wrenching inequalities” (p. 1). Scholars discuss the implications of race. Hayduk (2003) rejects mainstream explanations for social inequality such as when the majority group blames minority groups’ poor choices, and non-mainstream values, for their unequal status in the United States. Instead, Hayduk (2003) and House (1999) suggest that social inequities continue to be related to the dominant group’s discriminatory or racist beliefs about people who are not members of the dominant culture, another form of judging groups as “deficit.” Hayduk and House argue that these beliefs are underlying tenets which reinforce White culture’s dominance through public policy.

From the critical social theory domain comes the position that racism and classism are hidden assumptions to many of the underlying factors I outline in this section. Racism is not only isolated actions by individuals, but is broader and “rooted in American institutions, American culture, and concepts of self-identity and group identity” (Lazos Vargas, 2003, p. 2). For example, the prevailing belief and unspoken assumption about differences in intelligence and ability, based on “scientific” testing, is built on and reinforces racist and classist assumptions about people who are non-White and non-middle or upper-class. Such discriminatory practices and policies are instantiations of hegemony, or the invisible power of a dominant group to control and normalize institutional, social, and individual actions that privilege the dominant group and discriminate against people who are members of non-dominant groups. Subsequently, critical social theorists would posit that school and social practices, while seemingly using “natural” and “fair” pedagogies and policies, actual enact racist and classist beliefs (hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998).

**Underlying factor: assumption that schooling is neutral.**

One primary assumption embedded in the conversation about the achievement gap is the nature of public schooling. Since we have all been participants in some form of schooling in a “democratic” nation, we assume, or want to believe, that the way schooling has been constructed is normal and based on principled pedagogy that has “democratic” principles at its foundation. Yet, public schools have historically been organized, structured, and created for the purpose of segregating groups of people, creating a work force, and identifying the academic elite (Luke, 1995; Nieto, 2000a; Weil, 1998).

As discussed earlier, rather than providing equal opportunity for all children, schooling seems to be more likely to replicate the stratified social order. Researchers found that when school reforms attempted to create classrooms that did not track children by ability (and thus by racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups), families from elite backgrounds opposed such changes. These family members, who held power and voice, questioned the purposes of heterogeneous grouping, believed that such grouping would lower the academic expectations for their children and thus affect their children’s options for further academic and life choices (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000).

Weil (1998) describes schools as “indoctrination centers.” Schools simply continue to teach widely accepted dominant histories, ways of being, and knowledge production that are believed to be true. They omit perspectives outside of the Western canon and also omit a constructionist assumption about knowledge (Jenkins, 1991; Loewen, 1995). Critical scholars ask, “Who chooses what should be studied and in whose interest is this decision made?” White
culture becomes the “dominant” culture and other cultures are thus “deficit” because of the power that the dominant culture has in choosing the content and processes in American schools. What counts as learning in schools is also viewed as obvious and normalized pedagogy. However, schools have been designed by White, middle, and upper-class people and are quite often social constructions of Western concepts of learning and language. Delpit (1995) asserts that schools represent the “culture of power,” in which there are codes and rules that are embedded in daily school practices and institutional patterns of interaction. The “culture of power” is the White, middle, and upper-class culture that already lives by these rules and codes and whose children come to school prepared to interact in such ways. Members of White culture arrive at school with an advantage or “privilege” because their dominant group has determined the definition of knowledge and learning.

Within this educational paradigm, teachers participate in a teaching and learning process without knowledge of other cultures’ literacy and family practices. Students are then judged to have less value in the eyes of the educators who are in power to make such judgments. Children who have not grown up within this “culture of power” experience barriers to learning. Other cultures become “deficit.” Delpit states that people within the “culture of power” cannot see or are blind to the notion that their school policies and practices are related to their cultural construction of education and behavior. They believe that their ideas about schooling are neutral and unbiased (Delpit, 1995).

Underlying factor: assumptions about testing as “science.”

Testing is a common educational routine and is considered by our culture to be a scientific measure of ability and achievement. These testing routines wield power in public schools today. Testing is regularly used to make judgments about classroom pedagogies for children and is often used as a tool for labeling and sorting children by ability and achievement. These test results have been used to provide a larger percentage of limited public school funding to groups that the tests “proved” to be more able and thus more deserving of more school funds (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Scholars reveal that many school assessment procedures construct and “scientifically” identify cultures outside of dominant mainstream culture as deficit when children perform at lower levels on such tests (Au, 2000; Banks, 2002, 2004; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Giving these testing practices such power has become “social practice” made invisible by the culture’s belief in the power and neutrality of science to give us accurate evidence about people (Johnston, 1993).

Although test bias has been reduced through researched selections of “test items and other technical points” (Kornhaber, 2004, p. 94), differences in test scores do persist. Since these differences in achievement have persisted over time, this achievement gap between children reinforces and extends stereotypical beliefs about minority children’s ability (Kornhaber). In addition to debates about school testing, the use of testing in the broader social arena has also acted to instantiate or prove underlying social assumptions about “deficit” people outside of dominant White culture.

As recently as 1994, Herrnstein and Murray published findings in an 800-page “scientific” text, The Bell Curve. Their work used test results to determine differences in ability based on race and class. The authors stated, “This book is about differences in intellectual capacity among people and groups and what those differences mean for America’s future” (1994, p. xxi). Their study recommended ending services for low-income families, replacing the welfare system, controlling the flow of immigrants, and changing school funding to remove assistance to the disadvantaged.
Gould (1994, 1996) critiqued and reported that The Bell Curve study (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) used flawed premises, omission of facts and information, and misuse of statistical methods to assert that African Americans and Hispanics had less ability than people from White and Asian cultures. “How strange that we would let a single and false number divide us, when evolution has united all people in the recency of our common ancestry…” (Gould, 1994). A debate, known as “The Bell Curve Debate,” became an ongoing conversation between social policy makers, media talk-show hosts, scientists, and educators and became a broad social, scientific, and educational dialogue about our assumptions about people and our assumptions about what we can understand about people through testing practices or statistics (Fraser, 1995).

The use of tests in Western culture has a history of being used “scientifically” to sort, segregate, and stratify people of different ethnicities and races. In particular, ethnographers and scholars decry the discriminatory practices embedded in the construct of what we name as “intelligence” and as defined by many “intelligence” tests (Bowker & Starr, 1999; Gould, 1996). This prevailing belief and unspoken assumption about differences in intelligence and ability is built on and reinforces racist assumptions that are still evident in our country about people who are non-White and non-middle or upper-class.

Underlying factor: assumptions about families and homes.
Beliefs about “deficit” cultures, the idea that groups outside the dominant White middle-class paradigm are deficient either in ability or resources, supports the belief that minority groups bring children to school who are less prepared for school. This theory often places the blame for children’s lower achievement on minority groups’ homes and families and removes responsibility for children’s learning from the school (Nieto, 2000a). Children from minority cultures are often inappropriately considered and labeled at-risk, disadvantaged, deprived, developmentally immature and children of dysfunctional home environments. However, many times children from “other” classed and raced identities are simply different from the White concept of appropriate language, literacy, and behavioral norms (Irvine, 2003). Although these labels can seem like fair and sympathetic judgments about people, based exclusively on socio-economic circumstances, these beliefs about the impact of children’s home experiences and socio-economic class membership are enactments of discriminatory myths about “others” created by members of the dominant White, middle and upper-class who are in a position of power (Compton-Lilly, 2004).

Teachers do not enact racist and classist practices consciously (Nieto, 2000a). These assumptions about different classes and cultures have become normalized as teacher explanations for a child’s lack of achievement in school and can be based on our belief that school is “normal” and “fair” or can be substantiated through the “science” of testing. It is common educational discourse to discuss, from either a standpoint of sympathy or judgment, how families “do not care about their child’s education,” “cannot assist their child with literacy and learning,” “don’t read at bedtime,” “do not provide modeling of appropriate behavior,” or are “part of a cycle of poverty.” All of these are home factors, related to the broader social systems discussed earlier, that teachers believe can engender or cause poor school performance (Compton-Lilly, 2004).

It is difficult to see that an assumption that seems commonly understood as true is based on misinformation and is a socially constructed belief about people who are situated in “different” classed, raced, or ethnic identities. Since “teachers are also products of educational systems that have a history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy…. they may unwittingly perpetuate policies and approaches that are harmful to many of their students”
(Nieto, 2000a, p. 5). Lazos Vargas (2003) asserts that White people’s beliefs about lower ability, tracking, and deficit cultures function as “rules, norms, standards, and assumptions that appear ‘neutral,’ but which systemically disadvantage or ‘subordinate’ racial minorities” (p. 1).

**Underlying factor: assumptions about language.**

Another more specific factor regarding the achievement gap is that schools and teachers can make discriminatory judgments about children’s home literacy acquisition, a cultural judgment that is inextricably tied to identity and power. Gee (2001) states that people acquire different discourses based on their race, ethnicity, and class, and that these literacy practices represent complex ways of talking, writing, and viewing the world. However, certain discourses have more power than others. White, Eurocentric Standard English is the dialect that is assumed to be the language of privilege and correctness in the United States. “Children who are born into households in which their home discourses capture and represent mainstream ways of understanding the world have huge advantages in school and in the larger society” (Compton-Lilly, 2004, pp. 12-13). Children who come to school with a different English dialect or non-English speaking background are less likely to succeed in school literacy practices than White middle and upper-class children (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Nieto, 2000a; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

Schools have also created literacy learning as reading and writing acts that are based solely on White middle and upper-class oral and written language patterns and consequently expect all children to acquire such standard forms of literacy without regard to other complex cultural forms of talking, writing, and viewing the world (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Scholars believe that this difference between children’s home literacy discourses and their “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1990), or their ways of knowing and interacting with the world, leads to cultural incongruency between the child’s home experiences and school literacy expectations. Many literacy scholars believe that a child’s home literacy practices are critical to a child’s sense of identity, school achievement, motivation, and understanding about language’s use and syntax. Therefore, a child’s home language and literacy practices should be honored and used within the classroom while teaching standard forms of English (Au, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 1999; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Trueba, 1988).

**Underlying factor: theories about culture, language, and cognition.**

Theorists and ethnographers have also discussed the critical relationship between language, culture, and cognition (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Trueba, 1988; Wertsch, 1991). “Culture operates both at the collective macrosocial, and at the micropsychological levels” (Trueba, 1988, p. 280). Trueba states that what “we need is to search for a cohesive theory of culture that permits an understanding of culture’s crucial role in the process of knowledge acquisition and its intimate link to the developmental processes of children’s cognitive skills” (p. 280). A century earlier, Dewey asserted a similar notion in his 1901 presidential address to the American Psychological Association. He said that the field of psychology would “have to come to terms with how individuals are culturally, historically, and institutionally situated before it could understand many aspects of mental functioning” (cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 3).

Vygotsky (1986) theorized that children’s speech first occurs without thought and that thought first occurred without speech. When speech and thought meet or integrate, language then becomes an expression of the human mind. Vygotsky believed that language acquisition was significant because the structure of one’s language also becomes “the basic structures of his thinking” (p. 94). He elaborates, “Thought development is determined by language…by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child” (p. 94). It was
Vygotsky’s belief that a child’s particular language structures, forms, and meaning would then arrange and influence how the child thought and viewed the world. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1921) also asserted that “how people see and speak of their world is to a large extent determined by their mother tongue” (Von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 3).

Wertsch (1991) extends these theories about the connection between language and cognition and finds an intersection between language, cognition, and action. He uses the term “mediated action” and proposes that language is only meaningful in the context of function and action. He believes that we cannot understand learning by viewing it in a vacuum, as though it were unrelated to historical, cultural, and institutional influences. Wertsch contends that differences in cultural and social traditions transform human cognition and consequently result in ethnic differences in the mind, rather than universal human attributes of cognition and emotion. Gee (2001) states that the first purpose of language is to “scaffold the performance of action in the world, including social activities and interactions” and proposes that how we connect language to our actions and how we form our language within those actions also changes the meanings we construct.

Underlying factor: theories about language and identity.

In addition, a person’s family and individual identity is inextricably linked to the person’s language and literacy. How we use words, syntax, inflection, and dialect represents who we are and what we are becoming. Literacy is our “identity kit,” a “way of being,” or discourse that is more than just reading, writing, and mastering a code of symbols (Gee, 2001). Educators need to change their perspectives as they observe their students so as to see that children are “cultural beings whose identities and perceptions reflect the nested cultural contexts of ethnic heritage, education/literacy level, gender, and socioeconomic status” (Purcell-Gates, 1995, p. 179). Purcell-Gates and Nieto (2000a) assert that children should not have to choose between their family and cultural-language identity and a school identity (Nieto, 2000a). Children should not have to abandon their “identity kit” to become educated.

Underlying factor: incongruency between home and school cultures.

The concept of cultural incongruency between home culture and school culture becomes a way to synthesize many of these underlying factors into one focal point. Cultural incongruency refers to the theory that since a child’s home culture and school culture are vastly different based on standards of behavior, interests, values, language, cognition, and assumptions about deficit cultures, children from non-dominant groups experience less success at school. Since cultural incongruency combines many social and pedagogical issues, culture becomes an important consideration in solving the problem of differences in achievement, but culture is a complex construct that is difficult to consider in relationship to the classroom. As noted, scholars have written about the different pedagogical and social incongruencies and the need to solve the problem.

Scholars suggest that it is important work for people in the dominant group to “recognize their complicity in creating and supporting the conditions in schools that lead to failure for so many students of color” (Howard, 1999, p. xiii), as well as to understand the intersection of racial identity with class identity (Compton-Lilly, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Moss, 2003; Nieto, 2000a). When children come to school from outside of school’s mainstream literacy and language system, they become “immigrants to the literate world,” “foreigners,” or “outsiders” in the classroom (Purcell-Gates, 1995, p. 181). However, schools continue to expect a homogenous use of behavior, language, literacy, and cognition in the classroom, one that is defined by White Eurocentric standards and thus limits other groups’ access to learning. White educators should
not make White ways of being the “default racial identity” in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Many scholars explain that it is this cultural “incongruency” between Euro-centric schools and children who come from other cultures that is a significant factor in the achievement gap problem. Paley (1989) expressed this “incongruency” eloquently:

Suddenly a stranger called “teacher” is trying to find out not who he is, but what he knows. The further away the teacher is from the child’s cultural or temperamental background, the more likely it is that the wrong questions will be asked. (p. xiv)

Complexity of Problem and Significance

I present this discussion as a means of revealing the complexity of teaching all children equitably and the impossibility of finding one answer to a social justice issue that remains to be solved. The inherent complexity of people’s beliefs about others and about how schooling is constructed makes our ability to create change challenging. Indeed, these issues are difficult to unearth and discuss, and it is difficult to place parameters around one factor, such as “testing” or “assumptions about families,” or “cultural incongruency” for research purposes because of the factors’ complex relationships.

Whereas the field of education espouses the principles of teaching all children to become productive members of a democratic society, some educators question the sincerity of these stated beliefs (House, 1999; Lazos Vargas, 2003; Oakes et al., 2000). If equitable education is our true goal, then why haven’t unequal funding, differences in teacher quality, and discriminatory assumptions about schooling and subordinated groups been addressed in some way that would create real reform? Aren’t the hidden assumptions of racist and discriminatory beliefs still prevalent in schools? These are complex issues that cannot be changed by one pedagogy or one social reform.

In addition to the complexity of the past and present, there are current and future social issues that compound concerns about cultural differences in classrooms. These issues cannot be disregarded by teacher educators and teachers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Digest of Education Statistics, 2001), U. S. school populations are presently 61% White; 39% of the school population is listed as Black, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaskan native. The number of children who immigrate and come to school as non-English speakers is also increasing (Nieto, 2004). While the demographics of our school population is becoming more multicultural, the teacher population continues to be mostly White, 84% as recorded in the Digest of Education Statistics, 2001.

Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries, (2004) calls the combination of these facts a “demographic imperative.” It is imperative for us to address “cultural incongruency” in classrooms because of the changing demographics in our nation. Delpit (1995) also calls our attention to this demographic issue. She believes that since most teachers who are teaching children from diverse cultures are White, these teachers are charged with the task of teaching “other people’s children” who come to school from cultures other than White middle-class culture and whose language and behavior can be misinterpreted. Delpit asserts that a White teacher must work to overcome this cultural incongruency. Other scholars agree (Banks, 2002; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 2000a); Howard states that teachers can’t “teach what we don’t know” (Howard). I also suggest that with the changing demographics of our nation, no matter the race or ethnicity of a teacher, all teachers will be teaching “other people’s children,” children who come to school from cultural standards with which teachers are not familiar.

Additionally, while U. S. school diversity is increasing, federal and state policies are making high stakes, standards-driven assessment procedures even more embedded in school and
connected to school funding policies. These standards-driven assessment practices have been developed in response to the achievement gap. Policy-makers have based these policies on the belief that testing students on high standards to see if the standards have been reached is an appropriate solution to the problem of differences in achievement (Kornhaber, 2004). Having high standards and expectations for all children is much needed in schools; however, it is questionable if using assessment as an accountability measure can effectively solve the complex problem of differences in achievement since the differences cannot all be solved through an outcomes measure like testing (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Such high stakes testing places great pressure on children who are poor and in minority groups to achieve high standards despite the inequitable conditions previously discussed (Newman & Chin, 2003; Novak & Fuller, 2003). The paradox is that while some say that testing accountability will cause educators to leave “no child behind,” “it is safe to assume that children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be the ones most likely to have trouble with high stakes tests” when we consider the unequal distribution of educational and cultural resources (Newman & Chin, 2003, p. 6). As the future portends more high stakes testing and more cultural and language differences in the school population, it seems to be poor educational policy to enact high stakes testing as an outcomes-driven solution to a cultural achievement gap problem that has never been “fixed.” Ladson-Billings (2004) states, “Current assessment schemes continue to instantiate inequity and validate the privilege of those who have access to cultural capital” (p. 60) and that more testing will only make the gap worse.

I am interested in this issue of cultural incongruency and the role that it plays in the relationship between teachers, children, and learning. Because of our country’s changing demographics, the social justice movement to equalize achievement for all children, and my scholarly belief that cultural incongruency can be a factor in classroom pedagogy and learning, I determined that I wanted to know more about how to prepare future teachers for “cultural incongruency” in the classroom and to understand how to teach “other people’s children.”

Hope: Multicultural Studies

Multicultural education (MCE) is a complex reform movement that addresses classroom and systemic issues of cultural inequity and student achievement. MCE addresses how culture has an impact on learning in the classroom. Sleeter (1996) analyzes and interprets multicultural studies as it is reproduced in many forms in schools and educational discourse. MCE can be merely a form of assisting people from other cultures in being successful in the traditional educational forum, or MCE can become a way in which to understand other cultures simply through the arts and cultural practices. At a deeper level, MCE can include engagement with cultural issues by focusing on human relations between people and/or acknowledging that education can become a tool of social reconstruction, social justice, and thus social transformation. My study employs a form of multicultural education that focuses on both human relations between people and education as social reconstruction, social justice, and transformation.

Multicultural Studies Framework

This research project embraces a critical multicultural studies (CMS) framework since I acknowledge the social justice issues embedded in multicultural education. The field of CMS is located in a multi-layered maze of historical and current educational and social reform movements as well as epistemological discourses, an academic location that extends across a broad set of time, space, and ideological networks. Critical multicultural studies (CMS) is a “meta-narrative” in that it is related to postmodern social theory, to epistemological assumptions
of constructionist knowledge production, and to “oppositional social movements” (Lather, 1991; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Weil, 1998). These social theories and tenets all reject Eurocentric values, discourse, and power systems that have normalized a Western canon of knowledge and have limited others’ access to cultural capital and empowerment.

Although CMS is a philosophy and political stance, its specific purpose is to change “traditional forms of schooling” (Gay, 1995, p. 155) and to transform education into becoming an agent of social change. Although multicultural education might be described in some arenas as simply adding content onto the curriculum that is related to diverse individual and group identities (as described earlier), multicultural studies in this broader CMS framework is a complex prescription that infuses diversity in belief, knowledge about culture, pedagogy, action, and opposition throughout the educational forum.

CMS sustains the notion that knowledge production is a socially and thus subjectively mediated act. As a social constructionist standpoint, CMS posits that knowledge can be socially re-constructed or created to include voices of other cultures and multiple truths (Gay, 1995; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Gergen, 1999). Therefore, critical multiculturalists are social reconstructionists, for one of the defining characteristics of CMS is its attention to and action towards changing structural educational inequalities, normalized discriminatory practices, and the effects of power and privilege in the larger social context (Leistnya, 2002). The foundation of CMS is this ongoing work for social justice. Consequently, CMS, or the multicultural education (MCE) framework that I embrace, views education as a “counter-hegemonic act” that is “rooted in antiracist struggle” (hooks, 1994, p. 2).

MCE addresses many pedagogical and social issues featured earlier in this chapter. Multicultural education examines the classroom and beyond, the whole system of influences on the opportunities that people have and do not have. “The fundamental message of the teacher is this: You can change your life….the teacher points to what could be, but is not yet” (Ayers, 1998, p. xvii). If we embrace and implement MCE as this broad educational reform, MCE can have an impact on many children’s futures. MCE can be one way that we answer the dilemma of “how” we can make the classroom fair by looking at both inequity in school achievement and social circumstances.

Therefore, while the achievement gap is one significant discussion and sign of injustice, it is not the only factor that is addressed in the multicultural education movement. Education for social justice is also grounded in the belief that schooling is about more than acquiring knowledge evidenced by test scores; it is about changing one’s life chances and creating a context wherein students can come to know the world and themselves. What does MCE offer as an answer and theory? First, as stated, it places this dream of educational equity and social justice at the center of its work; The Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education (Banks & Banks, 2004) describes MCE as a “meta-discipline” and a “field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates for this purpose content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and ethnic studies and women’s studies” (p. xii).

The Handbook uses Banks’ framework for MCE, the five inter-related dimensions of content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. While each of these dimensions is important in its own right, it is the factors’ relationship and integration that create the possibility for real change and hope. Other MCE scholars describe these propositions using different terms and frameworks (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 1995; Howard, 1999; Irvine, 2003;
Nieto, 2000a; Weil, 1998), but each is passionate as they elaborate on the purposes, pedagogies, and transformations that MCE espouses and the hope that it engenders in schools. See Appendix A for a summary table of various critical and multicultural studies propositions. I have synthesized scholarship in the field of MCE outlined in Appendix A, and I have created my own framework to describe MCE’s approach to social and educational change.

**MCE framework: Multicultural education as hope.**

MCE is founded on the notion that change is needed and that there is hope for such change through education. Multicultural education has historical roots in the Civil Rights Movement. This hope is related to the “dream” and belief that we should “turn the world upside down” (M. L. King, Jr., quoted in Rappaport, 2001) so as to change social inequality. Multiculturalists believe that by changing our educational system to be more culturally equitable, social change can occur and consequently cause a social transformation for individuals, collective groups, and institutions (Nieto, 1999). Nieto (2000a), Freire (1998), and hooks (2003) remind us that this hope for education is closely related to a teacher’s mission or “calling” or belief that their work should make a difference in people’s lives. Teachers, or “dreamkeepers” (Ladson-Billings, 1994), must be “called” to participate in education for social justice and believe that an emancipatory education gives hope for more equitable circumstances for all people.

**MCE framework: Multicultural education as lens-changing.**

While multiculturalists base their work on this hope for change, they begin their work with the realization that we must change the way people view each other, in particular, change how we view people who are different from ourselves. MCE becomes a way to change our view or “lens.” This is not an easy beginning. Changing one’s lens is difficult work. hooks (1992) discusses the power of the “gaze” and reminds us that our look, our lens, has the power to name and judge “others.” Through our looking we define and control what we believe and want others to be. Over one hundred years ago, DuBois (1903) described the double consciousness that “Black folks” developed in order to survive. As enslaved people, African Americans had to understand White people’s perspective and the collective White consciousness, so as to protect themselves as slaves and make their everyday existence possible.

A dominant group, or White, middle, and upper-class culture, does not have to understand other’s perspectives for survival, but MCE asks for dominant (and non-dominant groups) to recognize and question the sources of power and privilege and to see the invisible lines that define position and exclusion in social and economic access. For people from a dominant culture to perceive the world with a kind of “double consciousness,” they must be able to see the boundaries to equitable access that a dominant group has unknowingly created and see how hegemony invisibly works through normalized, but socially constructed, assumptions about social practices, policies, and ideology. Double consciousness causes a person to “see” that one’s culture makes a difference in one’s life opportunities.

Teachers need to understand that culture changes the way we experience the world. Irvine (2003) uses the phrase, “seeing with the cultural eye.” Freire’s (2002) term for enacting a critical view is “conscientização,” which implies “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (translator’s note, Freire, p. 35). Some scholars describe such a change in “lens” as more dramatic. How middle-class White America (and all people) can see “through other eyes” (Skolnick, Dulberg, & Maestre, 2004) and become impassioned with a purpose of restructuring the cultural balance and the power of dominant culture can only happen through “changes in worldview…conversions or
gestalt shifts” (Nespor, 1987; cited in Windschitl, 2002, p. 143). MCE seeks to create opportunities for people to experience this conversion and see these issues through a new lens.

**MCE framework: Multicultural education as a transformation of self and others.**

If we change our consciousness and lens through a multicultural perspective, then we transform the way we see ourselves and others. “Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were” (Freire, 2002, p. 61). Teachers who change their consciousness change their awareness of themselves as people and as educators. They can become “cultural workers” (Freire, 1998), situated in a multicultural world where they work to understand, respond to, and enter into dialogue with multiple racial, ethnic, class, and language identities. All voices have value. In particular, teachers must be active agents in confronting racist assumptions about non-dominant group’s ways of being and do the hard work of acknowledging and deconstructing their own privilege and cultural biases. If we do not come face-to-face with the existence of these biases and racist assumptions, then we may be an agent of their perpetuation (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Howard, 1999).

Multiculturalists believe that the cultural incongruency between a teacher’s culture and how the teacher views a student’s culture is one critical factor that can cause students to be unsuccessful in school (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000, 2001; Irvine, 2003). Often White educators deny that racist assumptions operate in their classrooms because they as individual teachers have examined their practices and believe in their own non-biased perceptions of children. What is difficult for White educators to see is the invisibility of the “taken-for-granted acceptance of White people as the center of the universe” (Sleeter cited in Howard, 1999, p. 30) and the systemic privileges that are afforded all people with certain cultural and physical markers. White educators are socially positioned within a dominant group and must understand the power that they own because of that powerful position, whether it is acknowledged or not (McIntosh, 1992).

While cultural incongruency must be addressed in relation to how dominant groups understand non-dominant groups, cultural incongruency must also address other forms of relationships. Because of immigration and changing demographics, there will be classrooms all over our nation in which teachers’ racial, ethnic, language, and classed identity will not match the cultures of the children in their classrooms, whether a teacher is White, Black, or Latino. Therefore, all educators should examine how they view children in their classrooms who are different from their teachers.

**MCE framework: Transformation of knowledge and texts.**

While MCE focuses on transforming how we view ourselves and others through a changed lens, the premises of MCE also transform how we view knowledge, knowledge production, and texts. Since education is about how we acquire knowledge, and MCE seeks to transform our beliefs about what knowledge is, this transformation changes education.

Simply stated, multiculturalists believe that knowledge and texts are socially constructed and represent biased knowledge sources from the dominant culture’s perspective. These are perspectives that are not objective, but individually and culturally subjective (Gergen, 1999; Jenkins, 1991; Loewen, 1995). As we change our understanding of knowledge and texts to realize that they are dependent on “un-innocent knowledge sources,” we realize that texts are no longer neutral and “true,” but represent ideology and perspective.

MCE insists that the traditional Western canons of knowledge that schools teach, and the way in which such knowledge is taught, (as in direct instruction which expects children to absorb and memorize predetermined bodies of knowledge or the “banking concept” of education
[Freire, 2002]), is not a valuable learning or learning process. MCE states that this kind of “knowledge” and “learning” is not the only teaching and learning exemplar. For example, scholars have examined traditional school textbooks and found that these textbooks are based only on Western and White culture’s perspectives about our national identity and history (Jenkins, 1991; Loewen, 1995). School texts have been composed based on White dominant and universalizing ideology; these texts omit other non-dominant groups’ history and their role in the making of our country (e.g. Native American or Indigenous people’s history). Even placing non-dominant culture’s history as a sidebar in history textbooks does nothing more than place a marginalized group as “in the margin.”

MCE also suggests that the processes of knowledge production and the pedagogical notions about how we learn should be related to a child’s cultural background and understandings of literacy, language, and worldview (Au, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Murrell, 2002; Purcell-Gates, 1995). This premise asserts that classrooms should be created based on “culturally responsive pedagogy” (Gay, 2000, 2001; Irvine, 2003). Goodman (2001) states that “it is the school’s perception of students’ language, culture, and class as inadequate and negative, and the subsequent devalued status of these characteristics in the academic environment, that help to explain school failure” (p. 17). MCE acts in opposition to White identity being the “default racial identity” (Ladson-Billings, 2004) and seeks to find pedagogical practices that include other cultural learning processes (Au, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Murrell, 2002). This notion about knowledge and the production of knowledge works to counteract problems related to “cultural incongruency.”

**MCE framework: Multicultural education as social justice action.**

MCE believes that educational reform is a social justice action; however, MCE also believes that education should engage children in acts of social justice. Freire (2002) calls for an integration of reflection and action or “praxis” in the educational endeavor. Such “praxis” engages a child in the consideration of how the sociopolitical and historical context controls and defines people’s life circumstances. In addition, social action, as part of education, makes social justice more than an act of “verbalism” (p. 87) but becomes action based on deep and considered thinking and not action for action’s sake.

Therefore, praxis towards change is enacted at multiple levels. In a MCE setting, teachers view their role as social agents and cultural workers in creating fair classrooms, and teachers make social justice a reality by guiding and joining their children as they reflect and act together to alter systemic discrimination inside and outside of school (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Edelsky, 1999; Goodman, 2001; Murrell, 2002; Vasquez, et al., 2003). For non-dominant groups, education that addresses issues that influence the injustice in students’ lives is then directly related to the non-dominant groups’ position, cultural capital, and lack of equal access to life opportunities. Then, education matters, for it addresses students’ real life circumstances. This is an important factor in addressing “cultural incongruency.” MCE believes that children become more engaged in learning when the school curriculum is related to children’s lives.

**MCE framework: Learning is mediated through language and dialogue.**

Embedded in each of these components of multicultural reform is the role of language, literacy, and relational dialogue in creating socially just education. Our actions and thinking are mediated through language (Wertsch, 1991). We use our language and literacy to describe, explain, instantiate, question, and negotiate what we experience and understand about our world. Therefore, language and literacy are the conduits for transformation, change, and reconstruction. “Thus, to speak a true word, is to transform the world” (Freire, 2002, p. 87). We can invite
multiple “identity kits” and discourses to influence our classroom practices and to inform how we change the way that we view ourselves, others, knowledge, and texts. When we acknowledge and value others’ cultural discourses, then we change the way power is enacted in schools.

Since many multicultural scholars and social constructionists theorize that knowledge is culturally and socially constructed, we should examine the role of relational dialogue as we consider how we transform our understandings about the world through our words, talk, and in social relations. Bakhtin (1984) states, “To be means to communicate” (p. 287). This communication infers dialogue with others. Gergen (1999) critiques those who focus on “in the head thinking” in theorizing how we learn and know. Instead, he examines the role of the “self in relationship,” the “relational-self” and suggests that this “relational-self” creates meaning when in dialogue with other “relational selves.” We bring our past knowledge into a present dialogic relationship and enter into talk or dialogue that is socially and historically situated and defined by relationship (Gergen).

Freire (2002) extols the virtue of the dialogic relationship and the power of the method of relational dialogue in knowing ourselves and others. Such dialogue creates the potential and possibility for knowing and understanding multiple truths and multiple ways of being. Doesn’t relational dialogue have the power to transform, for isn’t the essential meaning and question that resides in multicultural scholars’ work, “How do we know ourselves and others in the world in which we live?”

This dialogic potential becomes more than a process; the potential and process becomes a “relational responsibility” for understanding ways of being and thinking (Gergen, 1999). MCE proposes that through dialogue, people in relationship can deconstruct the ways in which we have constructed ideas and people. Through relational dialogue we have the potential to investigate the binary assumptions that we make about people such as the notion that a person is either like-me or not-like-me, normal and not-normal. We can use language and dialogue to reconstruct people and concepts in more complex ways, thus rejecting binaries that stereotype. Seeing another becomes more powerful because we can see another’s meaning of “self” rather than the meaning of “self” that we construct for them. Educators who are identified as White and middle or upper-class can give up the power to name and judge other people, can give up the missionary zeal of bringing a message of “salvation” to people from other “deficit” cultures or discourses, and instead can liberate and be liberated from oppressive policies and pedagogies through the potential of dialogue (Freire, 2002).

**Hope: The Role of Teacher Education**

Multicultural teacher educators (MCTE) design university programs with the intention of creating opportunities for future teachers to develop an emotional and intellectual understanding about the underlying cultural issues that prevent all children from being successful in school. MCTE believes that teachers, who care for and teach all children, need an awareness that “we each bear marks of historical forces of oppression and privilege, and these affect how we hear one another, and the languages we speak and understand” (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001, p. 97).

These university programs are created with the ultimate intention that multicultural beliefs and practices will have a positive impact on teachers’ classrooms and student learning (Au, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2000a). Multicultural teachers describe how they enact “praxis” (Freire, 2002) as a way to work alongside their students for social justice through classroom engagement with texts and related projects (Compton-Lilly, 2004; Edelsky, 1999; Goodman, 2001; Vasquez et al. 2003).
The framework that I have outlined, and other multicultural frameworks that appear in Appendix A, list ideologies and practices that change teachers’ practices. Some of these ideologies and practices are concrete and tangible; others are intangible. Ultimately, multicultural teacher education hopes to lead future teachers to the intangible understanding or stance or realizing that culture matters between people and in classrooms. This realization is related to this “changed lens” or “seeing with a cultural eye” or “conscientização” and becomes an intangible intersection of cognitive, axiological, and individual ways to view other people and the way the world operates that could be informally described as “getting it.” This is complex work that needs investigation. My research focused on the field of teacher education. Because I believe that teachers make a difference in the classroom (as research has revealed), then teacher education needs to prepare future teachers to understand the complexity of culture in the classroom. I want to understand how to better assist future teachers in “getting it.”

Teacher education first occurs within the dialogic relationship between the university educator, pre-service teacher, selected texts, subtexts, or those things not stated but inferred about the teacher education curriculum. This dialogic relationship at the university then extends to the dialogic relationship in which the pre-service teacher is immersed with the cooperating teacher, administrators, children, parents, and university mentors at the school site during internship experiences. If the teacher-student relationship and dialogic is a powerful nexus for transforming one’s understanding of the world and others, then teacher education becomes a compelling site for research.

Hope: Learning How to Teach Teachers through Student Teachers’ Experiences

Teacher education assumes the responsibility of teaching teachers how to teach all children and to consider how culture is a factor in the classroom; therefore, university programs include coursework and internship experiences in schools with diverse populations. My interest is in student teachers’ field experiences and how those experiences in schools affect the student teachers’ understandings about and teaching of “other people.” I presumed that if I better understood student teachers’ interpretations of their experiences, I would gain knowledge about how to prepare student teachers for those experiences through the university program and coursework. Subsequently, I investigated student teachers’ experiences as they were immersed in a multicultural school. I believed that if I could hear how student teachers talked about their experiences with other cultural groups while in the classroom, I would learn how to assist student teachers in “getting it.” I developed research questions so as to generate knowledge about how student teachers learn to teach “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995) while immersed in a multicultural school. My research questions included:

- How do student teachers perceive and experience multicultural schools?
- What do student teachers learn about multicultural schools during fieldwork?
- What questions arise for student teachers from their experiences?
- What are the complexities embedded in their experiences and stories?
- How can these stories inform university teacher education?

While MCE has historical roots in African Americans’ civil rights journey, it embraces the complexity of race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, and able-bodied identities and the relationship between visible and invisible uses of power and the discriminatory understandings that we have about people who are different from ourselves. For my study, I fore-grounded the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, and language through the eyes of people learning to teach other people’s children in the elementary school setting because as Nieto (2000a) stated, one
work cannot adequately address all of the complex identities that are present in our everyday interactions.

**Personal, Axiological, and Ethical Significance**

I have knowledge about research, social theory, and multicultural education’s mission to create new socially just paradigms in education for all people, and these are critical factors that affect my research interest and that could stand alone as a worthy rationale. Although I am a graduate student, I have also served as a teacher educator for ten years prior to this research process. Therefore, I have previous professional experience with student teachers that convinced me of the ability of teacher education programs to prepare “high quality” teachers. This experience also propelled me to find the field of teacher education as a significant source of hope in overcoming the effects of cultural incongruency. However, I also know that the broad issue of how “culture matters” in the classroom has personal and ethical significance for me and that this significance is truly a portion of my rationale for my study.

Years ago, when I was a classroom teacher, I lived the life of an elementary teacher in a multicultural school and witnessed the differences in my own students’ success based on class and race, although I do not have the quantitative “data” to verify my memories. My recollections continue to rise up in my mind, for while I wanted all of my students to achieve high standards in my classroom, making this happen was not easy or possible through simple pedagogical changes in my classroom. The fact is that many of my 29-34 third graders did not attain expected “grade level” standards, and the teacher discourse that was prevalent in my school was that “these children’s families don’t support education” or that these families are from a “deficit” culture.

When I began my research process, I also realized that the research decisions I made, processes I participated in, and findings I “discovered’ would all be engraved by my personal viewpoints which were reflections of my own racial, ethnic, and classed identity. I begin here with my autoethnographic understandings of my life’s journey as a raced, gendered, and classed woman. I include this narrative here because through the writing process, I discovered other significant personal factors in my rationale for my study.

**Researcher’s Auto-ethnographic Narrative**

Thank you, Patti Lather (1991) for using these words first. I am a “first world woman”—white, upper-middle-class, English speaking, heterosexual, and able-bodied. How did I arrive at the oppositional and constructionist standpoint that I espouse today? How have I constituted myself?

---

Consensus of Doctoral Committee   April 2004

You need to write your auto-ethnography and use it as you think about your position as a researcher.

Excerpts from Dana’s Autoethnography 6/06/04

There were many obvious, clear, and concrete boundaries during my growing up years in the 1950’s and 60’s in Richmond, Virginia, related to behavior, values, and identity – boundaries such as class, race, ability and gender - across which few people crossed, or at least no one with any concept of how the world was supposed to work! There was a right way to be and a wrong way to be, and I aspired to live in the ‘right’ category…. How normalcy was defined and who defined it was also a concept I had not considered.
My segregated city seemed put together according to the natural order of things (from a child’s eye perspective). Concepts related to “normal” seemed scientific and right. I experienced my world with a sort of “taken for granted” assumption that this was the way the world was.

I attended segregated schools until high school, and only had contact with someone different from me (as classed and raced individuals) through my relationship with a woman that my father and mother hired to work in our home one day a week (instead of her regular job at my father’s motel), and through trips to downtown Richmond where many African American families lived.

At this age, I didn’t question why things were the way they were, and looking back on this with my newer and adult constructionist understandings of reality, I see how simple and easy it was to just “see the world the way it is” and think that this is the way it’s supposed to be.

Although I was not aware of it at the time, this historical context, the 1950’s and 1960’s, made me a witness to the transformation of social and cultural understandings of the world. This alone helped me change my understandings of truth and knowledge. My childhood spanned the “before the Civil Rights Act” and the “after the Civil Rights Act” era.

Certainly, I do not think that these changes created equal contexts for all people, but significant changes in law and policy are important historical markers. Although there were a few African American students at my high school, I viewed and experienced my segregated city as the natural order of things. (My high school years did not provide me with the context or impetus to view the world differently. I lived a very insular life). When I went to college in 1969, I became intrigued with the social movements swirling around me. As I viewed and experienced the upheaval of the late 60’s and early 70’s, when large segments of the population questioned the way our culture defined identity, through the anti-War movement, feminist movement, anti-Establishment movement, and the on-going Civil Rights struggle, I began to see how my world and reality had been socially constructed. People my age were saying that the world wasn’t right and that we could change the way social systems were put together. I witnessed and lived through a total change in truth and traditions that were embedded in my everyday context. Many of the social systems I had experience were being re-arranged through changing policies and ideologies.
What do I mean by “total change?”… My world certainly did not totally change. I continued to live in a privileged upper-middle-class neighborhood. I attended a private college that segregated itself according to religious ideology. I did not worry about my economic future or my ability to find work that sustained my physical needs. I continued to relate mostly to people like me. However, the social changes of the times caused me to realize that the institutions in which I had placed my belief and trust (government, agents of the government, laws, social systems, gendered identities, and the church) had been found to be flawed and were actually social constructions, rather than normal, natural, or “givens.” If the world as I knew it was not “given” as I had assumed, then the world could be changed to be different. This was “total change” because before I would not have considered that social systems, government, gendered relations, or the church could be anything but what I had known them to be.

Yes, this is true. I had seen the world as others had given it to me and thought that it was ontologically real and objectively true. I had found that truth was subjective, relative, and changing. Some say that there is crisis in oppositional discourse that rejects a belief in an objective and knowable Truth. If Truth does not exist or cannot be found, then what can we know? I see multiple truths and subjective knowledge as possibility and as an emancipation from a canon that silenced and silences voices that speak from outside the hegemony of Western thought. It is this “possibility” that makes the purposes of my knowledge meaningful. If knowledge is constructed and interpreted, then we can reconstruct and re-interpret what we know and what we assume about the social order. I am intent to “search for different possibilities of making sense of human life, for other ways of knowing which do justice to the complexity, tenuity, and indeterminancy of human experience” (Lather, 1991, p. 52).

Aside from my epistemological and ontological ideas about the world, I have also identified my axiological purpose in my research. What made me choose this topic, besides my scholarly and professional interest in a social constructionist standpoint? I believe there is a transcendent “interplay between affect and cognition” (Ely et al. 1991, p. 1) and that it is in this interplay that we find our values or passions. Boler (1999) investigates the power of the relationship between emotion and values, as well as the relationship between action and inaction in education with regard to changed understandings about hegemony, culture, and identity in particular. Our values, as guided by cognition, emotion, and passions can channel and define our work. The values we place on our knowledge and experience become our axiological assumptions. In a subjective research paradigm, the researcher assumes that the knowledge generated is value-laden and that biases influence the choices the researcher makes about the interpretation of the empirical materials. Therefore, the researcher should explicate the axiological assumptions that may pilot the researcher’s direction.

The field of education draws heavily on the values of creating opportunities for all children, providing equitable contexts in schools, and helping each individual child “reach his or her potential,” as I have described earlier. Some believe that this hope in the power of education to enact change in lives is dependent on teachers’ professional and personal belief that teaching is a “calling” or that a teacher’s work must “make a difference” (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings,
According to Ayers (1998), Maxine Greene calls us to “do philosophy” or to live life driven by our beliefs and passions, for it is when we act on our principles that our lives become purposeful. These themes of ‘passion,’ ‘principles,’ and ‘calling’ also run through critical multiculturalists’ work.

Each of these influences draws me into my study and speaks to a sense within in me that goes beyond cognition and academic rigor and highlights my axiological purposes. It speaks to what is deep within my ideology.

Excerpt from Dana’s Autoethnography

6/16/04 More than ethnicity, my family’s “cultural” practices were formed by our social class and our religious beliefs. The religious beliefs were the ‘firm foundation’ upon which everything else was built....I spent a lot of energy on church, thought like a serious church person, and sang like a church person. (In the 2nd grade I wrote that I would become “a singer for God.”) There are some regions of the country where church membership is truly central to one’s community life and identity.

Church membership is complex because of the intersection of beliefs and class and education and race and how one connects with a particular group of people and ideas. I wonder if the church became more prevalent, powerful, and significant, as ethnicities and cultures became assimilated into one White identity? Religion became a culture of a sort and individual identities could be defined by Catholicism, Baptist, Jewish, or Episcopal ways of being, even though all of these religions were still of Western religious descent.

7/04/04 I know that my own sense of myself as a human being is deeply rooted in my family of origin and religious foundation about which I rarely speak and have never written about. I am far removed from who I was as a young child and young woman, raised Southern Baptist. My beliefs now would seem unrelated to assumptions about Baptist ideology and theology, and I have never discussed those foundational experiences from childhood because of my ambivalence about what I now think and my firm conviction to separate my religious perspective from my profession (i.e. separation of church and state). However, as a researcher, I cannot be honest and totally omit my religious “upbringing” and history if I reveal who I am as a subjective researcher and academic. My beliefs about Christian teaching centered on two basic things: as a young child I thought that if I believed in Jesus, I would go to heaven; and second, as I matured during high school, I thought that Christian teachings were not so much about going to heaven, but were about social justice and learning to accept and support all people outside of the accepted. This idea was based on the Biblical stories of Jesus valuing the woman (prostitute) at the well, visiting the man with leprosy, and healing the sick and needy....

Life is not about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.
George Bernard Shaw
As I acknowledge the spiritual roots of my axiological system, I re-present into text an element of my consciousness that I have not voiced before. As I began teaching children after completing undergraduate school, I wrote a “philosophical” statement that said I wanted to teach each child “how to learn how to learn.” I was intent on helping individual children “reach their potential” through literacy skills and relational understandings they learned in my classroom. I secured a teaching position in a large Southern city with a diverse population (for the 1970’s). My heart was in the right place, but there were tensions. The tensions still simmer in my mind and heart.

Excerpts from Dana’s Auto-ethnography

6/16/04 The three schools in which I worked all had diverse populations, two of which were obviously in poor, low-socio-economic neighborhoods. The last school was comprised of a larger number of children on free and reduced lunches and at least a quarter to one third of my 30-33 students were African American.

I was clueless about the institutional reproduction of race and racism and didn’t know it. I thought that if I attended to their individual needs, then I was a good teacher. Perhaps this is one of the driving forces behind my research. I know first-hand how easy it is to be clueless and blind. I had my children’s best interest at heart, I wanted what was positive and good for each of them, but as I look back, I know that the African American children in my classroom came to me with lower literacy skills (by school standards) than the White children (not individually but statistically as a group) and so I placed them in my lower reading groups for instruction that “met their needs”… The cultural differences in what many of my children experienced in their family and community setting and what they experienced in this White constructed public school were certainly factors I had never considered. I think I thought that if I just came up with the right teaching strategy, I would solve all of their literacy problems. Now I see the complexities and am still perplexed.

7/4/04 Could it be that I’ve wanted to confront my sense of failure as a third grade teacher in a multicultural urban school in Nashville years ago?

My belief that I could and should “help” all children was originally grounded in a spiritual basis for social justice. As I have always believed in “separation of church and state,” I would not have spoken about my religious background in an academic setting. Plus, now my religious ambiguities and beliefs don’t fit neatly into any constructed category or denomination. Today, I would not say that I am “helping” children who are different from me, as some might see teaching as a humanist’s task to help someone “less fortunate.” Instead I would view social justice as a mission in being more fully human (Freire, 2002).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) call forth this element that is silent but still deeply held within who I am. In their “Seventh Moment” of qualitative research history, they describe a research paradigm that “seeks to ground the self in a sense of the sacred, to connect the ethical, respectful self dialogically to nature and the worldly environment” (p. 1052). Denzin and Lincoln continue and state, “This sacred epistemology is political, presuming a feminist, communitarian moral ethic stressing the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers, and civic transformation” (p. 1052).
This is the transcendence of human consciousness that considers how we view and enact being human. I return to my journal where I recorded this entry before reading Denzin and Lincoln.

Dana’s Research Journal

6/04/04 I am sitting at the Baccalaureate service prior to my son Andrew’s graduation from Swarthmore College. It is an almost ethereal event for me. Beside me are many of the people I love, there is clear and filtered sun streaming in through the canopy of trees over the amphitheater, a live jazz ensemble has accompanied the graduates march down the stone and grassy steps, and I am about to hear words of wisdom from the selected scholarly speaker. This place is an academic paradise. Donald Swearer, professor of religion and soon to leave the college for Harvard, eloquently calls the transcendent to the foreground for me in his speech. He proclaims the necessity for the spiritual in all peoples’ lives. He states that ‘we are the consciousness and conscience of the cosmos.”

I was moved by his eloquence and propelled into this image about a collective consciousness. When I return home I find the text of his speech on the college website.


My ‘pitch’ this morning -- that to be religious means to be more fully human – is intended to counterbalance today's world news headlines that so often demonize religion. I propose that when construed in the best sense, religious spirituality promotes healing and wholeness, a greater sensitivity to the nuances and textures of life, and a broader understanding of and compassion toward others.

Later in his address, Swearer cites Father Ernesto Cardenal, the Nicaraguan Roman Catholic priest and poet and his vision on religious thinking:

The vastness of the universe which you contemplate in a star-lit night becomes even vaster when you look at yourself as part of this universe, and when you begin to realize that it is you who are this universe, contemplating itself, a universe which, in addition to its spatio-temporal dimensions, acquires a new dimension of even greater magnitude within your own self. We are the consciousness and the conscience of the cosmos.

Father Ernesto Cardenal
This is the spiritual life to which I aspire… to be a part of “acting individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives” (Lather, 1991, p. 4). I envision all of humanity as one collective consciousness. This collective consciousness represents what it means to be human. If I consider the way that the world works today, I have to ask, Who are we as people? What role can I assume as an educator in changing the way the world and education “works?” What do all of our humming minds and spirits become when we visualize this integrated grand consciousness of humanity?

Now, I get it. The reason my committee wanted me to write this auto-ethnographic piece first was because it isn’t the literature review, social theory, and scholarly research that compels me to study student teachers and multicultural schools. It is my life that compels me, and in revealing myself as a researcher as part of my study, I understand. Dana

Thus, I describe my rationale for my study. It is a complex mix of interrelated reasons that led me to my research questions. First, I recognize an educational problem that is grounded in a broader social schema and which I believe is a critical social justice issue, crucial to America’s future. Second, I acknowledge the multiple influences on this issue such as classroom pedagogies, inequity in social, economic, and political systems and the underlying social assumptions that marginalize and judge non-dominant people. Third, I find hope in critical multicultural studies, and in particular, multicultural teacher education to prepare future teachers to create classrooms that honor all children’s culture and identity. Fourth, I state that teacher educators must gain deeper knowledge about pre-service teachers’ experiences in multicultural schools so as to understand the complexities in pre-service teachers’ thinking about teaching children different from themselves. Finally, I reveal my own ethical and axiological purposes in this study in that to be more fully human, I must join the sacred “conscience of the cosmos” and unite my work with others before me who seek to find answers to such a social justice concern. If I believe that I have been able to finally “get it” as a human being (although I know that plenty of learning remains in my future), how can I assist future teachers in the tangible and intangible process of “getting it?”

I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love. (Freire, 2002, p. 89)

My “act of love” and revolution becomes making teacher education a place of social justice and reform; it becomes a revolution in my own life as reflected in the way in which I practice teaching future teachers; and it becomes a revolution in my consciousness about the way culture matters in my small world and the broader universe in which I act as “human.”
CHAPTER 2: SUPPORTING THEORIES AND RESEARCH

Multicultural Teacher Education: Premises and Programs

Premises

A primary aim of multicultural education (MCE) is to create equitable educational contexts for all people as in equal access to educational opportunities and realized equality in achievement (Banks, 2004). MCE (from a critical multicultural AND social theory perspective) promotes these tenets as integral to social justice in our nation and assumes a “social reconstructionist” framework. This framework asserts that schools should have a broader purpose than only teaching children basic skills and knowledge. Lalik and Potts (2001) suggest that a social reconstructionist framework ascribes this responsibility to teachers and schools to prepare students for democracy by “helping children develop agency by working together, critiquing current conditions, and transforming unacceptable conditions towards ideals of equity and justice” (p. 119). Nieto (2000b) suggests that teaching for social justice should be “ubiquitous in teacher education” (p. 180). Therefore, multicultural teacher education (MCTE) has an important social justice mandate to prepare new teachers for these aims which first requires teachers to be “culturally responsive” to diverse children’s learning needs and life circumstances (Gay, 2000, 2001). MCE has made progress in making the tenets of MCE integral to teacher education.

All of the major professional organizations related to the preparation, licensing, and certification of teachers and/or the accreditation of programs now have consistent standards or recommendations regarding teachers’ competency to produce learning gains for all students, including those from diverse backgrounds. (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004, p. 931)

Whereas these are now acknowledged and accepted goals, we read and know from evidence in Chapter 1 that multicultural teacher education is not entirely successful at increasing all students’ achievement. In their review of literature and research on multicultural teacher education from 1992-2001, Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) find that despite a few teacher preparation programs that have undergone “dramatic change,” there has not been “broad-based fundamental change” in university programs that prepare teachers. In fact they state, “By and large, teachers continue to be prepared from a monocultural perspective” (p. 932).

Unfortunately, it takes more than good intentions. While we currently may have the ability to inspire, we have not demonstrated the capacity to educate a professorate who can prepare pre-service candidates to succeed in diverse settings, nor have we developed teacher preparation programs that understand how to select programmatic content, experiences, and strategies needed to help teachers develop from novice to expert levels and to apply cultural and language dimensions to curriculum and practice. (Sheets, 2003, p. 117).

I believe that despite the scholarly and social justice work that has been accomplished to date, it is my personal mandate to continue to study and investigate how to prepare myself and my students as “culturally responsive” agents in our schools.

Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) believe that we are living in the best and worst of times for multicultural education because of many of the current political, educational and social issues addressed in Chapter 1. In summary, they label this the best of times because of the “heightened awareness” of MCE across professional organizations. They believe that the Elementary and
Secondary Education Act (ESEA), better known as the No Child Left Behind Act, which insists on accountability for all children’s education, makes diverse populations’ achievement a critical goal for all educators. According to Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2004) review in *The Handbook for Multicultural Education*, our present educational time period is the worst for MCTE because high stakes tests are being used for accountability purposes when school resources remain very different based on school demographics. They state that major funding by the federal government for research on teacher education does not even include multicultural education issues. In addition, research continues to reveal negative national opinions about issues related to diversity, such as affirmative action and language programs. Some people view multicultural education as “anti-White, anti-intellectual, and anti-capitalist” (p. 932) and consider MCE as problematic rather than a solution.

Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) add that MCE is also operating in a “complex context” because of “changing demographics that exacerbate the divide between privileged and disadvantaged groups, competing agendas for educational reform with privatization a pivotal issue, and serious challenges to the research basis in all areas of education” (p. 936). Although competing reform movements in teacher education and the challenges of what “counts” as scientific evidence in the research base in education are not a focus of this study, I include these issues as a backdrop of the complex influences on current research practices and MCTE.

**Programs: Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers**

Multicultural teacher educators (MCTEs) use scholarly writing and research strategies to investigate and share what kinds of programs best promote the tenets of MCE. Scholars propose that teacher education programs should develop holistic university programs that infuse multicultural studies throughout the teacher education program rather than a program that employs “add-on” courses or fragmented seminars (Irvine, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Fragmented program design marginalizes the multicultural concepts and creates a programmatic subtext which communicates to student teachers that multicultural education and social justice are “extras” that are not central to all educational endeavors.

MCE programs generally include two components - requirements for coursework and requirements for field experiences in schools or the community with multicultural populations. The university intends for the student teachers’ understanding from both components to intersect, thus creating a more holistic experience with multicultural issues and settings. Coursework would incorporate student study of and reflection on the multicultural education themes outlined in Chapter 1. The coursework would include pre-service teachers’ examination of their own and others’ socio-cultural identities and consciousness, examination of the role of power and privilege in creating and instantiating dominant and non-dominant groups, study of the social construction of knowledge, learning about students and families, and immersion in social justice understandings and action (Banks, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The goal of this coursework is for new teachers to embrace knowledge, pedagogy, and dispositions towards the worthiness and purposes of multicultural education so as to prepare teachers to become “culturally responsive” (Gay, 2000, 2001).

Being a “culturally responsive” teacher is one significant tenet that MCTEs hope that future teachers will consider and embrace. The following is a summary statement that describes the concept of “culturally responsive” teacher practices.

The term culturally responsive pedagogy is used interchangeably with several terms such as culturally responsible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, culturally compatible, and culturally relevant to describe a variety of effective teaching approaches
in diverse classrooms. All these terms indicate that teachers should be responsive to their students by incorporating elements of students’ culture into their teaching..

Responsive simply means reacting appropriately in the instructional context. Responsive teachers do not stereotype students, blindly follow one teaching method, or use the same teaching materials for all students. (Irvine, 2003, p. 73)

Pedagogical suggestions for university coursework include the reading and discussion of written and visual texts related to multicultural issues, experiences with diverse community groups, personal reflection, and autoethnographic writing in which students investigate their own personal assumptions about culture (Au, 1998; Irvine, 2003 Nieto, 2000a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). MCTEs assume that without such studies, White middle-class teachers perpetuate inherent problems in school policies and teaching practices (such as labeling and tracking) by assuming that such practices are normal and fair (Howard, 1999; Sleeter, 2001).

The purposes of field work in a multicultural school, the second component of MCTE, is to acquaint future teachers with other cultural communities. Teacher educators hope that, through experiences with people who are different from themselves, future teachers will contextualize their understanding from coursework and further develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for culturally responsive pedagogy (Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2000a; Zeichner, 1996). Research “suggests that community-based immersion experiences are more powerful than stand-alone multicultural education courses” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 102). Sleeter subsequently recommends the development of research that follows teachers into the classroom, beyond pre-service teacher education. Multicultural educators hope that the coursework described above will prepare future teachers for these diverse contexts and that field experiences in return will create an authentic context that will make future teachers’ understandings about diverse populations and culturally responsive pedagogy concretely-based.

Obstacles

According to publications that discuss teacher education research, MCTE programs face obstacles. University students bring powerful prior knowledge and beliefs about cultural differences. Most future teachers are White and do not understand how their White identity has an impact on how they have socially constructed their world view. There is also a chasm between what future teachers might read and discuss in the university class and what they might witness in a multicultural school. I address each of these obstacles as I further my discussion of the supporting theories for this study.

Obstacles: Prior Beliefs

Prospective teachers arrive at the university as people who have constructed their knowledge about people and schools in the presence of a culture that supports and promotes biases about people. These “prospective teachers bring firmly held beliefs about teaching and learning in schools” (Tiezzi & Cross, 1997, p. 113) which restrict university coursework’s success in changing student teachers’ assumptions about themselves and others. As described earlier in Chapter 1, these prior beliefs can include a) cultural and biased assumptions about intelligence; b) views that non-dominant cultures are deficit cultures; c) traditional ideas about the purposes of schooling; d) incorrect assumptions about reasons for students’ failure; e) biases and stereotypes about race and class, and f) an overall belief that our schools are neutral places that offer possibilities for all children based on the meritocratic principle that suggests that hard work earns success (Davis, 1995). Future teachers need to participate in transformative experiences so as to engender an understanding of how institutional systems create differences in people and to alter personal beliefs and biases.
Obstacles: White Privilege

A sub-construct to this obstacle in changing pre-service teachers’ attitudes and assumptions is the notion of White privilege. White privilege affects a White person’s ability to realize that the person automatically has unrecognized privileges that make it more possible to achieve success than a person from a diverse culture. White privilege also makes it difficult for a White person to understand that common beliefs about people are not “true” but socially constructed from a position of power and privilege (Howard, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). Sleeter (2001) found in a review of 80 studies of teacher education programs that “most of the research focuses on addressing the attitudes and lack of knowledge of White pre-service students” (p. 94). Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) suggest that a primary barrier in educating future teachers to be culturally responsive (that can be correlated to White privilege) is the issue of racism.

Obstacles: Chasm Between Theory and Practice

Ladson-Billings (2004) also finds that there is a lag between theory and practice in multicultural teacher education. There is rich and powerful writing about the theory and scholarship of diversity, yet in the public school classroom, student teachers are faced with contexts that do not support or do not model culturally responsive approaches to pedagogy. It is also rare to find a classroom that makes social justice a focus of learning and action. Tiezzi & Cross (1997) question the teacher education fieldwork requirement when “the model is based on experience for the sake of experience rather than instruction” (p. 122). This obstacle raises the question, “How can programs create field experiences that support the premises of multicultural education?” This question is correlated to my decision to study student teacher experiences as a means of better understanding how to integrate theory and practice.

Scholars attempt to determine how to create field experiences that support universities’ goals. Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann (1985) discuss the chasm between university and public schools and the different and sometimes opposing agendas they each espouse. Student teachers can and should learn from both settings, yet teacher education accepts the “fallacious assumption that making connections between these two worlds is straightforward and can be left to the novice” (p. 63). In one case study of pre-service teachers, Kimani-Oluoch (2000) found that student teachers did not have the support structure to explore and reflect on the “cultural issues they were encountering in their classrooms” (p. 182). Proctor, Rentz, and Jackson (2001) suggest that field experiences should be carefully planned to include time for student teachers to discuss their perceptions and share their reactions to working in multicultural schools (Gomez, 1996; Zeichner, 1996).

MCTE Research: Knowledge, Practice, and Teacher Learning

Research in the field of MCTE is ongoing because of the importance of its mission and because, as Sheets (2003) stated, “We have not demonstrated the capacity to educate a professorate who can prepare pre-service candidates to succeed in diverse settings” (p. 117). Cochran-Smith et al. (2004), in their synthesis of empirical research on multicultural education, employ eight “teacher education questions” to discuss the scope of multicultural teacher education research on university programs and the effects on future teachers and schools. These “teacher education questions” include the “diversity question,” the “ideology question,” the “knowledge question,” the “teacher learning question,” the “practice question,” the “outcomes question,” the “selection and recruitment question,” and the “coherence question.” I highlight an intersection of the “teacher learning question,” the “knowledge question” and the “practice question” in this study.
**The Knowledge Question**

According to Cochran-Smith et al. (2004), the “knowledge question” includes the “interpretive frameworks” that a student teacher uses to understand diversity and culturally responsive practice as well as the following issues: “What are pre-service teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and conceptions about diversity? What experiences and other factors seem to influence those beliefs? Do beliefs change after program experiences intended to enhance capacity to deal with diversity?” (p. 956). Cochran-Smith et al. state that they examined a “fair” amount of empirical studies on future teachers’ attitudes and understandings about diversity (p. 958). Eight of the research studies that addressed the “knowledge question” used questionnaires to assess attitudes which were summarized through descriptive statistics. The responses were “mixed” (p. 956).

Other studies used factor analysis of “teaching efficacy,” content analysis of student teacher writing and interviews, and survey data. All of these studies revealed various attitudes about teaching diverse populations; one study stated that its participants had “unsophisticated notions about multiculturalism.” (Cochran Smith et al, 2004, p. 957). Cochran-Smith et al. give numerous examples of empirical studies that discussed the “knowledge question,” summarizing their overall findings in the statement below. They also add that these results seem to be “consistent” with studies that used various methods.

Results… indicated that pre-service teachers had had few experiences with diversity but did anticipate diverse classrooms, held traditional expectations for “good students” as well as some stereotypical views about racial and cultural groups, and did not understand the structural underpinnings of inequity, but wanted to teach all students effectively. There were mixed responses about whether teacher candidates felt prepared by their preparation programs to do so (pp. 956-957).

Finally, Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) looked at six studies that explored whether pre-service teachers’ attitudes and beliefs had changed in response to university coursework or field experiences. All six studies found that university programs had “modest or uneven effects depending on teachers’ backgrounds and the quality of supervision and facilitation” (p. 957).

**The Practice Question**

The “practice question” acts to investigate, describe, and assess “the actual practice of teacher candidates when they work in schools and classrooms” (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2004 p. 958). Cochran-Smith et al. only found 10 empirical studies that investigated the teacher candidate’s practice during fieldwork. Two of these studies (Lawrence, 1997; Tellez, 1999) used interviews either after or during fieldwork. One study (Cochran-Smith, 1999) analyzed pre-service teachers’ study of their own teaching and their documentation of children’s learning. Seven of these 10 studies used combinations of qualitative methods and data including classroom observation, “instructional profiles, reflections and lesson plans, and assessments by school-based faculty” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004, p. 958).

Again, the results were various, depending on the focus of the research questions and the context. Some studies found that the student teachers were able to conduct culturally responsive and socially just classrooms with some success. Vavrus (1994) found that most student teachers used an “additive” or “contributions” pedagogy to multicultural education, not a social justice approach (Banks, 1994). Tellez (1999), according to Cochran-Smith et al. (2004), found that student teachers being studied were not able to enact culturally responsive practice because the school curriculum was already determined with little opportunity for the student teacher to implement a multicultural emphasis.
Other studies documented levels of student teacher success in diverse settings and found multiple factors that had an influence on the student teacher’s success. These factors included having “bicultural mentors” or “teacher models,” being personally open-minded, having experience with particular levels of racial identity themselves, and being influenced by one’s own background experiences. According to Cochran-Smith et al., one study (Valli, 1995) found that the student teachers “wrestled with the dilemma” in their teaching of trying to be both color-blind and to see their students’ color. The student teachers “benefited by eventually acknowledging the dialectical relationship of these ideas” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004, p. 959).

Whereas this is a finding in a study that focused on teacher “practice” or teaching in the classroom, the student teacher learning is also related to the “knowledge question” or how and what the student teacher believes about diversity. The student teachers’ experiences in the school brought to the forefront issues related to the teacher candidates’ attitudes and knowledge about diversity.

Of the 10, one study took an ethnographic approach. Ladson-Billings (2001) completed a year-long examination of eight student teachers who were immersed in a university program that emphasized diversity. The program emphasized three components of culturally responsive practice. Ladson-Billings investigated the student teachers’ practice through meetings with students, observations, lesson plans and interviews. The findings from this complex study are as follows:

- “Prospective teachers working in diverse communities need the chance to learn about the students in the context of the community.”
- “Prospective teachers working in diverse community schools need an opportunity to apprentice with skilled cooperating teachers.”
- “Prospective teachers working in diverse school communities need an opportunity to ask lots of questions about teachers and teaching.”
- “Prospective teachers need the opportunity to do serious intellectual work.” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, pp. 135-137)

Aside from Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2004) synthesis, there are other mixed results in research on student teacher experiences. Haberman and Post (1992) found that direct multicultural school experiences did not necessarily educate pre-service teachers towards equitable judgments of others and instead served to reinforce their existing perceptions. Alternatively, Deering and Stanutz’s (1995) research determined that student teachers developed more thoughtful and stable dispositions when their beliefs derived from experience. McAllister and Irvine (2000) reported that “thrusting teachers or pre-service teachers into high-risk, challenging situations may foster more resistance rather than openness” (p. 442). Groulx (2001) asserted that pre-service teachers were more likely to accept jobs in urban schools if they had had positive experiences in an urban school during student teaching. Paccione (2000) reported that “cultural immersion experiences” were significant factors in the development of positive attitudes towards teaching in diverse settings, as expressed by teachers in the nation who are committed to multicultural education. “Witnessing firsthand the educational inequities that existed in urban environments” has the power to transform teachers’ understanding of the children of diverse backgrounds (p. 999).

**The Teacher Learning Question**

Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) defines the “teacher learning question” as the study of how teachers “learn to teach for diversity” and in particular, the study of what pedagogies in teacher education programs promote “learning to teach for diversity” (p. 951). In the conceptual
literature, Cochran-Smith et al. found scholars who described the “enormity” of the task of preparing teachers to be culturally responsive and explained that student teachers’ prior beliefs about diversity and their understanding that teaching is actually giving students information makes MCTE’s social justice mission sometimes overwhelming. Cochran-Smith et al. accept Villegas & Lucas’ (2002) notion that teaching future teachers requires a broad “resocialization” for future teachers by changing the way in which they see knowledge, teaching, and diversity issues. Cochran-Smith et al.’s review of the conceptual literature on the “teaching learning question” found hope in programs that instituted self-reflection and inquiry as a means of posing questions and encouraging life-long thinking and consideration of complex issues.

The empirical literature on the “teacher learning question” includes teacher educator practitioner studies that investigate their own pedagogies. These studies investigate how students interact with those pedagogies by examining students’ writing, discussion, and course assignments. The reviewers of the empirical literature describe teacher educators’ findings about numerous course pedagogies. These include such course assignments as reading about the lives of others, cross-cultural discussions in class by assigning members as partners according to difference in race, using inquiry to investigate personal interests (including autobiographical writing, journals, study of topics), and portfolios. Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) report that these studies suggest that there is hope in the use of inquiry approaches and particularly suggest using narrative in coursework as means of connecting one’s life experiences, emerging understandings, and on-going field-based experiences. Since Cochran-Smith et al. assert that the “teacher learning question” is related to teacher educator pedagogies during coursework and programs, they did not report any studies that extended the investigation of the “teacher learning question” into a focused study on students’ knowledge and practice during field experiences.

*My Assumptions about “Culture”*

If cultural incongruency is a theme in my study, I need to explicate my assumptions about the construct of “culture.” I believe that culture is not a bounded entity that is easily described or defined. “If postmodernism has taught anthropologists anything definitive, it is that we can no longer conceive of social groups of people with a culture that is clearly bounded and determined, internally coherent, and uniformly meaningful” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 17). In present times, with technologies, media, and mobility changing the way we share ideas and practices, cultures cross boundaries and blend identities, and in this process, “our cultural identities” have “become more open-ended, variable, and problematic” (Hall, 1996, p. 598). Hall states that individual identities are in continuous transformation within the cultural system that surrounds the individual. This identity can thus represent multiple cultural systems, “at least temporarily” (p. 598).

Culture cannot be one collective identity; rather, social bonds are “a weave of crisscrossing threads of discursive practices, no single one of which runs continuously throughout the whole. Individuals are the nodes or posts where such practices intersect, and so they participate in many practices simultaneously” (Fraser & Nicholson, 1997, p. 136). We attempt to define culture through such factors as ethnicity, race, gender, language, religion, socio-economic class, and national citizenry. Such cultural factors and identities are significant in our attempts to understand people and the teaching-learning process for according to sociocultural theory, culture has a complex and powerful impact on language, cognition, responses, and values, (Trueba,1988; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). Yet, we instantiate, embrace, and resist those factors in individual ways.

The study of culture, the intersection of cultures and “cultural discontinuity,” is complex and representative of multiple networks of understandings. Nespor (1997) cites Moll (1990) and
describes culture as a group’s “funds of knowledge” that are articulated through “networks of activities and associations that intersect in particular times and spaces” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 17). Each person becomes an individual representation of the multiple influences of culture, family, personality, economics, politics, popular culture, education, beliefs, friendships, and technologies (Nespor, 1997).

My research operated with this understanding of culture; the researcher could not make stereotypical assumptions about either White teachers or schools or children from multicultural groups because each entity - teacher, school, and child - represents complex socio-cultural identities at the individual, collective, and institutional level. In addition, pre-service teachers’ cultural identities will intersect in a particular school with a civic, economic, and educational history during a particular year with specific individuals from their own personal and cultural histories.

Research Directions and Influences on this Study

Each of these “questions” is significant as an integrated framework for this study, for I wanted to better understand how student teachers learned about diversity (“teacher learner question”) by examining their “knowledge” and “practice” while they participated in their field experiences. Although field experiences are not considered a teacher education “pedagogy” (the focus of the “teacher learning question”), field experiences become a pedagogy because student interns learn about teaching (“teacher learner question”) during their field experiences. Their everyday interactions and concrete experiences assume a pedagogical role in the student teachers’ lives and learning. I also believed that by examining student teachers’ experiences, I would better understand how to alter my pedagogies in university coursework so as to better prepare student interns for “culturally responsive practice” in a multicultural school.

Multicultural teacher education research investigates student teacher “knowledge,” “practice,” and “teacher learning,” allowing researchers to make suggestions for further studies based on their findings and research processes. Therefore, my research questions became instrumental in examining student teacher “knowledge” and “practice” while they worked in multicultural schools and how their “knowledge” and “practice” could influence my “teacher learning questions.”

- How do student teachers perceive and experience multicultural schools?
- What do student teachers learn about multicultural schools during fieldwork?
- What questions arise for student teachers from their experiences?
- What are the complexities embedded in their experiences and stories?
- How can these stories inform university teacher education?

Research in Naturalistic Settings

The previously cited research suggests that student teacher knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practices recursively affect one another. Therefore, I wanted to integrate the “knowledge” and “practice” questions in my study through investigating student teachers’ “knowledge” while “practicing” in a multicultural school. Some research reinforces the fact that the place to find out about classroom practices is the naturalistic setting of the classroom and from the lived experiences of teachers” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163). Phillion (2002) agrees.

To come to grips with and make a difference in multicultural education, researchers need to work closely with teachers in their classrooms, be with children as they learn and play, and spend their research life in the midst of schools and community life. I can best make a contribution to my field by working not from theory, but from life as it is lived. (p. 276)
Phillion found in her ethnographic longitudinal study in one teacher’s classroom that “the persuasive breadth and strength of the literature, and commitment to this literature, may obscure rather than shed light on the details of multicultural life” (p. 274). In her work, she realized that she needed to listen more to the classroom teacher than to the scholarship. Just as Rose (1995) suggested that good teachers know their students’ lives, teacher educators also need to know student teachers’ lives as they are experienced in multicultural schools.

I used these suggestions to make the student teachers’ experiences in a school central to my research design. I wanted to understand the complexity of the recursive relationship between “knowledge” and “practice” and how this relationship affected “teacher learning” during the university program’s requirement for fieldwork and “practice” in public schools. My study became an in-depth examination of what it means to be a student teacher learning to teach “other people’s children.” What “knowledge” did the student teachers reveal during their “practice,” and how did their “knowledge,” and practice become recursively related?

Generating Knowledge through Small In-depth Studies

Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) believe that there is a need for large-scale studies that connect small studies so as to produce generalizable knowledge in the face of national standards, the “demographic imperative,” high-stakes testing, and the insistence on “scientific research evidence. Cochran-Smith et al., indicate that much of the empirical research on MCTE that they studied could be characterized as “practitioner inquiry,” or studies conducted by teacher educators on their own practice or on their own pre-service teachers. The authors see such research as worthy since it demonstrates teacher educators’ commitment to MCE. However, they point out that there are problems in inquiries of this nature. Practitioner studies are often conducted on small groups, and it is difficult to synthesize the “cumulative meaning of many little studies” (p. 955). Studies conducted by practitioners may also raise questions about the unbiased nature of the research findings because teacher educators may not be able to extract themselves from issues related to “power and coercion” since the “researcher has a vested interest” (p. 955) as the teacher candidates’ professor. For example, in Ladson-Billings’ ethnographic study (2001), the researcher “co-mingled the roles of supervisor and researcher” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004, p. 959). However, the authors do acknowledge that “close studies of specific sites may lead to the development of conceptual frameworks, theories, and practices that are useful well beyond the original site” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004, p. 955). They state that practitioner inquiry gives researchers the opportunity to investigate “how pre-service teachers interact with course and program content and how they make sense of their experiences” (p. 957).

There is continued hope for finding applicable, researched “Answers” for “no child” to be left behind. Yet, in reality, each university finds itself related to particular university students and with particular public schools and teachers that influence the nature of a university program and the way in which each potential teacher constructs his or her understanding of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy. While multicultural educators’ rich accounts of their work with their students give teacher education frameworks for reference and reform, each context is different and has different obstacles and possibilities. Each university, cohort of students, and public school has its own set of rituals, processes, artifacts, stories, and personalities that engenders a program identity of its own. University students develop their teacher knowledge from their membership or participation in such “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998). Yet, since particular settings are connected to larger social systems, small in-
depth studies can have merit because it is possible to connect the particular with the broader field of the classroom at large.

I intend to center my teacher education work in the future in a geographical area that has features of rural, small town, middle-class and working communities, as well as an urban, mid-size city, each of which includes citizens with multiple-raced, classed, ethnic, and language identities from established community members, international student families, and new immigrants. I believe that I should begin a life of research in understanding teacher education as situated in this particular diverse context. If I want to understand pre-service teachers’ and teachers’ multicultural contexts, then I must live in and study this context in order to understand the complexities and details from an insider’s perspective.

The two notions of “communities of practice” and “insider’s knowledge” derive from the theoretical framework of situated learning. This is my work in the “practice – theory project,” which is an on-going study of how teacher educators and teachers must make connections between educational theory and educational practice by investigating how theory can inform practice. We can best understand these relationships through “participation in the lived world” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 121). I believe that it may be of the utmost importance for me to prepare student teachers by talking about “particular truths for particular people in particular circumstances” rather than aiming for what might be generally true. I concur with Kohl (2000) and think that “to root our struggles for social justice in the work we do everyday, in a particular community, with a particular groups of students” has extraordinary value (p. 14).

Situated learning is a learning theory that looks not at the in-the-head cognitive processes of individuals, but investigates what “kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place” (Hanks, 1991, p. 14). Student teachers participate in a type of “apprenticeship” experience in which they work with an experienced teacher who is a presumed master. The student teacher learns to teach by participating in schools and classrooms. Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that such “situated learning” is more than an “apprenticeship” or just “learning by doing.” It is learning by becoming a “peripheral participant” in authentic action within a community. They suggest that all learning is an “inseparable act of social practice” (p. 31).

In my research, my use of the term “situated learning” as a “historical-cultural theory” about learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 32) occurs in two realms. The first use is “situated learning” in which student teachers participated in cultural communities of practice – their own family, the university program, the cohort of student teachers, and in the particular multicultural public school to which she was assigned for an internship experience. I investigated their learning by examining their “knowledge” and “practice.” The second use of “situated learning” is the researcher’s own situated learning as a result of my study of a particular community of practice, while in relation to multicultural teacher education’s propositions. This second realm of “situated learning” for myself became my investigation of the “teacher learning question” and what I would learn through these situated experiences about how to teach teachers.

These two examples of situated learning do not represent how meaning and learning occurs in a particular place or time. Instead, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that the concept of situated learning is “the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” and that learning occurs as action in a social context (p. 33). The student teacher research participants were immersed in action in a community of practice, and the research took place within this same context. Therefore, this research is influenced by the social world in which the student teachers’ experiences and the research was contextualized.
Lave and Wenger (1991) contest the claim that situated learning focuses only on the particularity of learning in one context and is therefore less meaningful, as compared to the more valued “generalized” research about learning. Lave and Wenger suggest that such generalities are usually decontextualized abstractions that are often meaningless unless they can be related to a specific community of practice. They assert that particular situations in the world can be connected to the general, and that this is “why stories can be so powerful in conveying ideas, often more so than an articulation of the idea itself” (p. 34). General knowledge is only powerful in its ability to address and reconstruct what we know about our present day condition (p. 34). Au (2002) cites Lave and Wenger’s notions about “situated learning” and agrees. She states that in her study of the development of a culturally relevant teacher education program for a specific community of practice in the Leeward Coast of Hawaii, she discovered “a wealth of knowledge that…may lead to solutions applicable in other diverse communities” (p. 226).

These notions about inquiry on specific programs are influential to my research design. I studied four student teachers in a particular program because I thought that conducting in-depth research on several “cases” of experiences would provide me with qualitative and rich information about student teacher responses to diverse settings in the geographic area in which I intend to be a teacher educator. With such knowledge, I believe I am able to propose “solutions applicable in other diverse communities” (Au, 2002, p. 226). Additionally, in my research design, I was able to extract myself from the “practitioner” role because I was not the student teachers’ supervisor or professor. Therefore, I neutralized some of the factors of “power and coercion” that Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) questioned.

**The Role of Dialogue and Narrative in Research**

I determined that I wanted my primary source of data to be student teacher dialogue and narratives about their experiences. I based this decision on empirical and conceptual studies that highlighted the power of dialogue and narrative in representing and constructing a person’s experiences and interpretations of experiences. MCE highlights the role of dialogue and language in its efforts to create new knowledge and understandings about its social justice mission. Qualitative researchers acknowledge the pivotal role that language plays as a data source in understanding people’s concepts. Sociocultural theorists discuss the role of language in people’s construction of their understandings of the world. Using language, dialogue, and narrative as a data source to understand experiences, thoughts, and beliefs represent a significant set of theories, from several academic paradigms.

**Dialogue and Inquiry: Understanding Student Teacher Knowledge**

As I have discussed, teacher candidates often bring prior knowledge and resistant attitudes towards multicultural education premises to their university coursework experiences. Consequently, teacher educators are seeking program and coursework approaches that will encourage positive responses to MCE. Practitioner research on multicultural teacher education that investigates changes in teacher candidate knowledge and attitudes (the “knowledge question”) usually occurs through analysis of student teacher interviews, questionnaires, surveys, and reflective writing. Sometimes research studies include teacher educators’ reflective and/or scholarly writing that investigates the teacher educators’ own experiences in the university classroom (Chizhik, 2003; Lesko & Bloom, 1998). Interviews, questionnaires, and reflective writing all include the study of a person’s language as an expression of the person’s ideas and beliefs. Some of these empirical studies that used student teacher language about university coursework also found that dialogue and narrative made it more possible for student teachers to respond more positively to multicultural education coursework.
For example, Lesko and Bloom’s (1998) empirical study suggests that teacher educators should develop facility in using dialogic pedagogical approaches in the classroom (Freire, 2002) and therefore engage students in responding to university texts with multiple perspectives. These teacher education researchers found that when they approached multicultural topics in their classrooms with their own fixed ideologies and positivist pedagogies, they were faced with student opposition and beliefs that the world is “neutral, fair, and getting better” (Lesko & Bloom, 1998, p. 388). Lesko and Bloom found that when they made dialogue a pedagogical process in their classrooms, students were less resistant and more able to look past their original assumptions. The authors state that, “an emphasis on the dialogic character of knowing and meaning and the pedagogical emphasis on interrogating the production of interpretations shifts the ground of multicultural teacher education” (p. 390). Dialogue created potential for people to respond more positively towards the premises of multicultural education.

Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) also cited studies in the empirical literature that recognized the “power of the narrative to connect personal history, academic content, and school-based teaching experiences” (p. 958). In their synthesis of the literature, Cochran-Smith et al. stated that some studies found that if student teachers used an inquiry approach to understanding culturally responsive practice and “school culture,” this inquiry approach showed “possibility” in having a positive affect on student teachers’ understandings (p. 957). Inquiry approaches infer the use of language and dialogue as a person questions and searches for knowledge and understanding about culture and culturally responsive practice.

I considered how these findings and premises about teacher candidates’ classroom learning through dialogue and inquiry, could directly apply to my study. Empirical studies that suggest that dialogue and narrative enhance learning (the “teacher learning question”) are related to other empirical and conceptual literature that supports the theory that language expresses thought, experiences and identity. Therefore, I surmised that narrative and dialogue must be a central focus of a study of people’s experiences; I used this empirical evidence and conceptual literature as supporting evidence for my investigation of student teacher dialogue and language during their field experience. I believed that a study of dialogue and narrative would give me the opportunity to more fully understand the complex ways in which these student teachers understood and constructed their knowledge as they described their experiences in a multicultural school. The following sections summarize other studies and theories that support the notion that dialogue and narrative are important data in understanding the participants’ knowledge and practice in multicultural schools.

Language and the Expression of Mind and Activity

Words and language are the mind’s tools of expression. “Real concepts are impossible without words, and thinking in concepts does not exist beyond verbal thinking” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 107). Knowledge is also constructed through socially situated language practices, and these processes affect thought and understanding (Vygotsky). In addition, scholars have asserted that our actions are mediated through our language. According to Bakhtin (1984), “All the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language” (1984, p. 60). Wertsch’s (1991) notion of “mediated action” identifies the reciprocal relationship between language, thought, and action. He asserted that language was more than syntax and sounds and that our language system was also dependent on how language functioned in the socio-cultural context.

Gee (2001) also acknowledges this relationship between language and action. In his sociocognitive and sociocultural theories of language, he proposes that the first purpose of language is to “scaffold the performance of action in the world, including social activities and
interactions” (p. 715). The way in which we link our language to our actions and the choices we make about how we use our language gives meaning and changes the meanings we construct. People are creating both their contexts and themselves through their socio-culturally situated language and actions. We create our realities through our individual arrangements of our patterns of action as well as our modes of discourse that are all culturally influenced. Thus, our stories become cultural and order the way in which we experience the world (Gergen, 1999).

Gee (2001) describes a second function of language. He contends that we use language to represent perspectives on experience and “affiliation in cultures and social groups” (p. 715). Gee uses the term “affinity group” for a group that uses a specific “semiotic domain” or set of language and communicative processes that are related to a particular set of practices or identity. The concept of “affinity group” compares to a “community of practice.” The semiotic domain, or the affinity group’s communicative processes, becomes related to or reflects the group’s identity and a group member’s ability to associate with the group. An affinity group member finds meaning in words only as the words are situated within embodied experiences of action or participation with the group through the semiotic domain. Therefore, participation and action give situated meaning to words within a particular semiotic domain. Gee (2002) suggests that one primary kind of experience that group members need is “dialogic talk with others within and about the domain” (p. 25) in order to practice within that semiotic domain.

Freire (2002) connects language and action when he emphasizes the importance of human relations. He states that “a careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character” (p. 71). He sees that language between the teacher and student is the expression and mediation of relationships. In their ideas about “situated learning,” Lave and Wenger believe that it is of utmost importance to study the social world in which activity takes place, and that language is the way in which we express our understanding of the social world. Specifically, activity in the social world of the classroom becomes mediated action through language among people. Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that an apprentice’s task is not so much to learn from formal talk about the participation, but to learn to talk within and about the “community of practice.” Talk is not only a way to transmit knowledge; talk becomes a way to demonstrate membership and understanding about the community by developing a certain way of talking as modeled by the “community of practice.” Lave and Wenger also suggest that stories play a major role in the description of the shared understandings that are necessary in a “community of practice.” Stories not only describe the particular but can be connected to broader knowledge and related to the larger community. Narratives that people tell about their specific experiences have merit in understanding larger social and cultural patterns.

The Value of Teachers’ Voices in Understanding “Knowledge” and “Practice”

An additional reason for studying student teachers’ language or narratives is the supposition that research must value teachers’ voices in understanding “teacher learning,” “knowledge,” and “practice.” Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1992) state that “what is missing from the knowledge base for teaching…are the voices of teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, the ways teachers use writing and intentional talk in their work lives and the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve their classroom practices” (p. 2). Teachers in the classroom are set within the “tangled-up” network of socio-political, historical, cultural, and economic systems as they work with children and families (Nespor, 1997). The classroom is also a place where people from many cultural, economic, and language identities intersect. Yet
reform and research often occurs far removed from teachers’ experiences and intuition (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993).

Just as researchers should listen to teacher voices, if teacher education expects to understand how student teachers learn in a “community of practice,” then universities must listen to student teachers’ voices (Mueller & Skamp, 2003). Since activity in a social world is mediated and represented through language and talk, student teachers’ talk about their experiences in the midst of culturally diverse classrooms should become a focal point in research. By listening to the tone, language, and questions embedded in student teachers’ narratives about their fieldwork, researchers can gain a richer understanding of prospective teachers’ situated knowledge. As researchers listen to participants’ voices, research acknowledges that those participants have worthy opinions and interpretations of experiences (Belenky, Clincy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

“Classrooms are powerful places” (Rose, 1995, p. 6), and thus I believed that the student teachers would have powerful experiences that would shape their knowledge, and that they would express those experiences in narrative forms. In the process of talking about classrooms, teachers become acquainted with themselves as teachers: they use and hear how their own voices represent their experiences, thoughts, action, tensions, questions, and identity (Belenky et al., 1986). I also believed that if the student teachers had the opportunity to express themselves in dialogue and story, they would consider more carefully their interpretations of their experiences as they heard their own voices.

Understanding “Knowledge” and “Practice” through Narratives of Reflexivity

Research based on the research paradigm outlined in Chapter 3 (Table 1) develops methodological strategies that highlight the “innovations” of “reflexivity.” Through auto-ethnography, expression of perspectives, and self-disclosure, researchers (and participants) describe their lives and their thinking about their lives. Such disclosure emphasizes the researcher’s “historical and geographic situatedness” as a necessary component in the interpretation of the data and the “situated knowledge” that is generated through a study (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027).

Reflective practice (Schon, 1983, 1987) has long been a component of university teacher education and the study of how teachers learn while in the midst of practice. Reflection on one’s practice is the study of the “epistemology of practice” (1983, p. viii). Schon looks at how knowledge can be based on professional experience, as opposed to knowledge from academic or theoretical writing and asks, “In what kind of knowing do practitioners engage? How is professional knowledge like or not like knowledge in textbooks? Do professional practitioners engage in academic rigor and in what way?”

By examining how some practitioners from diverse fields of study engage in knowing, Schon (1983) suggests that practitioners, such as teachers, reflect or think about “their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice” (p. vii-ix). Reflection changes a teacher’s role from being a performer of prescribed technical knowledge to becoming a practitioner who asks and attempts to answer questions about children’s particular responses to learning. Reflection requires teachers to consider how children’s responses can inform teachers’ professional and experiential knowledge. When a teacher observes and listens to children’s responses, teaching becomes an invention that matches students’ thinking and queries.

A reflective practitioner’s work changes the relationship among the self, professional knowledge, and intuitive knowledge because the practitioner is immersed in ongoing thinking or
reflection about “intuitive understandings about phenomena” (Schon, 1983, p. 320). Schon asserts that as a teacher “reflects-in-action,” he or she becomes a researcher, considers and makes attempts at alternate practices, and is not necessarily dependent on academic theory. Decisions made in the reflective-action context are experiments that may become new theories and solutions. Usually, “reflection-in-action is not generally accepted – even by those who do it – as a legitimate form of professional knowledge” (1983, p. 69).

Many teacher educators use these premises of reflective practice or “reflection” and expect student teachers to write reflectively, or write and talk about their thoughts and dispositions towards what they are reading, discussing, or experiencing. University mentors visit student teachers in the field to evaluate student teachers; they encourage the student interns to participate in reflective dialogue about field experiences; and they help interns integrate what they have studied in course work with what they are experiencing in the school. During this dialogue, student teachers can express their emerging professional knowledge and their situated learning about their developing membership in the “community of practice” of teaching.

An investigation of this reflection-in-action is of particular importance in understanding prospective teachers’ situated learning in a multicultural school. Listening to reflection-in-action is research. It changes the balance of authority between “academic knowledge” and “experiential knowledge,” and it requires that student teachers engage in a critique of their own practice and their preconceived ideas about professional actions. Reflection-in-action can occur as an individual teacher engages in critique of her or his practice, or it can occur in dialogue with other people who are teaching and learning to teach. When teachers talk about their work, their dialogue can become learning, as well as an opportunity to share stories and queries, to explain and gain input from others’ theories, and to question assumptions that remain unconfirmed. This dialogue is the teachers’ or student teachers’ talk within the community of practice, its discourse. Discourse and dialogic activity are central to reflective pedagogy and places people in relationship and in the joint process of understanding everyday phenomena that need to be investigated (Gergen, 1999).

The Role of Language in the Social Construction of Knowledge

The premises of social constructionism are a final set of assumptions that influenced this study. A constructionist view of epistemology maintains that knowledge does not represent an objective truth, and that knowledge is changing and dependent on individual cognition and social understandings. Therefore, “meaning is never frozen or terminated, but remains in a continuous state of becoming” (Gergen, 1999, p. 64). Social constructionism examines our processes of knowledge-making. “How is knowledge constructed? How do we come to know?” These are questions we must address if we consider the way we explain our experiences.

Much of social constructionist epistemology is based on the notion that we make or interpret our worlds through the words we use, the stories we tell, and the ways in which we tell our stories. This assertion places much power in our language and stories. Gergen (1999) states that language is fundamental in our processes of knowledge-making. As we use language in social relations to describe, explain, and represent, we also create our work and our future (p. 48). Language becomes the vehicle for all that we construct and is both the entity and process that defines us and that we use to define our world. Gergen states that our individual minds do not lead us to objective knowledge and truth, but instead, objectivity and truth are “byproducts … of community traditions” (p. 14). This is a primary tenet of social constructionism.

Since language and social interaction has this significant role in our knowledge construction, “our ways of talking and writing become key targets of concern” (Gergen, 1999, p.
Gergen asserts that this essential assumption in the “emergence of social construction” is this “weakness in the taken-for-granted character of language.” Our words are “not pictures of the world,” but our interpretations of the world (p. 21). He explains that the “correspondence theory of language” contends that language or words cannot correlate accurately with “experienced realities.” Gergen describes how our explanations of our experiences cannot be neutral: “To the extent that my interests determine how it is I describe the world, then my descriptions lose the capacity to objectively describe” (p. 21).

Gergen’s (1999) second “working assumption” about social constructionism is that “our modes of description, explanation and/or representation are derived from relationship” (p. 48). Gergen finds hope in these assumptions and adds a third, “As we describe, explain or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future” (p. 48). He believes then that not only do our words represent our biases and perspectives, but our words can “constitute” life (p. 49). If words can constitute life, then our stories have the power to change our interpretations of the world as well as change our relationships, our selves, and the cultures around us. Gergen believes that social constructionism leads to:

A celebration of reflexivity, that is, the attempt to place one’s premises into question, to suspend the “obvious,” to listen to alternative framings of reality, and to grapple with the comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints. (p. 50)

Just as Gergen (1999) asserts that we “are born of relationship” (p. 142), teaching identities are formed in relationship to the community of practice. Through relational dialogue teachers construct what they believe is true and right about teaching, and in constructing these understandings, they also construct what is not true and right about their practice. Gergen suggests that reflection and inquiry are a beginning point, but they are insufficient. Dialogue must seek to find answers or alternatives.

Freire, in embracing these epistemological notions about knowledge, engages the learner in dialogic processes. He does not consider that dialogic processes should be used to simply converse and make one’s story known. Instead, he suggests that we can use dialogue as a means of questioning the un-questioned assumptions about sources of knowledge as we actively engage in the social construction of knowledge. The engaged learner in a critical pedagogy paradigm is seeking freedom from these un-questioned assumptions (Freire, 1998).

In summary, social constructionist theory posits that we each interpret our worlds through a socio-cultural lens that influences the way in which we describe and experience reality. No interpretation is a “Truth,” but is an interpretation of the truth. We express our experiences and truths through language. Therefore, student teacher narratives become significant data sources in understanding how future teachers construct their understandings of multicultural schools, children, and families. If we study student teacher narratives and dialogue, can we hear about their assumptions and un-questioned assumptions about diversity?

The Nexus of Multicultural Teacher Education, Language, and Narrative Inquiry

As a researcher, I see significant connections between these empirical and conceptual theories and the purposes and value of narrative inquiry in qualitative research (Alvermann, 2000; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). While each of the preceding discussions about language, narrative, dialogue, and reflection, derives from different theoretical approaches and discussions within the field of education, they are related because each sees the significance of dialogue and narrative as a way to understand. Therefore, I saw value in adopting narrative inquiry approaches to my study.
I use the term narrative inquiry to describe a qualitative approach that uses an analytical process and creates a written product “that tells a story of how individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes” (Alverman, 2000, p. 124). This type of inquiry and analysis may reveal connections between “seemingly random activities that social groups perform as part of daily living” (p. 124). Therefore, narrative inquiry analysis refers to the way in which a researcher represents lived experience through stories the researcher hears and interprets so as to describe the lives of the researched.

According to Daiute and Lightfoot (2004), there are different ways to develop a narrative inquiry, but I saw value in a type of inquiry that would assist me in understanding “culturally developed ways” in which my student teachers expressed and understood their practices and knowledge (p. x). According to Daiute and Lightfoot, this type of narrative inquiry approach asserts that narrative discourses are cultural meanings and interpretations that guide perception, thought, interaction, and action. Narrative discourse organizes life -social relations, interpretations of the past, and plans for the future. The way people tell stories influences how they perceive, remember, and prepare for future events. (pp. x-xi)

Gergen (1999) makes a similar statement. He believes that the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are the narratives that create our personal and professional lives. We also create narratives about others’ lives that create and fix their identities. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) believe that this narrative inquiry is not about telling stories about the material nature of the world as in “money, food, and biology,” but rather are discourses that explain our “perception, interpretation and action” on the world and our social relations (p. xi).

Daiute and Lightfoot suggest four reasons for conducting the type of narrative inquiry and analysis that matched my purposes. First, they state that narrative analysis makes it possible to look at and “examine phenomena, issues, and people’s lives holistically.” Second, narrative data makes it possible to investigate and interpret “social histories that influence identity and development.” Third, Daiute and Lightfoot contend that narrative analysis “generates unique insights into the range of multiple, intersecting forces that order and illuminate relations between self and society.” Finally, narrative analysis makes it possible to include “value and evaluation into the research process” (pp. xi-xiii). These premises of narrative inquiry and analysis give the researcher tools that allow one to look far beyond short answers on questionnaires or predetermined codes on survey data. Instead, narrative analysis looks for more complex descriptions and relationships between identity, knowledge and practice and from a culturally situated perspective (Daiute & Lightfoot).

Rosaldo (1993) argues that stories shape, not just reflect, human conduct or action “because they embody compelling motives, strong feelings, vague aspirations, clear intentions or well-defined goals” (p. 129). Therefore, people’s stories must not be disregarded; they should be “given serious attention” in the analysis of lived experience. Rosaldo discusses narrative as social analysis; he agrees with philosopher of history Louis Mink in that analysis should not attempt to describe historical laws but should reveal “an understanding of what happened in a specific place, at a particular time, and under certain circumstances” (p. 131). Stories “make the abstract concrete” (Noddings & Witherell, 1991, p. 279).

Subsequently, I believed that this narrative inquiry process would acknowledge the relationship between language, thought, and action; would support my understanding of the role of dialogue, reflection, and voice in student teachers’ knowledge and practices; and support theories about the role of language as we socially construct our understanding of the social and
cultural worlds in which we participate. Narrative inquiry matched the qualitative purposes of this study.

Direct Effects on this Study

Each of these theories substantiates the significance of studying language in our quest to understand experiences and relations. If dialogue and narrative reveal people’s learning about their action in a social world, and each social world is a different context, then there is value in investigating the narratives and dialogue of particular student teachers. After participating in a specific university course of studies, these student teacher participants were placed in a specific multicultural school in a particular community in the historical time of the Academic Year 2004-2005.

Because of these research and conceptual suggestions, I studied student teachers’ dialogue and narratives about their experiences in multicultural schools as a way to investigate their knowledge, skills, and dispositions towards culturally responsive practice and thus investigate their “teacher learning” during field work. I used this analysis to consider the relationship between theory and practice and as a way to develop deeper understandings of the student teachers’ explanations and questions regarding their experiences and subsequent understandings about diversity. I did not choose to study student teacher “practices” through my own empirical observations of their practices. I investigated their narratives about their practices.

I also determined that I would create interview contexts in which I would welcome the students’ oral reflections and talk about their “knowledge” and “practice,” and I would not reflect my own understandings about diversity and culturally responsive teaching as “fixed” or “correct” during our dialogue. Instead, I attempted to emphasize an inquiry stance, during our interviews since I wanted the student teacher narratives to reveal their understandings.

In addition, my narrative analysis of diverse participants’ stories did not attempt to find a “unified master summation” (Rosaldo, 1991, p. 147) but revealed “complex understandings of ever-changing, multifaceted social realities” perspectives, and identities (p. 128). “Instead of having endpoints, such narratives describe situations as portions of complex journeys that continue to unfold” (Nespor & Barber, 1995, p. 62). Being incomplete and without conclusion are integral to the meaning of my social analysis.

While I acknowledged this research study as specific and small in relation to student teachers-at-large, I also believed that this research study was ultimately connected to other student teacher contexts because their lives and the lives of the children they taught were each affected by the larger cultural, economic, political, historical, and national systems that influence our daily lives. I believed that a careful study of the dialogue and narratives of a small group of student teachers could inform the larger world of multicultural teacher education. I believed that my particular study could be related to the larger academic community in unpredictable ways.
CHAPTER 3: GENERATING KNOWLEDGE

Research Design and Methodology

...in our action is our knowing. 

Lather, 1991, p, xv

Research Design

...a paradigm is an interpretive framework, a compilation of beliefs that undergird the action we take. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, p. 19

Introduction

My research study and its methods are grounded in a research paradigm based on a complex set of epistemological assumptions. Since my goal for this study is to generate knowledge about student teachers’ experiences in a multicultural school, I need to reveal my epistemological assumptions about the nature of knowledge before I outline specific methods for generating knowledge. I assert that knowledge is constructed in the mind and in social relations (Gay, 2000; Gergen, 1999; Lather, 1991; Shor, 1997); that knowledge is a product of the relationship between experience, identity, language, and power (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Fraser & Nicholson, 1997; Freire, 2002); that knowledge is expressed, interpreted and shaped by language (Gergen, 1999, Gee, 2000); that knowledge is relative and is not fixed or absolute (St. Pierre, 2000; Lather, 1991); and that knowledge expresses an ethic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b, hooks, 1994). These assumptions are related to diverse social theories such as social constructionism and reconstructionism, postmodern thought, critical theory, and feminist thought which all reject the concept that one Truth is knowable through an individual’s objective mind and authority. I use these assumptions about the nature of knowledge to outline how I will enact my research processes for understanding people’s experiences. In Table 1, I visually and textually depict how these epistemological assumptions influence my beliefs about research and thus my methodological choices.

My methodological design question became, “If I believe these assumptions about knowledge, how does this set of assumptions inform what I believe about what research is; how do these beliefs affect what methods and design I will choose?” Or “In what actions can I participate, so that I can collect and generate knowledge about student teachers’ experiences in a school with a multicultural population?” Table 1 shows this relationship. These assumptions about knowledge and research are the foundation of my study’s design.

My overall research goals became to collect and interpret student teachers’ talk about their lived experiences in a multicultural school with the expectation that I would not find one Truth. I also wanted this knowledge to influence my future work and pedagogies as a teacher educator. The issues embedded in my study were complex. Indeed, I wanted to design a study based on the tenets in Table 1 that would investigate complexity rather than find simplistic
Table 1

**Relationship between Epistemological Assumptions and Research Design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Assumptions</th>
<th>Assumptions about Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge is constructed in the mind and in social relations.</td>
<td>A. The study of the lived experience is valuable because (1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge is a product of social relations and is mediated through power and identity.</td>
<td>B. Multi-vocality is essential in research because (1, 2, 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Knowledge is expressed, interpreted, and shaped by language.</td>
<td>C. Language and relations are central to research because (1, 2, 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Knowledge is relative; knowledge is not fixed and absolute.</td>
<td>D. Research is complex and fluid because (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowledge represents an ethic.</td>
<td>E. Research should embrace the sacred, evocative, compelling because (5).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological Choices Based on these Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Therefore, my research methods included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The researcher acting as a participant-observer (A, D).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Focusing on student teacher talk about experiences in the naturalistic setting (A, C).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Making an effort to create relationships with the participants (C, D, E).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Conducting informal conversational interviews (B, C, D).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Acknowledging the significance of auto-ethnographic disclosure from all participants (A, B, E).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi. Using a research design that allowed for fluidity in method (D).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii. Using analysis, synthesis, and reporting or writing strategies that allowed for complexity and fluidity (D).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii. Acknowledging that research on social justice matters are compelling, evocative, and sacred (E.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Study of a “bounded system” of student teachers’ concrete experiences (i, iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Research conducted in the naturalistic setting (i, ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collection of in-depth knowledge and rich descriptions from this “bounded system” (i, ii, iii, iv, v)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on processes, complexities, and participants’ narratives in data collection and interpretation (i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, vii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comprehensive descriptions, interpretations, and “sociocultural analysis” (Merriam, p. 14) of the individual participants’ constructions of their experiences (vi, vii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying sociocultural themes that can inform teacher educator knowledge. (vi, vii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On-going commitment to recognizing student participants’ voices and narratives as a window on the ethical mandate to teach “other people’s children” through more complex understandings of sociocultural issues (viii)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was my intent that through these epistemological and research premises, I could “break out of the limitations of increasingly inadequate category systems” and investigate the “complexities of people and the culture they create – theories outside of binary logics of certainty, non-contradiction, totality and linearity” (Lather, 1991, p. xvi). I believed I could learn from the student teachers’ everyday experiences.

I made several essential choices. First, I planned to identify a small group of student teachers with whom I could conduct individual case studies while they worked in a multicultural school. I selected each “bounded entity” (each of the participants who agreed to participate) as an “instance” of a set of experiences that I wanted to understand (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). From each instance I could gain rich information and provide my readers with descriptive accounts of the student teachers’ interpretations of their lives. Such information would also allow me to use inductive analysis to investigate how student teachers construct their understandings about teaching “other people’s children.” I expected each “instance” to act as an individual “instrumental” case in that the Participants would “provide insight into an issue” (Stake, 2000, p. 437) that I wanted to know more about.

Each case would be subsequently related to each other in a broader interpretation of student teacher experiences through a cross-case analysis, another “bounded system” (Smith, 1987), or “collective case study” (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). Merriam names this qualitative study a “multiple case study.” Each individual case is first analyzed as a comprehensive case before the cross-case analysis is conducted. “A qualitative, inductive, multicase study seeks to build abstractions across cases” (Merriam, p. 195). My purposes were to discover “categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases” (Merriam, p. 195) with the ultimate intention of informing my understandings about how to prepare student teachers to teach in multicultural schools.

Second, I decided that to better understand this “bounded system” of student teacher experiences, I needed to become a participant-observer “student teacher.” I knew that I would have more in-depth understanding of the Participants’ experiences if I immersed myself in a classroom. As I worked in the school, my own experiences would give me concrete lived knowledge of the daily issues involved in teaching “other people’s children” and that my own “practice” in the school would compel me to ask deeper and more relevant questions of the student teacher Participants. I outline my role as a participant-observer later in this chapter.

Since I was interested in the sociocultural understandings of the Participants, this individual and collective case study was related to ethnographic approaches in qualitative research, for I interpreted the cases through an “ethnographic” lens. The cases became a “sociocultural analysis of a unit of study” (Merriam, p. 14) because I was interested in a comprehensive view of how the Participants described, their understandings of the culture of the children and their families, through their individual sociocultural perspectives.

My belief in the nexus of language to reveal one’s construction of ideas and knowledge was central to my research methodology. Therefore, another research process which informed my design was narrative approaches (Daitue & Lightfoot, 2004), for I thought that if I examined the Participants’ stories about their experiences, I could better understand the Participants’ “culturally developed ways of organizing experience and knowledge” (p. x) derived from their school experiences. I intended to use narrative analytical approaches that inductively “discovered” themes in the student teachers’ stories.

My intent was to ensure an emic approach by basing my interpretations on both the Participants’ and my insider views (Merriam, 1998). I planned to listen to the Participants’
voices and acknowledge the differences in what I could learn from each of them. I looked for the complexities within their stories in the individual case studies and between their stories for the cross-case analysis, considered how their auto-ethnographic journeys influenced their perspectives, and made an effort to create relationships with the student teachers through conversational interviews that valued the significance in what they chose to share.

Since knowledge is mediated through power, identity, language and in social relations, I needed to listen to my student teachers’ voices and acknowledge the differences in what I could learn from each of them. I looked for and acknowledged the complexities within their stories and between their stories, considered how their auto-ethnographic journeys influenced their perspectives, and made an effort to create relationships with the student teachers through conversational interviews that valued the significance in what they chose to share. The knowledge generated through this study was different from other teacher-educator practitioner inquiries (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004) because I did not serve as the Participants’ professor or supervisor and did not hold any power or authority over their semester evaluations.

Figure 1 is a concept map for how I visualized this relationship between my role as a teacher educator researcher, my participant-observer “knowledge” and “practice,” the student teachers’ “knowledge” and “practice,” and our conversations during our experiences at the school. Figure 1 visually reveals how our conversations about our “knowledge” or “practice” regarding diversity during our experiences in the school were set within and between our individual lives and our previous “knowledge” about diversity. These “circles within circles” (Ely et al., 1991) are fluid and recursively related. Therefore, I knew that the “knowledge” that I generated through these student teacher experiences would inform my future as a teacher educator who embraces a social justice belief system.

Overview of Research Design Phases

I determined that my research would extend across a year, but within three phases. (see Table 2 for a representation of the three research phases.) Phase I included all of the processes and data collection related to my participant-observer role as a student teacher during which I worked in a classroom for an entire academic year (2004-2005). In my auto-ethnography in Chapter 1, I discussed the significance of my research questions for myself as a teacher educator, and how I used this auto-ethnographic understanding as a personal entry point into my study of student teacher experiences. I also found that because my questions were personal, I wanted to re-enter the classroom on a daily basis so as to engage with the school environment, and in particular the children. Being in the school, besides being a personal journey, also supported my research from an ethnographic perspective. I knew that I needed to “approximate members’ experience” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 2) by being in a classroom, like the participants.
Figure 1. Relationship between researcher’s and participant’s lives.
I believed that if I planned to study student teacher experiences, then I needed to become “like a student teacher.” As a “student teacher,” I would be able to deeply engage with student teacher perspectives by developing a different consciousness about everyday events and by understanding the multicultural school context. Emerson et al. (1995) states that, “Through participation, the field researcher sees first-hand and up close how people grapple with uncertainty and confusion, how meanings emerge through talk and collective action, how understandings and interpretations change over time (p. 4).”

Since I also believed that each multicultural school has its own school and cultural community, I knew that if I “entered the field,” for an extended period of time, I would be able to better describe the setting and its nuances. As Becker (1998) has stated, None of our ‘substances’ are pure anything. They are all historically contingent, geographically influenced combinations of a variety of processes, no two of the combinations alike. So we can never ignore a topic just because someone has already studied it. In fact – this is a useful trick – when you hear yourself or someone else say that we shouldn’t study something because it’s been done already, that’s a good time to get to work on that very thing. (p. 89)

Subsequently, I knew that while there had been some research conducted about student teachers’ work in schools, I also knew that in each site there are different and complex factors. I became intrigued by the idea that all multicultural schools are “historically and geographically influenced” and that I should study the school in which the student teachers would be working. I wanted to have a more complex knowledge of the school and larger community so as to understand how local cultural, community, historical, and economic processes and events affected the “processes that swirl” through the school (Nespor, 1997, p. xx). I knew that whatever school I selected, while having many predictable elements, would be different from any other school in immeasurable ways.

Phase II of my research study began in January, 2005 when the student teachers arrived at the school in which I was already working. This Phase included all the processes and data collection related to the case study of four student teachers’ experiences. I established informal and conversational style individual and group interviews settings (Fontana & Frey, 2000) so as to give the student teachers the opportunity to tell stories about their experiences and to answer my research questions. Sharing our classroom stories and experiences through narrative would be the focus of this phase. Richardson (1997) believes that narrative “is the way individuals understand their own lives and best understand the lives of others” (p. 301). I thought that for me to get a deeper understanding of student teachers’ perceptions about their experiences, we would need to talk and listen to one another. I also attended the student teacher seminars on campus that were designed to address issues related to diversity and multicultural schools. I took notes and responded with my own viewpoint as a “student teacher.”

Phase III began during the first and second phase. Phase III included all of the actions that I took as a researcher throughout the year to do ongoing analysis, study, interpretation, synthesis, final analysis, and writing. My “early analysis” began while I was immersed in the field during the Fall semester. While I was acting like a “student teacher,” I constantly compared what I was experiencing with what I expected to find, with what I wanted to study, with what I wanted to know, with surprises that I experienced, and with what I hoped to learn from the student teachers during Phase II. During the Fall, my analysis of my own experiences helped me develop better questions for the student teachers during Phase II. I continued this process of ongoing analysis during Phase II, as I thought about my own responses to my experiences at the
school and considered how those experiences continued to inform the way that I developed research questions.

When my collection of data was complete from Phase I and Phase II, I then committed myself to a focused study of the materials and data so as to synthesize and complete a final analysis. In Phase III, my task became to read my data, code and identify themes in the narratives, and use writing as a tool for my analytical thinking. Since I believed that “writing is a process of discovery” (Richardson, 1997, p. 93), I trusted this writing process and was able to clarify my synthesis through the act of organizing ideas in a text.

Table 2 (Phases of Study) is a diagram of how these three phases occurred and overlapped during the year. While I planned these phases in which to generate knowledge through qualitative data, I also realized that this was to be an emergent design because “it is impossible to construct a design a priori that takes into account what the researcher finds out upon actually entering the social setting to be studied” (Hatch, 2002, p. 9-10). Moustakas (1990) describes a heuristic approach as one that develops through five phases: immersion in a setting, an incubation period for thinking and awareness, an illumination phase for expansion of awareness, an explication phase that describes and explains the participants’ experiences, and a phase for creative synthesis. In designing a year-long study, I knew that I would have more of an opportunity for immersion, incubation, reflection, and illumination before I attempted to synthesize what I collected.

Table 2

**Phases of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Summer 2004</th>
<th>Fall 2004</th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Summer-Fall 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s immersion in the field</td>
<td>Early conversations with Research Informant</td>
<td>Conversations with Research Informant</td>
<td>Conversations with Research Informants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher in the classroom</td>
<td>Researcher in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>Student teacher experiences and interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student teachers in the school, Interview-Conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td>Study and Analysis</td>
<td>Early analysis</td>
<td>Early analysis and writing</td>
<td>Final analysis, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study of demographics, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, writing</td>
<td>Early analysis</td>
<td>Early analysis and writing</td>
<td>Final analysis, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constant comparison</td>
<td>Constant comparison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Phase One: My Immersion as a Participant-Observer “Student Teacher”

Preliminary Steps

Since I wanted to begin my participant-observer work in the Fall, my first task was to find a teacher in a multicultural school context who would allow me to assist in his or her classroom for an academic year. I knew that this relationship would be pivotal to me in my work as a “student teacher.” I thought that after I had made a preliminary contact and agreement with a willing teacher, I could then request permission from the principal of the school and from the school system.

As I considered how to “find” a teacher with whom to work, one teacher’s name came to the foreground. During the previous academic year, I had been the university mentor for student teachers at an elementary school that had a multicultural population. While “conferencing” with one student teacher, she shared with me her admiration for one particular teacher with whom she had developed a relationship. The teacher, a young African American woman, had shared with the student teacher some of her own questions about how teachers viewed and related to some of the Black children in the school. The student teacher’s story about her conversation with Tison Butler and her admiration for how Tison related to the children in the school had remained in my consciousness as something to remember.

I decided to ask Tison if she would consent to letting me volunteer in her classroom and become “like a student teacher to her.” Tison Butler agreed to meet with me to discuss the possibility, but she later told me that she might not have agreed to talk to me if one of the teachers in her building (with whom I had discussed my research purposes) had not encouraged her to do so. I knew that I was already experiencing the effects of relational networks and dialogue and that the relationships I had nurtured during my supervision and mentoring work continued to create opportunities for me in the research field.

I met with Tison in May 2004 for the first time after school. I explained to her that I wanted to investigate student teacher experiences in a multicultural setting and that I thought that if I became “like a student teacher,” I would understand student teachers’ experiences better than if I just talked to them about their experiences. I told her that I had heard complimentary comments about her from student teachers and asked if she would be willing for me to volunteer in her classroom next year to collect data for my dissertation. I told her about my concerns and interests in teacher education and the role that teacher education plays in preparing teachers to work with all children. I told her that I thought her classroom and Gilmer Park Elementary School would be an excellent context for study. Tison responded with enthusiasm, and I was overcome with relief and excitement about having the opportunity to work in her classroom. Here are my notes from this first meeting.
I visited in Tison’s classroom for an entire day in June so that I could be in her classroom before the school year ended, and we could both see if we wanted to continue with my request to volunteer in her room. After school, we sat down to talk. She restated what she thought my purposes were in my research. She summarized what she thought my research needs were and said she realized that I “needed a room” to work in. True, I explained, but she was much more than a room. I told her that I saw her as a valuable resource for me, and that while I would not be critiquing her or studying her, she would be a voice in what I would learn. I wrote the following in my Journal later that day.

Excerpts from Dana’ Research Journal

5/26/04 Oh, how I wished for my trusty researcher’s tape recorder, although that would have created a sense of formality that I didn’t want to create. But don’t I wish I could have captured our mutual excitement and sense of willingness to work together? Tison even mentioned thinking that she believed things would, must “work out.” I wanted her to have time to think and consider. Research can be messy. I would never want her to feel exposed, critiqued, or dissected.

Have you ever just connected with someone immediately and thought that “this is a person I immediately like, and I’d really like to get to know better?” Well, this was how I felt with Tison. She was so positive and friendly and genuine and approachable.

I visited in Tison’s classroom for an entire day in June so that I could be in her classroom before the school year ended, and we could both see if we wanted to continue with my request to volunteer in her room. After school, we sat down to talk. She restated what she thought my purposes were in my research. She summarized what she thought my research needs were and said she realized that I “needed a room” to work in. True, I explained, but she was much more than a room. I told her that I saw her as a valuable resource for me, and that while I would not be critiquing her or studying her, she would be a voice in what I would learn. I wrote the following in my Journal later that day.

Excerpts from Dana’ Research Journal

6/6/04 I told her again how important she was to me because she knew many things that I didn’t know because of her cultural and community connections. She said that she didn’t like it when people asked her to explain things or generalize about African American culture, but that she was usually willing to answer questions that were informational.

We talked about her African American dialect and my use of Standard English. We laughed about this and then she discouraged me from “code switching” or attempting to use Black vernacular or behavior in my teaching style. She said the children could always tell when it wasn’t real or right. I was appreciative of her honesty and aimed to be as honest to her in return.

Since I knew that my relationship with Tison would be critical to my understanding of the school context and community, and because I respected her opinion and perspectives, I nurtured our relationship so that we could develop ways to talk to one another in the midst of the stresses of classroom teaching and school dynamics. We ate lunch together in July at the local restaurant during which we shared aspects of our life histories. She described how her life was defined by her African American identity. She told me about growing up first in a small nearby town and then moving into the school’s working or middle-class neighborhood in 1984 as the neighborhood’s first African American family. She told me about her experiences in the area’s
public schools and her decision to attend a Historical Black College for women. I told her how my life was originally defined by my White upper-middle-class identity, growing up in the segregated South of the 1950’s, and how I had witnessed changes in cultural norms during the 1960’s. I tried to tell her how my view had been transformed since then and that I knew that culture mattered in the classroom.

I taped our lunch conversation and transcribed what we shared. These were the beginnings of our autobiographical and auto-ethnographic narrative sharing (Richardson, 1997) that continued throughout the year. To be honest, Tison set the tone for this open-ended continual journey on how we came to know each other as women, teachers, and friends. It was her exuberant and honest sharing that made it possible for me to ask her my questions and for us to tell each other about our lives. This was how Tison began her participation in my research with the formal title of Research Informant.

In the meantime, since Tison and I were both enthusiastic and agreeable, I proceeded with gaining cooperation and consent from the school principal in June and then filed a request with the coordinator of research for the school system. I gained access to the research site in August from the school system, with the agreement that I would not divulge the city’s name, the school system, or the school in my dissertation. I was ready to proceed when I obtained approval from my university’s Institutional Review Board and my Doctoral Committee.

**Purposes and Agreement**

My agreement and promise to Tison was that I would be in her third grade classroom at Gilmer Park Elementary for two-three days each week during the school year. We talked about this, and she signed the necessary consent form (see Appendix B). She knew I wanted to have something like a “student teacher” experience, but we knew that we would have to wait to determine my exact responsibilities when her third grade team made decisions about scheduling, team teaching, and departmentalization by subject. In return, I would assist her with students and her teaching responsibilities. Given that I had been an elementary school teacher and had worked in schools for many years with student teachers as a teacher educator, I knew that I would not be able to assume the same position as a “student teacher.” I came to the task with a set of understandings based on my prior teaching experience. I was not new to classrooms.

**Teaching Responsibilities**

Tison and I negotiated how I could best fit into her daily schedule once her schedule was established in September. After school began, I soon realized that I could not assume a full student teacher’s responsibility of teaching whole units of study or doing full-time teaching because my research methods required that I complete field note journaling every evening after working in the school. Tison was the Math teacher for the entire third grade. The grade level team had made the decision to departmentalize, so each of the five teachers specialized in one subject - Reading, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, or Science. Each teacher had a homeroom, but the five classes rotated from teacher to teacher for five periods every day. Each homeroom teacher was responsible for Word Study instruction for that homeroom class during one of the few open blocks of time. I assumed the responsibility for Tison’s homeroom’s Word Study instruction and for the Math instruction for two immigrant children, one from Honduras and the other from Liberia, in one of her Math groups.

I did daily and long-term planning for Word Study instruction that was modeled after a developmental spelling approach (Ganske, 2000). In addition, I sometimes developed a writing lesson for the 17-18 students in our room during one open block of time during the week. I chose an appropriate picture book and encouraged the children’s writing from that theme or one of
their own choosing. Usually I selected a text that had a multicultural theme. This made it possible for me to have group discussions about their perspectives on historical and current events related to race and ethnicity.

The math instruction that I developed for the two students who were learning English was much different and more variable. Sometimes I worked with them together, and sometimes I worked with them individually, but these contexts provided me with opportunities to gain insight into the dilemmas student teachers would experience as they learned to teach children of different ethnicities and languages.

During the remainder of the day, I helped with routines, assisted children who needed help, graded papers and sometimes filled in for other duties such as providing accommodations to ELL students by reading benchmark tests to them or assisting them with computer-based testing.

Since my goal was to be an ethnographic participant-observer as a “student teacher,” I followed the expected patterns of a student teacher in a school, while preserving blocks of time for my writing about the experiences in the evenings and weekends. In some ways, this first phase of my research, the Fall semester when I immersed myself in the classroom and school before the student teachers arrived in January, seemed luxurious. I could focus on my own “student teacher” role in the classroom, my “cooperating” teacher, my students, the school climate, the neighborhood, and my responses to all of the influences on the classroom. In the evenings, I could record and elaborate on my notes from the day or what I called my “field note jottings.” This “luxurious” period allowed me to experience the immersion, incubation, reflection, and illumination phases that Moustakas (1990) outlined. At first, my task was to know the children and context, but I explain in my findings and discussion how this immersion in the field affected the questions that I would ask of Tison, of other teachers and administrators, and of the student teachers in the Spring Semester.

Routines in the Field

My daily routine included my arrival between 7:40-8:00 a.m. three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. This block of three days helped me participate in the daily routines in the classroom, understand the sequence of events during the school week, and establish a dependable and predictable presence for Tison and the 80 - 85 third graders that she taught because of our rotating schedule. I introduced myself to the children in our homeroom and their families through a letter that I placed in their Take Home Folders. Just as I would expect a student teacher to do, I stayed late after school, graded papers, prepared lessons for the next day, created bulletin boards, visited with other teachers, and attended faculty and grade-level meetings as well as parent-teacher conferences and special events. Some days I left 30 minutes after school was out; some days I left three hours after school was dismissed, depending on meetings, tasks, and my conversations with the teachers. Many times I wished I could have been at school every day, for I would arrive on a Tuesday and Tison would say something like, “I sure wish you had been here yesterday. Wait ‘til you hear what happened.” Since she knew my research interests, she would tell me a story about a child or an event at school that she thought I would want to add to my field notes. These stories were narratives that she told me based on her perceptions, and I recorded them.

During a conversation in October with the principal, Ms. Hope, when I asked her for permission to send out a student survey, she replied, “Of course.” She added that she saw me as one of “them,” and that I was around so much that she viewed me as part of the staff. Therefore, I believe that my research routines made me dependable for the school staff and for Tison.
**Complexity of Role**

While I called myself a “student teacher” and participated in student teacher responsibilities, the actual experience was more complex, fluid, and multi-faceted because I assumed multiple roles in the classroom. Being in the elementary classroom again was like a “re-socialization” experience for me (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 2) into a somewhat known entity. The territory wasn’t entirely new, so I felt knowledgeable about some teacher practices. I felt like an experienced teacher when I taught Word Study because it was a subject that I had taught to university students for several years. I felt like an experienced teacher when Tison asked me to handle a particular group of children’s disagreement with one another. I felt like an experienced teacher when other third grade teachers asked for my advice about literacy instruction since this was something with which I was familiar.

I felt like a student teacher when the children responded to me like I have seen children respond to other student teachers, such as when I watched Tison ably monitor our students’ behavior, but then the children misbehaved when I guided them from lunch back to the classroom. I felt like a student teacher, when Enrique resisted my requests for completing an assignment, and I wasn’t sure about what to do next. I felt like a student teacher when LaQuita “copped an attitude” at me and looked as if she wasn’t about to do anything I asked her to do, ever. I felt like a teacher’s aide or student teacher when I handed out papers or made copies in the office.

As a participant in the school routines, I was sometimes asked for an opinion about a grade-level decision by one of the third grade teachers. At these times, I changed from being a “student teacher” who might want to participate in such a discussion, to being a researcher. As a researcher, I did not want to affect decisions or appear as an “expert,” because of my label, “Doctoral Candidate” or “researcher.” An “Aside” in my Research Journal from 8-24-04 reads, “I don’t want to be viewed as an expert, but as someone learning from them…which I am.” I only wanted to watch and record how the teachers negotiated their school year and the pressures they faced so as to better understand a student teacher’s perspective and the school context. It was my decision not to intervene, and I attempted to maintain neutrality about their teaching choices. I did speak up when we discussed what we knew or wondered about the children’s needs.

While I was immersed in the setting and spent many hours in the school, I also knew that my name didn’t appear on the list of faculty-staff. I attended the private meetings with the school system’s “central office” personnel when they scrutinized and disaggregated our classroom’s test scores, but my own name didn’t appear on those test scores, and I did not have any influence on the long-range curricular decisions of the faculty. When we completed the children’s final “Word Study” assessment in the Spring, Tison’s name was attached to their scores as their homeroom teacher, not mine, even though I had been their “Word Study Teacher.” I attended faculty meetings to hear about the news and pressures, but never voiced an opinion. I suppose in some ways, this part of the experience was much like that of a student teacher.

One time during the Fall semester, Tison laughed and said to another faculty member, “Yeah, Dana, she’s my student teacher!” and she said the words with a playful, mocking tone to reveal that she knew I wasn’t really like a 22-year-old college student learning to teach. In March, during parent-teacher conference time, I overheard her telling a parent that I was like a “teacher’s aid” to her. My role was fluid and changed with the task and with the teachers’ and children’s responses to me. Despite the changes in the roles that I assumed, I learned about the
school, community, and children by being there. At the end of the year, I had been at school for 105 days and approximately 815 hours.

I knew during my first steps of the research process, and continued to realize, that all that I was thinking and knowing was being affected by the relationships that I was developing in the context. Since my research assumptions included the pivotal role of “relationships” as we come to understand an issue, I emphasize and illustrate here my relationships with the people at the school before I describe my material collection. Without my relationships, my data would have been quite different.

Relationship with Research Informant - Tison Butler

And so we are reminded that everything that happened in Kurmann’s life, of course, depended not only on his actions and choices, but also on what all the other people he was involved with did. Becker, 1998, p. 35

This was my experience. I can truly say that what I experienced as a participant observer, “student teacher,” was dependent on my cooperating teacher and Research Informant, Tison Butler. My field notes were mine, but sometimes they were in response to Tison’s actions, or an attempt to understand Tison’s perspectives. My relationship with her evolved from a mere chance professional contact through a student teacher acquaintance to a deep friendship over the course of my working in her classroom.

As friends and colleagues, we assumed different relational roles with one another, depending on the situation. As I had planned, I was her “student teacher,” observing her pedagogical and communicative skills as 85 third graders moved through her third grade math classroom. I watched her model an extraordinary communication manner with children as she was able to tell stories and relate children’s interests to their math skills. I wanted to emulate her relationship with the children, although I knew that my 53-year-old White identity could not assume her 24-year-old African American style. (And she had told me not to try.) Perhaps, I simply wanted the children to develop with me the same kind of connection that they had with her. As my cooperating teacher, she became a mentor to me in how she thought about the children and their families. At the same time, I was an experienced professional educator whom she trusted to teach her children lessons without her supervision. Sometimes we were friends. We shared snacks at lunch or after school and talked about our own personal and family crisis that were often deep and troubling. At times, I was like a mother to her. She was my own sons’ age, and she came to me with questions about relationships and family, based on my longer life history and experiences.

Most importantly, Tison taught me about herself as a young African American woman and teacher. Her African American perspective was a viewpoint I had only known through a book or movies. Tison was real. She gave me a window into her ideas about the world as a Black woman. These were research topics I had not planned to investigate and for which I could not have planned. Since I didn’t know Tison well before we made our agreement, the outcome of our relationship could have been quite different. We discovered that we “clicked” as people and as friends. I describe in more detail my relationship with Tison and our discussions about culture and diversity in Appendix C.
My auxiliary, but critical research question.

Since Tison knew that I was interested in cultural factors in the classroom, she took it as her duty to educate me and tell me about her views and perspectives on all sorts of topics. We discussed TV sitcoms that did not represent “regular Black guys.” We talked about her feelings of being marginalized as an African American teacher in the school. For example, she told me about how one White family had removed their son from her room while she taught Black History because they disagreed with the Black History Month emphasis. These were classroom issues that I had never had to consider as a White teacher, and I doubted that my future White student teachers would ever have to consider. In Appendix C, I tell stories about the conversations Tison and I had before school, during planning time, and after school about issues in the classroom, popular culture, her life and my life, issues that were related to race and culture. These were the stories that helped me “get it” even more and made me more deeply attuned to “others’” perspectives and my desire to help future teachers understand that culture mattered in the classroom.

I believe now that one of the auxiliary and foundational questions in my research about student teachers became “What can teacher educators do to help student teachers ‘get it?’ How do we know (as White people) when we ‘get it?’ What is ‘getting it?’” “Getting it” was one of those intangible states of being whereby a person cognitively and emotionally understands the significance of cultural differences and is able to acknowledge them with another human being. For a White person to “get it,” the intangible piece is perhaps realizing how their position as “White” is privileged and that a person who is not White sees and experiences the world differently because of their place outside the position of White privilege. I thought that if future teachers developed this intangible “realization,” they would then create classrooms that honored and supported “other people’s children.” “Getting it” literally became another “way of being.”

I began my research study with cognitive and affective knowledge and beliefs regarding this perspective. I believed that I could use my study of student teachers’ experiences to help me understand how classroom experiences affect student teachers’ knowledge about “others” and how this knowledge could further my work in helping future teachers “get it.” However, Tison told me personal accounts of her experiences as a Black woman that deepened my cognitive and affective responses to “getting it” that did not compare with the books I had read.

I realize now that Tison was like a cultural translator for me. I had thought she could help me understand the school community since she had grown up in the neighborhood, which she did; but she also helped me by translating her African American experiences through her voice. Her impact on me was much broader and deeper than I could have ever anticipated.

Relationship with Faculty

My beginning days as a researcher and “student teacher” at Gilmer Park began as I followed Tison around the school, assisted her, and listened to the others around me. I became acquainted with the third grade team and they eventually understood that I was actually a doctoral student and researcher and that I was immersing myself in a classroom for my study. As a researcher cannot always predict how the research process will unfold, I could not have predicted another important factor in my experiences at Gilmer Park. I did not foresee that my relationship with Tison would lead me to relationships with her friends and colleagues. It seemed natural for some of Tison’s friends to congregate in her room and for us to talk. I noticed that many of these friends, not all, were also African American who shared a cultural connection with her. As they became more familiar with my research interests, they would often engage in discussions with Tison and me about the historical and present day state of the cultural, racial,
and class issues in the school community or within the African American community in Oakland. Sometimes I took notes on my notepad, sometimes I listened and recorded my impressions that night in my Field Note Tales, and sometimes I pulled out my tape recorder and asked for permission to tape our talk.

As I participated in the everyday life of school for the year, I found that some of my most valuable encounters as a participant-observer during Phase I, aside from my work with the children and their learning, were these casual conversations that I had with fellow faculty members. For the first time in my life, I had an authentic window on African Americans’ lives and perspectives. We shared an ongoing friendship in which we could depend on each other for support in the every day struggles of teachers of young children. This is not to say that these teachers had a homogenous view of school or their work, but we had conversations in which they revealed to me their experiences as African American teachers, and their interpretations of the children’s families’ actions (rather than a White middle-class interpretation).

Sometimes the African American teachers would share school experiences that they believed had been influenced by their race. It was in October when one of the teachers was telling me about how she felt she had been treated in the school system. “You’re getting this down, aren’t you?” she asked, and at that moment I realized that she wanted me to record and possibly write about how she had been marginalized as a Black educator. I wanted to honor her expectation. I realized then that while my study was not about Black teachers’ experiences, I needed to include these conversations in my Field Notes since they entrusted me with their stories. Their stories changed me as a researcher and teacher educator; they helped me change my consciousness about the things I take for granted as a White teacher and gave me other stories in my journey towards “getting it.” Their stories were their own examples of being “not-privileged” in comparison to McIntosh’s knapsack (1992).

As my relationship with the faculty developed and as they shared their stories with me, I began to realize that these teachers were acting as “Research Informants” for me concerning the school context and the nature of the community. Since these stories and relationships were also important to them and me, I submitted an Addendum to my research study proposal that was approved. These teachers signed consent forms as Research Informants (see Appendix D). During the Spring Semester, I formally interviewed some of these teachers, as well as the principal and two fifth grade teachers, as people who were knowledgeable about the school community.

When my participant student teachers arrived, I explained to their cooperating teachers what my purposes were, that I would be conducting interviews with the student teachers during the semester, and that I did not want my interviews to interfere with their student teacher responsibilities. At the end of the year, I decided to speak to the faculty as a group and explained to them what I thought I had accomplished. I presented a small set of books to the library as a thank you to the faculty for including me in their school and in honor of Tison Butler.

Relationship with Children and Families

My relationships with the children and their families were important to my method since I wanted to learn more about teaching “other people’s children.” I met children at the door in the morning, assisted them with school work, had high expectations for them, listened to their stories from home, ate lunch with them from time to time, met some parents at PTA meetings, participated in parent-teacher conferences, and joined in conversations with parents after school about children’s work or their problems in the classroom. I had experiences like this throughout the year that influenced the questions I developed for my interviews and that helped me become
a part of the conversations with student teachers as we discussed the tensions and joys of teaching at Gilmer Park. My experiences are not the focus of this study, but I include some of my experiences throughout my analysis of the student teachers’ experiences because my own experiences changed my “knowledge” and “practice.”

Phase I: Data Collection

It is not humanly possible to collect all of the data necessary to “understand” a phenomenon or a lived experience over nine months. Yet I had my “own yearnings for completeness” (Becker, 1998, p. 75). During Phase I, I collected all of my field notes, asides, and commentaries in a Research Journal (Emerson et al., 1995). In the beginning, – the first few days as a “student teacher” in the classroom with the children - I was able to take detailed field notes on a legal-sized notepad. However, soon, I was expected and wanted to “jump in” and assist the children with routines as well as teaching and learning like a student teacher would participate in the classroom. I would find that hours might pass during the day, and I had not come close to my notepad. If something of significance happened such as a discussion between children about their racial differences, I would listen carefully and then return to my notepad and jot down key words the children used, get down the order of the conversation as best as I could recollect, and then return to teaching. This note-taking is what I refer to as my field note “jottings” (Emerson, et al., 1995).

Sometimes Tison and I would have a conversation about a specific issue related to race, class, and ethnicity in the school or in popular cultural texts, or she would tell me about a situation she had encountered as an African American woman. I would grab my notepad and say, “This is something I need to get notes on.” She would talk, and again, in my desire for “completeness” in data collection, I would write down her key words and phrases (my “jottings”) as she told a story that she thought I needed to understand from her perspective. I would often ask questions for clarification or respond with a story from my own experiences or beliefs. These became ongoing conversations about our lives as raced and classed women. Sometimes my “jottings” during our conversations were more complete than just key words, because we would sit, and I could completely focus on the note-taking at length. I knew that these conversations were not directly related to student teacher experiences in the school, but the conversations were related to the notion of “getting it,” and the idea that I needed to hear about someone else’s world if I was going to prepare future teachers to teach children from diverse backgrounds.

My field notes from my ethnographic immersion in the school were varied. I always had my notepad prepared for “jottings” or writing, but spent most of my real writing time at home every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evening. My writing in the evening became my more complete field notes of “everyday life” (Richardson, 1997) in which I described the routines and conversations of the day or recounted stories that unfurled in the classroom or the hallway right before my eyes. At night, I used my jotted notes to trigger the fuller description of an event that I found significant, and I created on the computer screen and printed page my subjective recollection of a story as field notes and “field note tales” (Emerson et al., 1995). I called my field note tales my Research Journal. These were not well-crafted narratives at this point, but my
selected descriptions of my experiences. I attempted to transform the real events into “mobile forms” (Nespor & Barber, 1995, p. 52) in which I had put experiences on paper and could thus carry school behavior, language, conversations, numbers, and memories to my office and ponder them over and over again as I constantly compared what I was seeing and hearing. My field notes and tales became a Research Journal and a written account or “accumulating written record of these observations and experiences” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 1).

As I wrote (through word processing) in my Research Journal, I would sometimes add what Emerson et al. called an “Aside” or “Commentary” which might be a reflection on or an analysis of a particular situation. These were my initial stages of Phase III when I began to do early reflection and analysis of my experiences and developed research questions based on those experiences. I will describe this initial analysis work in the later section titled “Phase III: Analysis.”

Since I was at school sometimes 8 - 10 hours each day, it was impossible for me to record every event. I knew that this was problematic. “No one can spend forever doing their study, so short cuts have to be taken and these invariably lead to violations of ‘the way research is supposed to be done’” (Becker, 1998, p. 75). As an ethnographer, I had to make selections about which stories to record or accentuate that seemed related to my research study. I would automatically write down events or conversations that were related to race, ethnicity, and class. Subjects like work, poverty, color, bias, prejudice, families, language etc. were obviously in the conversation. However, I wondered about when race, ethnicity, and class were implicitly a factor but not obviously addressed in the event or conversation. I could only hope that by being immersed over time, I would eventually see or hear the things that were not said explicitly.

These were my “slices of life” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 67) that I recorded and responded to in my Research Journal. After only twelve weeks, I had almost 300 pages of accounts, descriptions, and asides and by the end of the year, my research journal included approximately 650 pages. There is a lot to see and hear in an elementary school.

Phase I: Interview Process

In addition to my Research Journal, I scheduled interviews with Tison when I had gathered questions that I wanted to pose to her. These interviews were informal conversations over meals or snacks. Our conversations moved from personal to professional and back again. I taped these informal interviews and transcribed them. On some days, during my 50-minute ride to and from school, I would re-listen to the interview to recapture her intonation and to remind myself of what I had learned. While many of my conversations with her happened “on the fly” or casually after school (I wrote about them in my Research Journal), there were times when I grabbed the tape recorder and taped a conversation. Twice we had important phone conversations about something occurring at school, and I sat at the computer and “transcribed” or took notes while we talked. Sometimes other Research Informants joined us, and I recorded those conversations.

By the end of the year, I had 10 documents in my computer files that were transcriptions of interviews and conversations with Tison and her friends. I printed copies of the e-mails between Tison and me that she read when I shared some of this document with her at the end of the year. Again, these were not directly related to “student teacher experiences in a multicultural school,” but her stories informed my viewpoint as a researcher who was interested in the way culture influences the classroom. The dates for all of my interviews are found in Appendix E: Interview Record with Tison Butler and Research Informants.
I also collected data from the classroom and school. I filed documents that the school sent home to parents at the beginning of the year, I accumulated hand-outs from faculty meetings, I kept some of the flyers about school and community events that the school distributed to families in their Tuesday Take Home Folders, I saved drawings and notes from the children that were good examples of their developmental interests, and I made copies of the children’s writing if it was relevant to my research interests regarding how student teachers might experience various cultural identities in a classroom.

During Phase I, I decided that I needed to be able to describe the school and its surrounding community. Therefore, I collected demographic data about the city and community by talking with the principal, reading and printing on-line census data, and collecting newspaper articles about the city. This search made me realize that I wanted to interview the principal and some of the teachers at the school who had been members of the community for years. Consequently, I interviewed the principal and several teachers so that I could hear more about the history of the community and school and how this history was a backdrop to the school’s present day culture. I taped and transcribed these interviews. The Interview Record for these interviews is found in Appendix F.

**Phase II: Student Teacher Experiences**

**Beginnings**

For Phase II of my research design, I planned to interview the student teachers that were placed at Gilmer Park for the Spring Semester; I knew that I couldn’t simply proclaim that the student teachers assigned to this school were automatically “my” research participants. I needed to ask the student teachers that were coming to Gilmer Park if they were willing to participate in the study. Instead of working by chance, I had conversations with my advisor, Dr. Ann Potts, who was the person responsible for coordinating student teacher placements in the urban schools. After reviewing the list of university students who would be student teaching, we made judgments and identified four students who we thought might be willing to participate, based on our knowledge of them from coursework and their personalities.

Since I believed that my qualitative research’s credibility would be partially dependent on my relationship with my participants and their willingness to talk openly with me about difficult issues, we selected two student teachers who I already knew. I had been their instructor in a literacy course at the university and perceived that they had a positive regard for me. The other two student teachers were people whom I had never met, but that Dr. Potts believed would be thoughtful and forthright. Dr. Potts e-mailed these four women and asked them if they would be willing to be participants. They each agreed, and I met briefly with them in December following their final seminar in the Fall Semester to express my appreciation and to explain again what my intentions were. They all responded willingly once more.

Our first “formal” meeting was for coffee on January 17th, before they began their daily travels to school that week. I discussed my research interests and shared my research assumptions with them. I gave them an informal written outline of my research principles and methodological choices that came directly from the epistemological foundations of my Research Proposal, as summarized in Table 1. Table 3 is a copy of the research summary I gave to each participant.
Research Assumptions

- Research should be Multi-voiced.
- The value of your lived experience is worthy of study.
- Interpretation is created through language and talk.
- Interpretation is done in relationship.
- Research is complex and fluid; I will not find one Truth.
- This research is evocative and compelling.

Methodological Issues

- Confidentiality.
- Auto-ethnographic writing?
- I will honor your work time with the children and your teacher.
- I will attempt to conduct some interviews during school.
- I may ask you to check my interpretation of your words (member checks).
- Tape recording or writing stories?

I discussed the issue of confidentiality and explained that they would select a pseudonym for the study so that their identity would be confidential to my readers. However, I further explained that I could not promise them total anonymity to outsiders or within the group because the student teachers would be able to deduce “who said what” in my study simply by their proximity to each other and hearing some of our joint conversations during group interviews.

I told them that I knew that they would be affected by the stress of student teacher responsibilities and university requirements for their masters degree this semester, and that I would respect the time that they needed to focus on their teaching and their application process for their first job. I felt lucky to have four student teachers who were willing to do research with me and did not want to make the process a burden. Instead, I wanted to create a co-constructed journey or exploration of what we were all thinking, feeling, and experiencing in the school, while also honoring our different points of view. Finally, I gave them a proposed calendar for the three individual and two group interviews and asked them to sign the research consent form (see Appendix G). These were our beginnings…coffee and talk, although we barely knew each other. My next task was to get to know each participant individually.
Relationships with Student Teacher Participants

At the beginning, my primary concern for my relationship with these willing participants was for them to feel comfortable with me, for them to be willing to talk about difficult topics, for them to be forthright, and for them to know they could depend on me to hold to my research assumptions and agreement. I thought that if they knew something about who I was as a researcher and the research process, then they would be more willing to talk.

Student teachers often arrive in January, *in media res*, in the middle of the year when months of relationships, planning, managing, and instruction have already occurred. When these student teachers arrived at school on their first day, I met them in the office before a fourth grade teacher (the school’s liaison with the university) gave them a quick tour of the school and introduced them to their cooperating teachers. After this first day, I checked in with them during the semester between our regularly scheduled interviews, either in the hallway, in their classrooms, at faculty meetings, by e-mail, or at our Thursday night student teacher seminars on campus.

These were small steps, but I think my presence in the school made a difference because we had common knowledge and classroom experiences. Sometimes small steps and first impressions matter. In my last interview with Cameron, she told me, “It was nice on that first day when we came in to a new school and you were here, and we knew you; so that was nice to have a familiar face in the hallways.” However, my more personal conversations with them began during the individual interviews, and I hoped that through these interviews, I would present my trustworthiness as a researcher to them. I have included an introduction to each participant in each individual case study in Chapter 4.

Phase II: Data Collection

It might be said that the narratives revealed in a research study are themselves by-products of the relationships of researchers to respondents. The mutual gaze, subtle signs of agreement or disagreement, silences, smiles, frowns, and comments related to shared or diverse experiences all lend shape to the story being told. Gergen, M., 2004, p. 279

Overview of interviews.

“The best interviews become a conversation between two engaged people, both of whom are searching to unravel the mysteries and meanings of life” (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, p. 210). I believed this; therefore, it was my intention with our “interviews” to create conversations between myself and the participants during which we tried to “unravel” our experiences. It was my intention to respond or reciprocate in a natural manner through an “establishment of a human-to-human relation with … the desire to understand rather than to explain” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 652). At the same time, I did not want to be explicit about my transformed view of multicultural issues so that I would not influence their perspectives. Therefore, I listened to their stories and responded with my stories and questions. I never responded negatively to what they said, but would sometimes carefully attempt to extend the student teachers’ thinking with another question or with a related story from my own school experiences. Our interviews became co-constructions of our understandings of the Knowledge and Practice Questions (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004).

I came to interviews with questions but sometimes was not able to direct the conversation in this manner because the student teachers brought stories or concerns to share that they deemed important or relevant. These concerns pertained to classroom routines, questions about their
relationships with their children or teachers, something they had liked about a seminar, and school events like “International Day.” While this was frustrating to me at times, I knew that my research needed to come out of their stories and not just from my questions. I did not guide the research into predetermined topics of conversations through my questions; the interview-conversations were more natural. In the meantime, the student teachers knew that I was interested in their experiences in a multicultural school and that I was focused on whatever they determined was related to “multicultural” or “diversity,” so they selected topics that they thought were related to “multicultural” school experiences.

At times, I created questions “on the fly,” or from a qualitative research perspective, as immediate “follow-up questions” during an interview based on something that a student teacher said. For example, I might ask a participant what they meant by a particular word, such as when Susan used the word “outrageous” to describe a young Black boy’s interactions with her. In order to foster my relationship with the student teachers, we talked about personal concerns in the midst of the interview. Sometimes, when a personal matter emerged that was difficult to discuss and warranted privacy, we turned off the tape recorder. At times there were tears, for when two participants discussed autobiographical issues, strong feelings rose up to meet us right in the interview setting, to our surprise.

During the third interview, a participant named Susan and I had a conversation I should relate. As you will read later, Susan shared some opinions about multicultural education that were different from the perspective her university professors might have espoused. In this interview, she talks about how she felt comfortable sharing her views with me, despite her disagreement with the university’s emphasis on diversity. I told Susan that I appreciated her participation and her willingness to share her perspective even though she probably guessed that my views were different from hers. She answered,

You’re very non-judgmental and so you make it so I can tell you these things, even though (laughter from Dana) I know you feel different and not make me feel awkward about it….It feels good to vent about it, too. (chuckle).

She continued and said that it was “nice to tell somebody who has different views.”

At the end of the interview process, I felt like I had some indication that my attempts to maintain an open dialogue with the individual participants had been somewhat successful. At the beginning of the semester, I planned an interview schedule that would create opportunities for us to talk across the semester as outlined in Table 4. The actual dates of these and other student teacher conversations changed depending on the participants’ teaching schedule. Actual dates of the interviews are found in Appendix H: Interview and Conversation Record with Student Teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Schedule with Student Teacher Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview 1: Week of January 24 (Week 2 of the semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Interview 1: February 17 (Week 5 of the semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview 2: Week of February 21 (Week 6 of the semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Interview 2: March 21 (Week 10 of the semester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview 3: Weeks of April 18 and 25 (Weeks 14 &amp; 15 of the semester)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First individual interview.

Our first individual interview-conversations occurred during the student teachers’ second week after they had a few days to adjust to their classrooms. My primary goal was to get to know something about them as people and future teachers. I believed that questions about their life would help us begin with an emphasis on knowing one another and recognizing the power that autobiographic and auto-ethnographic thinking can have in one’s knowledge and interpretations about life experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I constructed questions that were open-ended but focused the discussion on multicultural issues. The student teachers responded with narratives about their lives and their expectations about working in the multicultural setting. I used the questions that I had developed for my Research Proposal as seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Questions for Individual Interview 1

- Tell me about yourself.
- How did you come to be enrolled in an elementary teacher education program?
- Why did you select to come to this school system for your student teaching semester?
- How would you describe your own socio-cultural identity? Race, class, ethnicity, language?
- When you hear the terms diverse and multicultural, how would you define or explain them?
- How would you describe your own school experiences in relation to diversity?
- What other kinds of experiences have you had with people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds?
- Can you think of any other experience you may have had that has prepared you for working here? i.e. coursework, books?
- Tell me about the population at this school. How would you describe it?
- What were your expectations about teaching in diverse settings prior to your student teaching?
- Do you have any stories to share about your children?

I was not able to ask each question in each interview because we often talked at length about one or two questions of importance. Sometimes, the student teachers had personal matters to discuss, and I listened. We found a small room adjacent to the library in which to sit and talk which helped ensure privacy for the participants. The tapes were transcribed in time for me to read and reread the transcriptions before I conducted the first group interview a few weeks later.

First group interview.

My questions for the first group interview (February 17, 2005) revolved around the participants’ early experiences in the school, but I also revisited some of my questions about their prior experiences with multicultural education in their university coursework because I hoped that a group conversation might trigger some of their memories that they could not recollect individually. I also developed questions for the group interview from our conversations during our first individual interview. For example, some of the student teachers said that they were surprised. Since Gilmer Park was in the city, they expected the children to have “more issues.” They did not find the school or the children to have the qualities that they expected to
find in a city school. This was an early interpretation. I wanted to ask them again about this interpretation after six weeks of experience in the school. What would they say now about their overall understandings of the school, children, and families? What did they mean when they said “issues?” The questions I developed for this interview are in Table 6.

Table 6

*Questions for Group Interview 1*

**Student Teacher Questions: Group Interview 1**

Prior Knowledge and Understandings about Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
- Could you describe for me some of the things you remember learning about teaching “other people’s children” in a multicultural setting?
- Anything you read?
- What do you think you’re implementing?
- Can you describe any changes that have occurred in your perceptions about multicultural schools or “teaching other people’s children since being engaged at National University?” “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy?”
- What is culturally responsive pedagogy?
- When we created those culturally responsive teaching plans last week, how do you think they related to or were not related to your experiences or ideas about Gilmer Park? You had to do this and make a connection, but what connections do you honestly see? What tensions are there in thinking this way?

School Experiences
- What are you thinking about the school? The children?
- Have you heard this somewhere else?
- Who are you interacting with?
- What stories can you tell me about your children, your school … that you think you would not have heard in a non-multicultural setting?
- What have you found that you expected? Not expected?
- Can you describe an experience that has surprised you?
- Can you describe an experience that has been uncomfortable for you?
- What is the significance of that story?

What Do You Need?
- What kinds of support do you need as you learn to teach here?
- What kinds of talk would you suggest that we engage in?

In order to establish a relaxed tone for the first group interview and to thank them for their time, I ordered pizza, and we sat after school for 75 minutes, ate pizza and talked. I had come with my prepared questions, but they began with their own stories and without my prodding as an interviewer. Finally, after almost an hour of conversation, I realized that we had not addressed many of the questions that I wanted to ask, and so I interjected myself as a researcher and guided the conversations through some of my pre-designed questions.

I simply asked them if they had stories to share about their experiences in the school that they “might not have had in a school if it was not multicultural” (Group Interview 1, 2-17-05). The dialogue that followed was enlightening, and they seemed to want to keep talking, but it was
time for us to leave for our Thursday student teacher seminar on campus, so we had to stop our conversation. (see Chapter 4: Analysis: Homework and Behavior for a discussion on this group dialogue.) As they readied to leave for campus, I gave them the tape recorder and asked them that if they wanted, they could extend their interview-conversation in their car on the way back to campus. (They all carpoled that day.) During this car ride home, the four of them taped a 5 minute conversation and gave it to me as data. We called this conversation “Car Talk.” Since they were willing to tape this conversation, I bought another tape-recorder and left it with them to have in their car. I suggested that they could tape other “car talk” and could also bring the recorder into school so that they could record casual conversations that they thought were related to my research interests.

Second individual interview.

The next step in my data collection process for Phase II was the second individual interview. I read the transcriptions of their first interviews, the group interview, and the Car Talk and developed questions based on my comparison of their responses and my ongoing research questions. I also constantly compared their responses with my own Research Journal and some of the questions I was asking as a “student teacher.” I developed common questions for the second interview with the four student teachers, but I also developed specific individual follow-up questions based on topics they had each discussed in previous interviews. I thought that by asking participant-specific questions, I could hopefully understand in more detail how they were each thinking. The common questions for the second interview are in Table 7.

Table 7

Questions for Individual Interview 2

Student Teacher Questions: Individual Interview 2

- Some of you said that you were surprised about Gilmer Park. Since it was in the city, you expected the children to have “more issues.” You did not find the school or the children to have the qualities you expected in a city school. This was an early interpretation. What would you say now about your overall understanding of what the school, children, and families are like?
- What do you mean when you say “issues”?
- Tell me a story about something that happened in your classroom that you don’t think would have happened in a school that is not ‘multicultural’?
- What have you found that you expected? Not expected?
- Can you describe an experience that has been uncomfortable for you?
- Can you describe anything that prepared you for “teaching other people’s children”? What are you drawing on as you figure out how to teach here?
- How have your ideas about the school and children changed since the beginning of the semester?

Second group interview.

I followed the same procedure for the second group interview (March 21, 2005). I studied the transcribed interviews and developed more questions for the group. However, based on the First Group Interview, I realized that they could talk at length about numerous experiences and
questions during our group interviews. For this last Group Interview, I planned to guide the topics in order to become more focused. I prepared my list of questions, made copies, and had the questions on our interview table alongside the pizza when they arrived after school. I told them that I had an extensive question list and wanted them to select questions that they perceived as interesting or that they wanted to address. This approach helped me guide their talk, while still giving them autonomy of choice about the topics. Table 8 includes the Questions for Group Interview 2.

Table 8

Questions for Group Interview 2
Student Teacher Questions: Group Interview 2

1. What questions about teaching “other people’s children” are you developing while you are in your classroom and in this school?
2. How are you managing the children’s relationships with each other? (We talked before about how the children were talking to each other; sometimes you mentioned that the children were being ‘mean’ to each other.”) How are you responding to their talk and comments to each other?
3. What are you learning about the children and their home culture?
4. Some of you thought that the children would have had more ‘issues’ here at this school. What are you finding out about that?
5. How’s the homework issue going?
6. What do you remember about the seminar on poverty?
7. Can you think of something that you thought would be true about teaching in a multicultural school that has changed since you were here? What caused the change?
8. Has anything occurred that made you uncomfortable?
9. What have you experienced that you expected?
10. What have you experienced that you did not expect?
11. Can you think of an experience that has “opened your eyes?”
12. What have you experienced that has been difficult or surprising?
13. What successes are you experiencing?
14. Can you think of anything that prepared you for being here?
15. What do you think culturally responsive teaching is?
16. Could I come and observe you?

Third individual interview.

For the third and final individual interview, I followed the same procedure that I used for the second individual interview. I repeated many questions from interview to interview because the questions were open-ended and could apply at any time during the semester. Also, we had not always had the opportunity to discuss a question earlier, so I added that question to a later interview. Table 9 is the list of common questions that I used for the third individual interview.
Table 9

Questions for Individual Interview 3

Student Teacher Questions: Individual Interview 3

- What have you learned about your own socio-cultural identity while being here?
- Tell me a story about something that happened in your classroom, that you don’t think would have happened in a school that is not “multicultural.”
- What have you found to be true about teaching in multicultural schools?
- What have you found to be not true about teaching in multicultural schools?
- How would you describe a positive experience you have had with the children and families?
- How have your ideas about teaching and learning in a multicultural school changed? What accounts for this change?
- What do you wish you had known before you came here?
- How would you describe the culture of the school? The children, families, teachers, community, administration?
- Sometimes we say children are the same – what makes them the same?
- Sometimes we say children are different – what makes them different?

Other data.

While the interviews were my primary source of data for Phase II, I also printed and filed e-mails to and from the four participants. One student teacher, Susan, showed me some samples of children’s work in which the children wrote about their ideas about “culture.” I copied the children’s work and added them to my empirical materials as representations of the student teachers’ perspectives on diversity and schools.

Finally, I had not planned to use any quantitative data; however, at the end of the semester, the student teachers completed two Likert-scale surveys, the Personal Beliefs about Diversity Scale and Professional Beliefs about Diversity Scale (Pohan & Aquilar, 2001) for the university program directors. After the student teachers had completed their surveys, I asked the four participants if I could use their surveys in my data collection. They each gave their consent, and I collected their four surveys only for my analysis. I report on this survey as a Postscript at the end of Chapter 3.

Phase III: Analysis Process and Writing

Fall Analysis

My specific analysis processes were varied, as I will describe in this section; however, my overall analytical approach included the constant comparison (Merriam, 1998, p. 18) of data between data sources and across time. I had no intent of generating theory, but constantly compared the data so as to gain insight into the student teachers’ perceptions. In order to discover themes and insights from the Participants’ experiences, I used an inductive approach to my analysis, seeking to find the emic themes from the Participants’ own stories and their explanations of those stories. Thus, I integrate narrative analysis into my analytical approaches because I investigated the ways in which the Participants expressed their understandings of
people and the school through their stories. The Participants’ stories were often about the concrete and everyday experiences in the school, yet through my analysis, I hoped to discover how those lived experiences could “stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information (Merriam, pp. 179-180) to my broader interests in the “Knowledge,” “Practice,” and “Teacher Learning” Questions.

As I described in Phase I: Data Collection, my Research Journal included Field Notes, Field Note Tales, Asides, and Commentaries (Emerson et al., 1995). By including all of my writing in the same Research Journal in sequential order, the Journal became a holistic “running record” of my experiences in the school and my analytical thinking about those experiences. My analysis process began during the Fall Semester as I constantly thought about what I was experiencing, and as I wrote the “Asides” and “Commentaries” in my Research Journal. This writing became early analysis of my experiences.

Additionally, I found that my analysis processes were highly intuitive and recursive in that my data collection affected what I was able to analyze, and my analysis of that data changed the questions I asked throughout the year. My writing and analysis of my concrete experiences led me to develop and ask questions based on my concrete experiences, and which caused me to view my experiences differently. As I composed and reflected, I developed research questions either for Tison, other research informants, or for the student teacher participants in Phase II. These questions were important. Consequently, I created another computer document entitled “Questions,” and as my questions emerged while I wrote in my Research Journal, I added those questions to that computer document (Questions) so that I would have easy access to an ongoing collection of my queries. This was a rough list, but I used this record of “Questions” as I made final decisions about what to ask my participants and research informants during interviews.

This entry about my methodology reveals some of my early thinking about my analysis processes.

Excerpts from Dana’ Research Journal

11/30/04 How have I used constant comparison analysis? I suppose I have chosen to use delayed and selective constant comparison analysis up till now. Before I began my second interview with Tison two weeks ago, I sat down with all my field notes and reread and developed my questions for the interview. As I developed the questions, I put them into three categories… questions I had about myself as a student teacher in her classroom, questions about the research site, and questions about race and ethnicity.

This was my first systematic reread of my field notes. I had not wanted to methodically and constantly analyze my experiences early in the semester because I did not want to allow what I was thinking in the beginning weeks to influence the remainder of my research. I only wanted to come home and record what was happening, or what seemed important at the time, without immediately focusing on issues that were repeated or emphasized in the beginning. I wanted to have a “mass” of documentation that I would then begin to analyze. I think I could wait to begin analysis through constantly comparing my experiences with my own questions and the student teachers’ experiences because of the luxury of time that I had in my year-long study. If this had been a one-semester study, I may have needed to compare my data constantly from the beginning.
Winter Analysis and Writing

During the winter break, I reread my Research Journal and color coded entries so as to be able to find topics of interest based on color. I realized that since I had such a quantity of data, I needed to be able to locate entries at first, simply by topic. The topics of interest that I used for the color-coding were a) My Relationship with Tison, b) Tison’s talk about her African American identity, c) Stories about the Children, d) My Teaching and Pedagogy, e) School Demographics and Environment, f) Stories about Cultural Identity, g) Children’s Behavior, h) Aside and Commentary Entries, and i) Writing Entries about Methodology. As I carefully reread my Research Journal during this early analysis and sorting, I used this study of my own stories to consider the direction of my questions and a few of my own emerging themes.

I also began writing about what I understood about the school and community context based on what I had learned from the Research Informants, statistics from census and city planning information, and observing the children and families. This writing is found later in Chapter 3 and is entitled, “Research Context.”

Spring Analysis and Writing

During the Spring Semester (January until June), I conducted ongoing analysis. As I described in “Phase II: Interviews.” I used my study of the transcripts to identity topics of significance so that I could craft questions that followed these themes. As a writing task, I began to keep an ongoing record of my methods, and I continued composing “Research Context.”

Summer Analysis, Synthesis, and Writing

As the story is co-created, it loses its unique authorship and becomes something mutual.
Gergen, M. 2004, p. 280

I waited until the student teachers completed their semesters before I thoroughly studied the transcripts and began to look at themes that emerged for my final analysis and synthesis. I trusted that as I read my collection of data again, the data and my responses to the texts would reveal the topics of significance in our conversations. What would be most important for me to investigate more closely?

As I read, I found my participants’ stories to be provocative; they were each different, rich in detail and emotion, and revealed biases and understandings I could not have known about without the interview-conversations. I proceeded with an analytic strategy by which I would read the data and organize it in several ways - according to sequence, according to questions, and according to themes or topics. My overall task was to “construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179) in the Participants’ stories, an analysis task and process which I found to be “highly intuitive” (p. 179). I began by literally using the mobility of the written forms to move their stories around, and in doing so, I would look beyond sequence and see patterns.

Initial processes: topic index.

My first steps of final analysis began by making a list of the topics we discussed during the interviews (with the page numbers) so that I would have a “topic index” of the flow of conversation to which I could refer. The Topic Index was like a Table of Contents for my ready reference. After I completed all of these outlines, I reread them to see if I saw any patterns or an emphasis of topics in the overall flow of conversations. As I made these lists, I also watched to
see if any larger issues were embedded in the conversations and kept a running list of those issues, such as “Books and Resources” that the student teachers cited. These became my beginning topics, themes, and codes.

*Initial processes: early analysis of questions.*

For my second analysis strategy, I looked at each of the interviews and found the questions that I had asked and cut the interviews apart and organized the parts according to the questions. Since my interviews were conversational in nature, I sometimes found that the student teacher and I were talking about a “topic,” but I had not asked a question. I read that section of conversation and decided, “What question is this conversation answering or discussing?” Then I cut that section away and labeled it with a question or topic like “Children and Conflict” and added these topics to the list of issues I had already found.

By the end of this organizing and sorting strategy, I had many sections of texts paper-clipped together by questions and topics. Some of the sets of questions had been answered by all the student teachers, and some of the questions had only been addressed by one of the student teachers. So, there was not a way to completely compare student teacher responses to each question. Another problem was that some discussions fit several categories. I had to select one primary relationship and note how this conversation also fit into other topics or questions.

*Initial processes: early analysis by topics or themes.*

After seeing the complexity of groupings that I had discovered in my indexing and sorting tasks, I returned to some readings about research and took notes on method, analysis, narrative analysis, and writing (Alverman, 2000; Becker, 1998; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Gergen, M. 2004; Nespor & Barber, 1995; Richardson, 1997; Freeman, 2004). I reviewed my Topic Index of each interview, so that I could remember the overview of the larger body of data and in particular the student teacher’s stories. I began to identify topics that I thought were worthy of note. Some of these “themes” or topics were interesting because they were repeated in our talks such as “homework,” and other themes were interesting because they were related to an analytic issue such as “construction of race.”

I did not attempt to conceptualize what each of these topics or themes meant; I simply wanted to begin with a set of categories or codes by which I could organize my data for further analysis. I worked with this list of my early ideas and topics as my “codes,” knowing that I would eventually eliminate, combine, and subsume some ideas into others and find new ones. I list the themes that I identified as “notable” at this beginning point in my analysis in Table 10.

Finally, while keeping my themes and topics in mind, I began to read the interviews a third time, straight through by interview number. I started by trusting Freeman (2004) when he said that “not only is there no discrete method being relied upon, … the process of analysis [is] highly exploratory and speculative” (p. 74). I hoped that I could find “by the nature of the phenomenon, what’s interesting about it, and what’s worth saying” (p. 71). I knew that the stories were telling me something. This dissertation would be my story of the student teachers’ stories.
For this last sorting process, I took a second copy of the interviews and began to cut and sort them by these topics and themes. As I read the paper copy of the transcript and identified which theme a section of the transcript was related to, I would cut the section of the paper copy and label it by its topic or theme (such as “Homework”). If the text was also related to another topic (such as Value of Education), I used another copy of the transcripts to identify a text with a second theme. While reading, if I had an analytical idea, I would write more extensively about that “train of thought” on a computer document entitled, Analysis Writing. I kept another document open on my desktop called, “Method Writing,” and as I worked through my analytical process, I kept a record of the process by recording my steps on this document. These sorting procedures helped me review the transcripts again and again as I moved them around and grouped them by themes. This process gave me a sense of familiarity with the student teachers’ stories and how they were significant.

Determining significance.
As a researcher, I chose themes that were both significant to the student teachers and to me and that I wanted to examine more closely. I determined significance at first by recognizing a topic as a topic that I was compelled to understand. I knew I could not discuss in this written

Table 10

Beginning Themes or Codes

“Attitude” (exhibited by children)
Books and resources the student teachers cited
Communication Style
Comparison to Self (Student teachers comparing this school and the families to their own experience)
Conflict between children
Teaching content to a multicultural audience
Construction of culture, race, diversity, multicultural, personality
Conflict between “culturally responsive practice” and stereotypes
Cultural months (i.e. Black History Month)
Descriptions of children and families
Emotion (when student teachers talked about emotion, such as “shock”)
Their talk about their future classrooms
Hair and Beauty
Homework
“Issues” in the city
Identity and relationships
Preconceptions, perceptions, and change
Popular culture (music, videos, movies)
Student teachers’ questions
Student teachers’ relationships with me
Religious or Spiritual influences
Terms: stern, consistency, flexibility, personality
Responses to university program
Value of education (conflict between home and school)
work of my year-long study every topic or theme. What I learned could be a book, and it was difficult for me as a researcher to minimize what I had experienced. However, I assumed that this is truth in a researcher’s life.

Since the piles of sorts were “complex,” I decided to select a beginning point. I began by rereading the student teachers’ discussion of their own personal and family backgrounds, their preconceptions of the school, and their early perceptions after being at Gilmer Park for 1-3 days. I summarized the student teachers’ backgrounds and perceptions; the writing serves as an introduction to each participant student teachers. I did not see them as generalized “student teachers,” but as persons with specific histories, prior experiences, and preconceptions.

After writing an introduction for each student teacher, I wanted to determine a topic of significance to investigate from Table 10. Any of these themes would have been a place to begin a closer analysis; however, I wanted the “case to define the concept” rather than the let the “concept define the case” (Becker, 1998, p. 124). Therefore, I selected an entry point, the topic of “Homework,” because “homework” seemed like a simple topic for a beginning point. “Homework” was a common school routine, it was not a directly “analytic” construct like “identity,” and it seemed to be a major topic of discussion at both of the group interviews. “Homework” was a simple object that I thought held such power in the student teachers’ comments, both in the amount of time we spent talking about problems they were having with homework and in their frustration level about “homework.” I was curious to investigate more closely what the student teachers said. I had a feeling after reading the interviews several times during my preliminary sorting and coding, that the paper object of “homework” represented more than the paper. Becker (1998) stated, “The object is…the embodiment in physical form of all the actions everyone took to bring it into being,” so I decided to look closely at this “concrete” artifact (p. 47). I thought this would be a place for me to begin analysis without making an early assumption about a major concept of significance.

**Analysis leads to analysis.**

I developed an analytical process for that first topic of significance. I read and reread, found significant pieces of conversations, interpreted these conversations, and used writing as an analytical and interpretive tool. (See the section below, “Writing as Analysis” for my discussion of how I used writing as an analytical tool.) I told the story about their conversation and found contradictions and ambiguities in the participants’ concerns. I began my formal writing and analysis with “Homework and Behavior,” but then continued my analysis in three subsequent stages. Each stage of analysis led to the next stage, and I used a different analytical process for each stage.

As I completed writing about “Homework” and realized that the participants used the topic of “homework” to talk about the children’s families, I became curious about how my participants further described the children, families, school, and community in other stories that they told me. Therefore, my next analytical process became an investigation of how the student teachers described the children and families. I summarized the participants’ “Descriptions of Children and Families” as Beginning Impressions, Developing Impressions, and Final Descriptions from their three interviews. While I was involved in this process of analysis, interpretation, and writing, I heard the student teachers talking about the concept of “diversity” in very different ways. Therefore, I investigated and wrote about the ways in which the student teachers talked about topics related to diversity and found themes within their narratives. I describe the analytical results in each case study as narrative themes.
As I examined the data and composed my written interpretations, I constantly recorded my preliminary findings as a way to synthesize a “cross-case analysis” as my final analytic process. I kept considering how I could get from my starting point with “Homework” to my endpoint “Conclusions and Recommendations” and make sense with four individual case studies and a final collective story (Richardson, 1997). I organized the case studies in this order – Cameron, Faith, Lily, and Susan. This order fit two categories - first, descending grade level order, because Cameron was in 5th grade, Faith and Lily were in the 4th grade, and Susan was in the 3rd grade. Second, this sequence also followed an alphabetical order by their first names.

Writing as analysis.

Since the student teachers talked about homework at both group interviews, I saw this topic as a “safe” place to start my closer analysis. However, I found that when I tried to “analyze” their discussion, I needed to write in order to see what I was noticing and to make my analysis logical and organized. Consequently, my writing process literally became part of my analysis process. I was able to think about (analyze) the texts more carefully if I had to organize the themes I was finding into my own words on paper. As I wrote, I could see what themes I did and did not understand, how my themes grouped and didn’t group together in a section of text, and what questions I needed to pursue in order to be able to explain the themes I was interpreting. For example, I might begin by thinking I was writing about an idea like “preconceptions about the city,” but as I wrote, I realized the topic was more about how the student teachers developed their preconceptions of the city.

For my writing process, I read the stack of cut up transcripts that I had labeled “Descriptions” in which the student teachers talked about the children and families. I began a closer analysis and highlighted phrases that summarized an idea, circled words that stood out, making notes in the margins about relationships between ideas. Then I wrote and described what I had found. I understood what Richardson (1997) said, that writing was analysis, and hoped that while I was writing, what I was finding would become more apparent to me. Therefore, reading, rereading, identifying relationships between ideas, and writing about what I heard in the student teachers’ stories became my analysis process.

During analysis, I had “aha” moments regarding how to best organize, outline, or synthesize the four case studies as a whole body of work in a cross-case analysis. For example, the section, “Homework and Behavior,” gave me an idea for a finding or recommendation. Therefore, I created a document on my desktop entitled “Ahas,” so that as I worked through the data, analysis, and writing, I would maintain a record of these insights so that I could synthesize them in my “Conclusions and Recommendations.” At the end of each of the analysis sections in Chapter 4, I recorded questions that each section raised for me, and that I wanted to address in the final chapter.

Analysis and synthesis: how do student teachers talk about diversity?

When I had read and sorted the transcripts in my earlier analysis processes, I could easily see how the student teachers used concepts like “diverse” in multiple ways within their own conversation and used the concept differently from each other. I was perplexed by the differences. I thought that a larger examination of how the student teachers thought about these concepts while they were in the school would become the major portion of my analytical work.

Again, I read through my set of cut-up transcripts that I thought were related to concepts like diversity, multicultural, race, and ethnicity and marked the sections and words that stood out. I took notes on each student teacher as I read, and began to write about each student teacher’s understanding of the concepts related to diversity.
I grouped the student teachers’ phrases onto pages of note paper entitled Race, Multicultural, Diversity, Population/Community, or whatever new topics came to the forefront, such as Socio-economic, Different, and Socio-cultural Identity. As I read, I identified new themes such as “how history affects our understanding of diversity,” what the student teachers “wondered about,” what “shocked” them, what it means to “be American,” relationships to “university courses,” “assumptions about the city,” “comparisons” to their own life experiences, things they “didn’t want to think about,” references to “family,” “guilt” and “emotion,” “media influences,” how the student teachers “monitored” themselves, “what is normal,” “personality” as difference, what is “socially acceptable,” and “visual imagery.” I had pages with each of those as a heading, and I recorded the student teachers’ related stories on those pages so that I could easily find the student teachers’ conversations about those topics. Through this sorting strategy, I had another picture of a collective story while looking at each participant as an individual case study.

As I analyzed, I had additional “aha” moments or new insights that I thought might lead me in a significant direction and added those to my list of “aha” insights. Sometimes they were insights about the student teachers’ “knowledge” and “practice,” and sometimes they were insights about what I thought teacher educators should consider when planning and conducting courses with teachers (the “teacher learning question”). Finally, I began my analysis of their responses as individual case studies by reading through those notes once again and making a set of notes for each separate student teacher. As I reviewed these notes, I created a working outline for my writing based on the case study’s primary themes. I reread their full transcripts to follow my questions and their conversations through the three individual interviews and added stories under my working outline according to its relevance.

I found that while I started to sort and write about their ideas about diversity, different related topics or themes emerged for each student teacher. For example, Cameron talked about diversity and race, but during her conversations about these topics, she was also interested in the whole notion of “what is normal?” and discussed how different people had different “realities.” Lily on the other hand, talked about diversity and race, but she was very interested in the concept of culture and the racial and cultural connections she made with her students. Therefore, I found very different themes in their transcripts beyond the initial concept of “diversity,” and therefore wrote about each case study in a different way. I tried to use the themes in their individual narratives to organize the structure of my analysis and writing.

As a final writing and analysis step, I took all the writing that I had done in each stage and integrated the writing into four individual case studies that introduced the participants, revealed the participants’ expectations about their student teaching experiences, explained their prior experiences with diversity, and then discussed, through my themes, an integrated summary of the student teachers’ “knowledge” and “practice” regarding the children, their families, and diversity.

Conclusions: collective story or cross-case analysis.

My final task was to develop a synthesis of understanding from the four individual case studies. Each student teacher told her own story, but I wanted to tell a “collective story” (Richardson, 1997). I used the questions at the end of each analysis section as a way to frame my process of cross-case analysis. I thought that by using the questions from each section, I would include each individual case study in my conclusions and recommendations. When I studied my long list of questions, I found themes in those questions that literally became an outline for the way in which I could present my conclusions.
I used the writing process once again as a key analysis tool, for as I wrote about each sub-topic in my conclusions, I sometimes reorganized, revised, and rethought my ideas. Since I had to put into words and text my interpretations of the student teachers’ concepts, it forced me to think differently and to analyze deeply some of the constructs related to my conclusions. Although my conclusions began with an outline, they emerged in final form during this writing, thinking, and revising process.

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Reliability

In keeping with my assumptions about knowledge and research (see Table 1), I have embraced a qualitative stance towards the nature of my inquiry and methodological processes. I have not accepted that the “psychometric assumption that the trinity of validity, generalizability, and reliability, all terms from the quantitative paradigm, are to be adhered to in research” (Janesick, 2000, p. 393) or that quantitative measures would give me “true” knowledge about student teachers. Qualitative measures correlated with the kinds of knowledge I wanted to generate about student teachers, a rich understanding and analysis based on my participants’ perspectives of their experiences at this particular school.

These qualitative choices also affected research issues regarding the “trinity of validity, generalizability, and reliability” (Janesick, p. 394) of my study. Janesick continues and I agree. “I hope that we can move beyond discussions of this trinity of psychometrics and get on with the discussion of powerful statements from carefully done, rigorous long-term studies that uncover the meanings of events in individual lives” (Janesick, p. 394). I do acknowledge that qualitative research must adhere to standards that ensure credibility and reliability in order to make a study trustworthy for the field of study. In qualitative studies, validity becomes “credibility,” or “Does my interpretation fit the student teachers’ stories?”

According to my epistemological notions that knowledge is relative and based on social relations, I know that another researcher could have interpreted or organized the stories that the student teachers told in many other ways. However, as a qualitative researcher, I must verify that my interpretations are one believable interpretation. First, I think that my interpretations are credible because they are based on my participants’ explanations and stories, as you will see in the analysis. I use their words from the transcripts. Second, I have reflected continually on my role as the researcher and participant-observer, and I have added my perspective at the end of each analytical section. Third, I also believe that I have made a case for my conclusions based on my development of questions for each section that then created a framework for a final cross-case analysis and synthesis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Finally, I asked the participants to member check my analysis, which they did. They each confirmed my writing with a few small changes which I note in each case study.

My methods were rigorous, another factor in credibility. These rigorous measures include my long-term commitment to my own fieldwork, my daily note-taking and writing, my careful selection of research questions based on my early analysis, and my attention to my participants’ histories, words, and questions. In addition, my knowledge of the research site as specific and influential to the evidence I gathered. The careful listening I did to those around me all represent qualitative methods that ensure rigor and thoroughness in data collection and analysis. I believe this chapter on my methodological assumptions and processes outlines how and why I made my methodological decisions about my three-phased design. I have also described in detail within this chapter how I made decisions about my analysis processes. It should be possible, that while my analytical processes were “messy” and varied, they were systematic in examining my data in-depth in many different ways. At times during the year, I met with my “critical friend” and chair
of my committee, Dr. Ann Potts, so that she could consider my research and analysis questions and give me feedback on my direction.

I have a reflexive nature, and so this personal quality enhanced my stance as a researcher and my attempts to be considerate and ethical in my relationships with the participants and my research informants. First, I supplied my participants with a written account of my research process and design and had them sign consent forms before they came to the school. I was ethical in privacy matters and turned off the tape recorder when student teachers or research informants talked about personal matters or asked me to turn off the recorder. We scheduled interviews based on their teaching schedules, my teaching schedule, and their teachers’ wishes so as to not interfere with their student teaching responsibilities. I used follow-up questions with my participants so as to check my understandings of their stories. I include their “member checks” in their case studies.

Richardson (1997) states that “triangulation” in sources of data is actually an outdated term for qualitative research. She prefers the term “crystallization” because of the multi-faceted nature of people’s lives and the way we can collect data to represent those lives. My empirical materials were “beyond” this triangulation and could be represented by this “crystal” image because I completed my study with a 650-page Research Journal, 35 interviews or conversations with student teachers and research informants (short and long interviews), a paper file of e-mails, a computer file of questions for each interview stage, data regarding the demographics of the school and community, and materials from the school. I hoped that all of this data would provide me with enough stories and information that I could provide my readers with “thick descriptions” of what I called my ethnographic case study.

I believe that my study has potential for usefulness in the field of multicultural teacher education. Many astute authors, researchers, and educators have written about teacher attitudes about diversity. However, I believed, along with Becker, that even small steps in research could lead to potential progress in understanding.

Heaven forbid that we just find out something routine, something that fits into the body of social science understanding we already have. Every finding, every tiny development in a field is hyped as a “revolution.” That ignores Kuhn’s analysis…which tells us that scientific revolutions are rare, that it is only by continuing to work on the same problems that workers in a discipline make any progress on anything (Becker, 1998, p. 88).

I did not expect to find a “revolution,” but I knew that my conclusions would influence my work as a teacher educator, and it would be other teacher educators’ task to determine if my findings influenced their own perspectives about how we prepare future teachers to teach “other people’s children.” I believe that small steps matter.

**Ethics**

As I mentioned, my participants were asked if they would be willing to participate and gave informed consent at the beginning of the study. They were not surprised by our work together. I felt some conflict in wanting to participate in our discussions without revealing my perspective or personal values regarding diversity because I did not want to change the nature of their comments. I made many efforts to gain their trust and to maintain relationships with each participant. I developed my relationships with them by listening to what was important to them, by letting them know they could depend on my visibility in the school, my attention to their individual schedules, and my respect for their opinions, regardless of whether I agreed or disagreed with them.
All names in this study are pseudonyms, except for my own and my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Ann Potts. My participants and school personnel selected their own pseudonyms at my request. For the children’s names, I made choices. If a child’s name was from an ethnic group, I used the Internet to find sites that listed baby names for those ethnic groups, as in the children in the third grade that were “Latino,” or from Cambodia. For names of locations, I selected some at random and eventually used names of Southern cities for some names because my study took place in a city in the Southeast.

Even though I used pseudonyms in this study, I informed my participants that it might be easy for some readers to determine who they were by the simple fact that they had peers who knew they were participating in a research project with me while they were in the midst of their student teaching semester. Therefore, it was possible for a peer or other university professor, to deduce who Lily was, for example, because they knew something about her identity and could determine who Lily was through her stories. Therefore, I knew that I could not ensure anonymity, and I told them so.

Researcher Note: Labels and Terms

I chose to use Black or African American, White, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian as the labels for race and ethnicity in this work. I am aware of other labels and many of the problems embedded with these labels (giving others the opportunity to name oneself, using one label as in “Asian” or “Hispanic” for multiple nationalities or ethnicities, using Native American rather than Indigenous People, for example), but I have used the labels that the school system used. I decided to capitalize the labels consistently, however, because I wanted them to be seen as labels or created titles, almost like proper nouns. I thought that if I used them with lower case letters, as in “white girl” or “black boy,” the words “black” and “white” represent something more real as when we use the adjectives “black crayon” or “white flower” and are referring to the actual colors of black and white. I did not want to use the words black and white as adjectives of description for people, but more as the labels and constructs we use in identifying people of different skin colors, for example. No White person is truly white, and no Black person is truly black, if we can even find those “true” colors in the universe.

Postscript

I add here one researcher’s note of interest. I did not intend to use any quantitative measures in my study. However, during the student teachers’ last days at the university, they returned to campus and participated in a university program Exit Interview in which they were asked about “diversity.” They also completed two Likert-scale surveys, The Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale and The Professional Beliefs about Diversity Scale (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). The university program intended to use the Exit Interview and survey results as part of the university’s assessment of their program. Each participant in my study gave me permission, after they completed the survey, to use their survey responses for my research study. Even though I had not planned to use quantitative measures in my study, I decided this would be additional data that might inform my understandings of their attitudes about diversity.

I waited until I had completed all of my case study analysis before quantifying the results of this survey, so that I would not have this information before I interpreted their stories. The results of their responses to the two surveys are in the following table (see Table 11). Generally, “low scores reflected general intolerance for diversity, whereas high scores reflected an openness or acceptance of most or all of the diversity issues” (Pohan & Aguilar, p. 4). The scale measures attitudes about diversity topics generally discussed in multicultural education courses: race,
ethnicity and culture, social class, gender, sexual orientation, exceptionality or issues about persons with disabilities, language diversity, and religion.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Personal Beliefs about Diversity</th>
<th>Professional Beliefs about Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>56.23 – 64.41</td>
<td>91.41- 105.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(omitted #19)</td>
<td>”I don’t really know.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>93 (omitted # 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean score based on field testing (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001.)

It is of particular interest to note that these quantitative results do not reflect the kinds of “attitudes” towards diversity that I found in the participants’ conversations. For example, you will read later that Cameron talked about her new perspectives on diversity. I would describe her as having very “positive beliefs about diversity,” and in particular, positive professional beliefs about the children and families at Gilmer Park. However, she “produced” the lowest score on this scale and thus would be assessed as having the “lowest general tolerance for diversity” of the group, even if I added five points to her score for her missing answer: 86 + 5 (highest possible positive answer for a single question) = 91). There are many possible explanations for this irony. For example, Cameron was making up all of her attitudes about diversity when I spoke to her, Cameron doesn’t like Likert scale surveys, Cameron was tired of talking about diversity at the end of the semester, Cameron misread some of the negatively worded items, Cameron had attitudes about diversity (such as opinions about roles of women or ability grouping) to which she would have responded negatively and thus skewed her overall score for her overall “beliefs about diversity.” My opinion is that the last example is what happened in Cameron’s case from my study of how she answered some of the questions. This is the subject of another thorough study. However, I include this data in this discussion to make two points.

My point is that the way we talk about diversity may be entirely different than how we might answer a question, or label ourselves, or even write about beliefs and attitudes. This survey substantiated my choice of qualitative design and my rigorous methods in attempting to understand the complexity of people’s ideas, something a quantitative measure could never do. How different Cameron’s, Faith’s, Lily’s, and Susan’s stories were compared to these numbers that represent their personal and professional beliefs about diversity. The notion of using a survey to determine a person’s beliefs about a complex idea such as “culture” or “diversity” is truly problematized by the paradox in how the numbers represent or don’t represent the student teachers’ lives in this case study.

A second subsidiary point is that as teacher educators, we must understand how important our talk is in understanding our beliefs, ourselves, and others and not to depend solely on quantitative measures in making judgments about the successes of our programs or the impact of
a course on a student’s views, although they do have a place in our research. Qualitative research is a necessary act in understanding people. My participants’ stories tell much more than a score of “86-91,” a low score in relation to the “mean.” I suggest that you notice each of the participant’s scores on this scale and remember them as you read their rich narratives about their life in the multicultural school.

Research Context

Introduction

Everything has to be someplace. Becker, 1998

Every research site is a case of some general category, and so knowledge about it gives knowledge about a generalized phenomenon. We can pretend that it is just like all the other cases, or at least is like them in all relevant ways, but only if we ignore all its local, peculiar characteristics. Becker, 1998, p. 52

As already noted, it is the university’s mission to provide opportunities for student teachers to work in and interact with multicultural populations. When we hear the terms “diverse populations,” “multicultural schools,” or “urban schools,” I suppose that, depending on our world view and scholarship, we would picture a school that is not all or predominantly White, a school that has diverse faces and skin tones, and a school that perhaps includes diversity in languages. I would suggest that if we walked into any single multicultural elementary school in our country, we would find a place with a particular socio-cultural identity and a community history that has evolved across changes in time and space and ideology. During my first semester at Gilmer Park Elementary, one of my tasks was to use an ethnographic approach to this case study by understanding the multicultural nature of the school and community in which the student teachers would be working. What makes this school multicultural or diverse? I looked for the complexities embedded in this school’s multicultural identity beyond the racial, ethnic, and classed identities represented in basic enrollment figures.

While my inquiry was a case study of student teacher experiences in a school, I also knew that I could not place an invisible barrier around the student teachers and myself and study “just us” and our thinking about the school. My early naive beliefs as an educator included the misguided assumption that a school was a box. Within that box were smaller classroom boxes in which I thought teachers could close their classroom doors and make their classrooms havens of learning. I also believed that teachers had control over the confines within their walls. I now believe that schools and classrooms are a “tangled” network of systems of cultural, economic, political, and personal forces (Nespor, 1997).

Teachers’ classrooms are influenced by such factors, factors over which teachers have little control. The pictures we place on our bulletin boards, the choices of topics that we teach, the materials we bring into our classrooms -- all come from our choices and personality, but are heavily influenced and often controlled by the cultural, economic, and political climate within which we find ourselves. I cannot, and student teachers cannot, close our doors and teach in an isolated context. The four student teachers and I were each a node on this complex web of intersected and networked agencies, families, cultural patterns, expectations, economics, political
ideology, personal lives and assumptions about the world, as well as about teaching and learning (Nespor). My task was to understand these student teachers as they became an intersection in this web in this particular multicultural context.

Equally interesting to me was my contention that elementary schools are the one place in our nation where people come together from varied social groups and cultures. The elementary school is a place (and a time in a child’s life) when social groups are more porous, they cross groups at lunch and on the playground, as compared to more rigid social group formations that are seen in high school (Tatum, 1997).

First Impressions

My first experiences at Gilmer Park Elementary School occurred when I served as a university supervisor and mentor for student teachers from my graduate school for one semester during the year prior to this study. From this supervisory experience, I recognized Gilmer Park as a place where there was a larger enrollment of people of color than of White children, and that the immediate neighborhood surrounding the school was one of working or middle-class brick homes built in the 1950’s. I saw both White and African American families in the yards as I drove to school.

While I was in preliminary talks with Tison during the Spring Semester about my desire to work in her classroom the next year, I visited her classroom on Career Day. Parents who volunteered came for the morning and talked to each third grade class about their work. It was there that I formulated some of my first questions about the school, because I had the chance to talk with family members and see them as community cultural agents. In the afternoon, I visited with one father and mother during a cookout. The father (African American male) explained that he did not intend for his son to attend the required middle school because he and his wife (White female) both believed that the middle school was in an entirely different kind of neighborhood than Gilmer Park’s neighborhood even though they were just across the highway from each other. The father, who was a police officer, based his opinion on police reports about assaults in neighborhoods and schools. “I had no idea that there was a difference in the environments at two schools that were both multicultural and were placed within a couple of miles from each other” (My Research Journal 6/8/04). I found that talking with parents might be a direct way of understanding the school and community, than my previous experience of driving through the neighborhood.

When I arrived at Gilmer Park’s doorstep as a researcher in August of 2004, I was prepared to investigate the nature of this multicultural school. During one of the in-service days before children arrived in August, I had my first real look at the school’s community. The principal at the school, Ms. Hope, planned a bus tour of the school community for the faculty. I recorded the experience in my Research Journal that night. The details of this story and what I saw are featured in Appendix I.

This bus trip was my first real introduction to the community. In my conversations with Research Informants (teachers, principal, staff) throughout the year, the community became more complex rather than apparent and understandable. The community included a broad range of people and identities that could be described by various race, classes, ethnicities, and languages. The neighborhood was not like an urban setting in a large city with row houses or high-rise apartments with heavy “urban” traffic. It was not like a planned suburban “residential” development that has cohesive and pre-planned architecture, lush landscaping, related street names, and community buildings. Gilmer Park’s district was a patchwork of small homes, bigger
homes, apartments, trailers, projects, subsidized housing, and “the hood” (according to Tison and Mr. Johnson), a school district that represented a diversity of lives.

**The City**

“My school” (I like to think I belonged there, if only for this year) was tucked away in a community that is in a Southeastern city called Oakland, a city with a population between 250,000 and 300,000 according to the Census Summary Data 2000. This is a city that I believe is still recovering from historical racial issues such as desegregation, Jim Crow laws, and municipal planning that decimated a well-established African American community in preference for a Civic Center and building restoration projects. The city’s history with desegregation and urban renewal has been documented and written about, but I must choose to omit those stories and use fictitious names as I uphold my promise of confidentiality to the school system.

It is important to note that Oakland continues to be identified as one of the most segregated cities in the South, based on residential census data. (The published source for this commentary is unidentified in this document to maintain confidentiality.) In the city, there are still reminders of segregation, desegregation, and integration. As a personal example, Tison told me a story about the twin water fountains – one for Whites and one for Blacks – two water fountains that still stand in her neighborhood. While the signs that determined which persons could use which fountain are gone, she said that the fact that they are still standing in a local park makes them simple concrete reminders of a history that hasn’t or can’t be totally forgotten. I heard other examples of the effects of segregation and desegregation. Ms. Jade and Mr. Johnson told me stories of the effects of Jim Crow laws on their childhood schooling experiences, the choices their families made about their homes, and current ongoing instances of racist behaviors towards Mr. Johnson’s local African American church.

As Tison and the principal told me, the city is essentially divided into quadrants. One is populated by middle-class to wealthy whites, one by poor or working-class whites, one by mostly African-Americans and now a mix of racial and ethnic identities, and the fourth quadrant is considered a mostly industrial sector. The quadrants in which mostly Black and Hispanic and other mixed and racial/ethnic identities reside used to be a White neighborhood and Black families used to live more in the center of the city. But as desegregation occurred and the downtown African American neighborhood was taken over by “revitalization” efforts, many African Americans moved to the quadrant in which Gilmer Park is located. White flight occurred towards the surrounding county and the wealthier or mostly-White quadrant (Interviews with Ms. Jade). In the older parts of the city, the central part, are large historic turn-of-the-century Victorian homes. Tison said, “Yeah, like the areas … they were beautiful houses because all of the Whites used to live in this area and then they moved out.” I realized that Oakland’s residential areas had changed over time, and I was curious about how this had affected Gilmer Park.

**School and Neighborhood**

**The School’s Physical Plant**

Gilmer Park was built in 1950, but the physical plant has been altered in the past 50 years as it was deemed necessary to meet new physical and academic needs. When I came to the front doors on my first visit, I found them locked. I assumed that “locked doors” was a common feature of all of the city schools; however, the principal told me the story of how she had asked for the locks to be installed.
Interview with Ms. Hope  1/5/05

One of our kid’s mothers was murdered right before Christmas – and I mean right before. And I decided that - during the holidays it was reported that the murderer was still on the loose – and he was intending to come to school to kill the kid. So, I immediately got security…. So, that’s why we have the security system, and when kids come in the front door – in the morning – every once in a while a kid’ll go “whew!” Like this is THE safe place and they make mention of that.

Ms. Hope said that “there are lots of murders and fires and things like that [in the city]. And whenever I hear on the news there’s been something, in this section of the city, I just perk right up. Several times, we’ve had to call kids together and extra people - extra guidance counselors - because there’s been a murder in our neighborhood or whatever. These are some changes in the last few years.” I had interpreted this simple physical feature of the school (locked doors) as a school wide policy; however, this lock actually represented stories and actions I knew nothing about until this interview, halfway through my year. Driving through the tidy homes adjacent to the school, I would have never guessed that worrying about murders would have been an issue.

Gilmer Park’s original structure and main part of the building is a two-story building with stairways at either end of the hallway and an elevator for access. It was built in the decade after World War II. Hallways shine with shiny rectangle block walls and terrazzo floors. There was no evidence of urban deterioration or an unkempt schoolyard. Attached to this main building is a one-story addition. This addition includes another traditional hallway with a strip of three “self-contained” classrooms on either side. The last pair of classrooms have doorways on their exterior wall that lead to extra instructional spaces. These rooms are attached to the one-story building like sidecars. The sidecar spaces were designed as a combination government-courtroom, a fully equipped kitchen, and a combination teacher workroom and small computer lab.

These newer additions look as if they had been created as “state of the art” educational spaces at the time, and Ms. Hope explained that the school obtained money for building and furnishing the rooms with grant monies for schools that develop themes to attract White children, so as to advance integration and avoid segregation.

Neighborhood

Particularly interesting is Gilmer Park’s neighborhood. Adjacent to the school on one side is a 1950’s development of tidy homes. Close by on three sides of the school are major commercial districts that include two malls, strip shopping centers, and clusters of “chain” variety stores. Just past the modern 1980’s mall is a four-lane limited access highway and beyond the highway is another cluster of neighborhoods that belong to the school’s district that is more toward the center of the city. My Research Informants at the school told me about the history of the neighborhood and how it had changed and was continuing to change. A record of the information I learned from them about the school’s neighborhood is in Appendix J.
Demographics of the Neighborhood and School

Racial and Ethnic Demographics of the Neighborhood

According to city records, the school district lies within three of the city’s planning districts, and each submit their own “Neighborhood Plans” to the City Planning Commission. These statistics show how the neighborhood has changed in the past ten years from mostly-White to a more diverse community. I provide census and district statistics in Appendix K as a description of the school neighborhood’s demographics and how the demographics have changed.

Tison had lived in the Gilmer Park neighborhood for 20 years and called her neighborhood “gray.” She showed me on a map of the city where the “gray” area was. “Here is the gray area where I live, right? But then the gray area cuts off … here,” and she showed me where the neighborhood changed to an all Black residential area. I wondered what she meant by gray and she explained, “You can’t tell the difference between who lives where because … it could be Black or White.” She explained that to her “gray,” meant that the neighborhood neither looked like a White or Black neighborhood. She made this determination by the way in which the residents maintained their homes or the physical appearance of the yards and homes. She named three schools in close proximity to Gilmer Park that were also in totally mixed neighborhoods. “Cumberland and our school and Parkside are kind of in the gray area because this neighborhood is all gray.” But in another direction on the map, the neighborhood was “predominantly Black.”

Finally, I was able to see the differences in neighborhoods that Tison had described when she and I accompanied our third graders on a school bus from the school to another quadrant of the city during the children’s annual trip to a large city pool. Tison began showing me how the neighborhoods changed as we traveled from our school neighborhood, into a “rougher” neighborhood, and then on to the farther quadrant of the city that was mostly White and wealthier. I asked her again what she meant by “gray.” She said that she used the word “gray” to mean mixed, but not bad, with people of a higher class of people and jobs than what she pointed out in the poorer neighborhood. As she pointed out the poorer area we were traveling through, she said, “They’re living kind of rough. There’s been a lot of people get killed over here. Now we’re easing on out.” We crossed a bridge, and I saw the homes change, the businesses change, the landscape change, and we were in the all or mostly-White area of town where the aquatic center was built. (Based on Research Journal, 12-04).

Racial and Ethnic Demographics of the School

I secured information about the school’s racial and ethnic enrollment from Ms. Moses, the administrative assistant. When I asked, she said that children’s race or ethnicity was determined based on the parents’ responses on the child’s enrollment forms. She stated that generally, if the race and ethnicity question was left unanswered on enrollment papers, the school determined race or ethnicity based on the mother’s race or ethnicity. These were the numbers (see Table 12) as of September 30, 2004.
Table 12

**Gilmer Park Enrollment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>254</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers still don’t tell all the stories about the children’s identities and what makes the school multicultural. These five racial and ethnic categories are much simpler than the human physical features that I saw in the hallways everyday. The city is not located on a harbor or border city like Los Angeles, New York, or El Paso where identities may be more blended, as in finding children with multiple ethnic backgrounds. [see Pollock (2004) as she describes children with blended identities from many racial and ethnic categories in one school.]

The “race bending” at Gilmer Park Elementary occurs most often in discussions about bi-racial children who have one White and one Black parent, or “mixed” grandparents. It was not always obvious to me which children were considered to be African American or bi-racial. Sometimes at lunch, Tison or Mr. Johnson would say, “He’s bi,” as a way to describe a child and his racial identity. I was perplexed sometimes at the “labeling,” and so were Tison, Mr. Johnson, and Ms. Jade. For example, we discovered that Chad, who was clearly bi-racial and light-brown, was identified as White on his school enrollment papers by his adoptive parents who were both White.

I also knew that immigration demographics were not reflected in the enrollment figures in Table 12 and performed another type of “race-bending.” Students were labeled alike according to some racial characteristics despite their ethnic differences. Some of the children who were labeled as African American in enrollment statistics were Black but were also recent immigrants from Liberia and Sudan. Other children were identified as White, but had come to the country from Bosnia. Some of these children were new English speakers and others were proficient. A description of the children who were English Language Learners appears in Appendix J.

I also found that the children talked about and resisted talk about their parent’s racial identity and in doing so were somewhat confronted with the effects of “race-bending.” I was helping Jackie (African American female) one day with a math concept. She stopped in the middle of the lesson and told me about how the other children had upset her. She explained that she lived with her wonderful grandmother (White) because her mother couldn’t take care of her. (Jackie whispered that her mom and dad lived on the street.) Jackie said it upset her when the other children thought Jackie was adopted because her grandmother was White. I asked her why she thought people believed she was adopted. Jackie replied, “We don’t look alike.”

**Socio-economic Demographics of the Neighborhood**

Race and ethnicity and language can be visual markers of difference in the school, but the socio-economic marker of socio-economic standing is often invisible. I knew that even if I made observations about the children’s homes, I could not be certain about income levels. To be more exact in my understandings about the socioeconomic class or income levels of the residents, I looked at the Census data, rather than depend on my assessment of home sizes and the
assumptions I might make about families based on a drive-through experience or the children’s clothing choices. The Census data uses different sectors of the city for its reporting and aggregation of information than the school districting sectors. Appendix L includes a summary of the area’s income levels. These statistics show that the economic levels in the households in the area are varied, with some households falling in the highest levels of income. About 10% of families in the school’s neighborhood are determined to be within “poverty status.” There are more families within “poverty status” in the Census Tract that is west of the school, closer to the center of the city, but a neighborhood that is partially districted to attend Gilmer Park.

**Socio-economic Demographics of the School**

The socio-economic level of children’s families was not always apparent. During our second group interview in March, one student teacher shared a conversation she had had with her cooperating teacher. Faith told us that her teacher had asked her to “pick out the one child in our class who is fully welfare dependent.” Faith said that she incorrectly named “about six or seven names,” but her teacher explained that the child would “be the last person you’d think of.” Faith was shocked because the child who came to school “with Vera Bradley bags or with the Louis Vitton bag” was the child that was “fully welfare dependent.” During the group interview, we discussed whether the “bags” were “fake.” Cameron added that “they have no money but somehow it makes sense to spend $500 on a purse.” The point of this conversation is that we wondered about the children’s socio-economic class and talked about their family’s income levels, but it was not always possible to make an accurate judgment.

“Class” at school is often defined by who pays for their lunch from their own household income, who can pay partially from their income, and who qualifies for free lunch. At Gilmer Park, 70% of the enrolled children qualified for free or reduced price lunch; 56% qualified for free and 14% qualified for reduced-price. The principal said that this number had increased from last year.

The school sponsored several projects during the year to raise money for other people. One project was for Tsunami victims on the other side of the world and the other project was an “Angel Tree” project. During the holidays, Tison organized a school dance and competition for Snow Queen and Snow King in which voting for the Queen and King was conducted by collecting money. Tison and another teacher friend and dance organizer, Ms. Brown, took the proceeds and bought gifts for a family “not as fortunate as you,” as Tison told our class of seventeen third graders in December (Research Journal entry). There was variation in their home financial circumstances, but Tison made certain that the children knew that they had a responsibility to give to other children.

Despite the ability of the children to raise money for the angel tree, there were children who had little. One third grade girl (White) seemed particularly “needy” according to her dress and cleanliness. Her father (White) came to school one day for the first time in December. He visited the office, but I never saw him again. I discovered that he had come to pick up a set of holiday gifts and resources for his family that the guidance counselor (African American) had collected for his family.

**Neighborhood and School Change**

By looking at city statistics, listening to Research Informants’ and Tison’s stories, and examining city maps with Tison, I came to understand that Gilmer Park was situated in the middle of changing demographic lines in the city. To the west of the school’s district were predominantly Black neighborhoods and to the east were predominantly White neighborhoods. Gilmer Park was “mixed” and was in the process of changing to having demographic
characteristics that comprised more diverse families than in the past. In our January interview, Ms. Hope (White female) explained that the neighborhood had changed dramatically since she had come to Gilmer Park as principal in 1993. She said that at that time, the residents in the neighborhood closest to the schoolyard were “all pretty much gray-haired White folks, and as they moved out it’s really become kind of an upwardly mobile community for the minorities.” The principal added that she personally viewed this change as “very healthy” and “positive” (Interview with Ms. Hope, January 2005). Ms. Hope reported also that immigration services had identified Oakland as a city for relocating refugees from specific countries and that churches in the city assisted families as they moved to the neighborhood.

Tison noted the changing neighborhood from her personal experience. She said that recently when “a Black couple moved across from us,” she had predicted more people would begin to move out. “And sure enough, like a month, we had three people to move that had been there since I was little …. And then a Black family moved into one of the houses. So it’s just like that is what is going to happened” (Interview with Tison, 11-10-04).

Tison recounted a neighborhood conflict last summer. She said that she thought that one resident (White male) had called the police this summer when a new Hispanic family had “this big fiesta” and “the music was loud.” Tison evaluated the problem. She said that, “cultures are different….they probably didn’t see anything wrong with having the music because they were celebrating” (Interview with Tison, 11/10/04).

Both Ms. Jade (third grade teacher, African American female) and Mr. Johnson, (third grade teacher, African American male) expressed their concerns about how this neighborhood had changed and was changing in ways that cannot be seen by the demographics. Mr. Johnson’s was one of the first African American families to move into the White neighborhood on the other side of the highway when he was in elementary school. He said that soon after, many White families began to move out. He was in the first group of African American children to be bused from his neighborhood to Gilmer Park. At the time, Gilmer Park was an all-White school except for this bus of children from his neighborhood.

Mr. Johnson considered his neighborhood to be a safe, middle-class community for years. Today, his mother still lives in the family home, but Mr. Johnson said that he would not be comfortable in letting his own daughter play in the yard without his supervision. He lives in the county and states that in his mother’s neighborhood, he has seen the effects of drugs and drug trafficking on his street. The street looked like another tidy, middle-class community to me when we drove past his home on the bus tour in August.

Ms. Jade made similar claims. She lives in a nearby school district, her neighborhood is mostly African American, and she is constantly seeing drug activity across the street from her father’s home. She expressed her concern over and over again about the differences she has seen in her neighborhood and among African American people in Oakland since she had returned to live here after being away for many years (Interview with Ms. Jade, 5-11-05).

In listening to these stories, I could see that Gilmer Park had begun as a rural area, transformed into a White neighborhood with an active commercial district, had transformed again during integration, and was continuing to change as cultural and class issues affected the population of the school district. The community is integrated by race, ethnicity, language, and class but continues to change regarding its racial and ethnic identity. As families with racial and ethnic identities, primarily other than White, move into the community, many White families continue to relocate outside of the school district.
In fact, it seemed that Gilmer Park’s school district was essentially situated in the midst of the city’s ongoing cultural transformation, with a mostly-Black neighborhood to the west of the school district and a mostly-White neighborhood to the east. The school’s neighborhood and the Gilmer Park families represented the socio-cultural and historical process of the integration of residential spaces and public spaces (and possible re-segregation). This made me wonder about how the children viewed each other, and how their views were influenced by tensions that may have been present in the immediate community as revealed by Tison’s story about her neighbor’s displeasure with the Hispanic family’s party.

**Children and Families**

It was approaching the holiday season when Tison and I decided that we would work together to make silhouettes of the children in our homeroom for them to give their families as holiday gifts. It was my job to pull children to the side of the classroom while Tison continued to teach, and to trace each child’s profile onto black paper. As I worked, I wondered. What kinds of families do they each represent? Each child was proud as they stepped away to see a dark two-dimensional representation of their individual identity and difference. I was glad to capture the pieces of their physical appearances that made them them. I found such variation in who they were and the families that they represented.

I was curious about the kinds of occupations the families participated in, because a family’s work and interests intersect in the values and norms of the home. Ms. Kellymae told me in her February interview that originally, most of the jobs in the area were related to the railroad, small and independent businesses, or construction. Now, she believed options for an occupation in the area were different. “What about the kinds of jobs your children’s families have now? How would you describe those?” I asked. She answered.

I have a father in my classroom now that is a chef at one of the motel type things, but I think most, one works as a mechanic at a car dealership out there. So many of them are one-parent households and the mothers seem to be mostly secretaries, clerical type people. We have, I think a lot of them work for the hospitals (Ms. Kellymae, Interview, 2-15-05).

I saw “diversity” simply in the adults’ appearance, but wondered about their current occupational statuses. Ms. Lowen, one of the student teacher participants, gave the third graders a writing assignment as part of a unit on economics and asked each child, “What do your parents specialize in (what are their jobs)?” Ms. Lowen shared the children’s papers with me, and I saved their writing as data. Children are curious informants, because their perceptions are not always accurate from an adult researcher’s perspective. However, their perceptions gave me one window on the families’ occupational identities. Of the 69 responses, the children said that their parents’ jobs were quite varied. There was a bridge builder, school teacher, teacher’s aid, house cleaner, waitress, a fireman, a UPS driver, nurses (“nurs,” “nures,” “nrsa,” “nous”), preschool workers, car or truck mechanics, a box maker, a pipe “clenere,” “in charge of a restaurant,” “in charge of all the buses in Alabama,” “delevering” newspapers, “Builds stuff,” a realtor (“releter”), and assorted jobs with local businesses or offices like Walmart, Hardees, Sears, Best Buy, Lowe’s, Home Shopping, a bank, and Hallmark. They “answered the phone,” “packed boxes,” “takes out all the garbage from ‘evry’ office,” “checks to see if tags are on the products,” and “gives advice.” The father, who had come to the parent teacher conference in the fall in suit and tie, worked in the city building as a “budget eministryer.” Children sometimes described their admiration for their parents’ work. “My dad helping people with ‘there’ jobs and doing stuff for old people” or “My mom work in the Army. She helps the world.”
There were three “immigrant” children in our homeroom, all of which had “graduated” from English Language Learners classes. They were Carlos from Mexico, whose dad worked in a Spanish restaurant in Ohio, Sebehate from Bosnia, whose mother worked in a day care, and Flutura from Bosnia, a particularly quiet girl who talked and wrote about her cat and wanted to be a veterinarian. Sebehate and Flutura always found each other on the playground and lunch table. They had been friends since coming to America and had a common bond.

There were children who went to Disney World during the year or to New York City or Washington, but there was another child who, when I asked her what she was hoping for Christmas, said, “Just warm pajamas” (Flutura). When I asked the children about their weekends, I heard about trips to the pizza parlor, skating rink, mall, birthday parties, or church events, but several children always said, “Nothing. I stayed at home and played video games. I was bored.” When we talked about Halloween weekend the same thing happened. Some children were out and about on the street playing or at a church-wide festival, but Carlos repeated again, “Nothing. I stayed at home and played video games. I never do anything but stay at home.”

There were two or three children living with grandparents either full-time or part-time. Jamahl’s mom was often away because of her work in the Army (helping the world), and so he lived with his grandmother for a large percentage of the year. She was persistent about checking on his homework and assignments. Thomas’ (African American male) grandmother and grandfather (White) said that they were raising Thomas because Thomas’ mother had gotten into trouble. I was never sure what kind of trouble this was, but I met his mother (White female) at the school dance in December, so I know that Thomas did have contact with her. His grandmother sent a note to school one day that explained that Thomas would check out of school on certain days for his appointment with his therapist. I was impressed that there were two families who sought professional help for their children.

Donnie’s mother and father came for a conference at the beginning of the year because of the way he was treating them at home. Donnie’s mother was surprised and relieved to find that Donnie was a model student, but evidently at home, he had terrorized both his parents, refused to obey, struck his mother, and was able to manipulate his father (who was disabled with bipolar disorder). Donnie’s mom said she intended to get Donnie counseling, and for the remainder of the year, he would check out early on certain afternoons.

Tyrell (African American male), who was repeating third grade, walked with a plodding step, had a serious demeanor, glasses that he pushed up on his nose over and over again, could change from being focused and studious to unfocused and belligerent based on his medication for ADD. He wanted to be a psychiatrist so that he could help children “stay off drugs.” If anyone could encourage Tyrell, it was Tison. “Come here, baby,” she would gently say to him, “Come here, boo,” and he would walk back to his desk and get back to work.

These are just a few of the children’s stories that stand out from the year, but at the same time our homeroom class was filled with approximately 17 children that were generally fed and clothed well, attended school regularly, had families that supported their education, and loved them.

Faculty and Staff

The faculty at Gilmer Park had also changed in the past few years. In the third grade team of five, there were three new teachers to the school. Ms. Hope told me in her January interview that she had made an effort to try to hire more African American teachers because she felt like this was important for the school community. Ms. Brown had been the first African American teacher at the school eight years ago and since then, four more black teachers were hired as part
of the 14 classroom teachers. There were 25 other full time and part time specialists or aides that were part of the school community including art, PE, music, speech, reading resource and special education aids. Of these 25 staff members, six were black. A few of the teachers lived in the school district, but most lived away from the school district and in the adjacent county or nearby city.

Academics

From my first day in August as part of the faculty, it was clear that a primary focus of the year for the faculty and students was to pass the state standards for school accreditation. I found out that Gilmer Park was “in warning” which meant that it had not successfully met “standards” because of their students’ test scores from a state mandated, standards-based end-of-the-year assessment. At the city-wide convocation on the first teacher workday, other schools in the system were recognized for achieving accreditation. The successful faculties were asked to stand up and large floodlights were focused on them while the crowd applauded. But Gilmer Park, along with several other schools, was not recognized as successful. When Tison and I talked about this, she explained that the third grade at the school had met state standards. The fifth grade had passed some, but not all of the tests. The principal explained the school’s history and present day standing with the state standards. Ms. Hope explained that their scores “little by little have improved,” and that “it’s just a killer that we have this warning thing because we continue to improve.” For the remainder of the year, passing the standardized tests and continuing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (No Child Left Behind) was a topic on the agenda at every faculty meeting and third grade team meeting that I attended.

Conclusion

This is the setting and circumstances in which the student teachers found themselves, according to my research, observations, and conversations with people who knew the school better than I would. The student teachers arrived on January 19 in the middle of all of this history and conditions and had four months to learn how to teach “other people’s children.” I believed that these circumstances and these student teachers would “intersect” in ways that would be specific to these circumstances and these student teachers because of their own personal backgrounds and the particular history of the school. If I were to repeat this research project during the following year, I expect that I might “find” something different. I was prepared to talk with the participants about what they observed, perceived, and felt and to try to understand how these perceptions and experiences affected their understandings about teaching and learning in a multicultural school.

Cratylus (c. 400 B. C.), student of Heraclitus, said, “you could not step into the same river twice.” However, what Heraclitus may have actually stated was more likely to have been this: “On those who enter the same river, ever different waters flow.”

http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/theseus.html
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Introduction to Analysis

If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we should value the narrative. Richardson, 1997, p. 35

The student teachers’ spoken words or narratives were fixed on my paper and had become “mobile” (Nespor & Barber, 1995). I could take their beliefs and experiences with me, as expressed through their words, and I could move the stories around and group them according to my wishes. I could decide how the stories worked together to explain the student teachers’ interpretations of their experiences and their beliefs. I also knew that oral language is otherwise temporary, and so I do not know how the participants’ stories or ideas would be different even today.

These four teacher candidates were “character actors” on a small stage that represented the larger social context and cultural tenets of the nation. Indeed, during the interview-conversations, I had heard the “inventive ways people define themselves and others based on their own experiential interpretations” (Moss, 2003, p. 16). Their narratives became my means of access to their “social realities” and signified the school world through which they had lived and moved. Their stories revealed how they viewed themselves and others as cultural selves. I hoped that by analyzing how they talked in these narratives, I would preserve my intent of gaining understanding about how they were thinking rather than what “caused” their thinking.

As university educators, we have heard some student teachers’ stories over and over again, sometimes the saddest stories of children’s plights, questions about parents’ actions and inactions, or a student teachers’ questions about how to “manage” a classroom or child. My hope was that in looking closer at their stories, by collecting a more “nuanced portrait” (Moss, 2003, p. 123) of their thinking and the social world of the school, I could understand their knowledge and practice in a multicultural setting.

As I explained in Chapter 3, I was perplexed about where to start my analysis. I chose to begin the process with a careful reading and interpretation of the participants’ discussion of “Homework and Behavior.” I include this analysis at the beginning of this chapter so as to let my readers begin to learn from the student teachers from this simple beginning point of my analysis process. By reading homework and behavior first, the reader has an entry point into the school and the collective story of the four cases.

The remaining sections in this chapter are the individual case studies of each participant. I made the decision to write four case studies so as to disclose the student teachers’ different interpretations clearly and to reveal “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). Each participant’s life history and judgment about the school experience is naturally unique. By finding and interpreting the “recurring patterns” (p. 179) in each participant’s stories, I give my readers the opportunity to hear each student teacher’s case as an open-ended “nuanced portrait.” I introduce each participant through four descriptive
accounts about their backgrounds: Family and School History, Prior Experiences with Diversity, Preconceptions about the School, and Beginning Perceptions. Finally, I have analyzed their conversations into themes that I identified through my analysis process, based on my “hunches” and interpretations of the student teachers’ systems of understandings about their experiences. Each participant’s stories are organized by these different narrative themes, (my interpretation of the “recurring patterns” in their stories), which I used as subheadings for each case. This thematic structure provides an analytical frame for the student teacher’s knowledge or systems of understandings. I have included the subheadings at the beginning of each participant’s section so that my readers can see an overview of the headings as a foreshadowing of my interpretation of the stories.

Each of the four participants discussed the concepts of and used the words “diverse” and “race,” so I consistently address their ideas about those two specific topics in each case. Sometimes the student teachers’ discussion of “diversity” and “race” developed from a question I might have asked them like, “how would you describe the children and their families?” At other times, their talk about “diversity” or “race” developed as they were telling me about an experience in their classroom. It was also difficult to entirely “parse out” one idea from another into separate themes or topics because truly, some stories and themes overlap.

The narrative themes are my primary analysis. Not until the end of each case study do I further my analysis through my two-part response to their narrative themes. This two-part response is entitled: “My Student Teacher Connections” and “My Teacher Educator Connections.” Since I played a dual role, I have presented my connections to the participants’ narrative themes and systems of understanding from those two perspectives. I related to the student teachers’ stories because I had similar experiences or questions as a “student teacher.” As I responded during the interviews and later analyzed their stories, my role as a teacher educator researcher was also present. Therefore, I have included my response as a teacher educator. I placed this analysis at the end of each case because I wanted to provide each reader with the opportunity to interpret the narratives without initial interference from my responses.

Finally, I find likenesses among these four cases by providing a cross-case analysis in Chapter 5. My goal was to find wholeness in my separate findings, add new findings to the longstanding discourse on “diversity” and multicultural education, and develop recommendations for how to prepare student teachers for work in multicultural settings.

Member Checking

A continuing puzzle for me is how to do sociological research and how to write it so that the people who teach me about their lives are honored and empowered, even if they and I see their worlds differently. Richardson, 1997, p. 106

The purpose of this study was to use student teachers’ stories as data. My analysis created a tension for me. I appreciated the participants’ willingness to share with me, wanted to share each story as “theirs,” yet I had control over the interpretation and made something new out of their stories. Also, I wanted to honor the participants’ voices while not necessarily agreeing with them. I hope I have accomplished this goal. When I completed the written text of the participants’ “narrative themes,” I sent a copy of their document to each of them for their review or “member checking.” I received e-mail responses from each of them, and I include their response at the beginning of the “Narrative Themes” sections. Therefore, I gave them the
opportunity to review my summaries of their “knowledge” and “practice” to ensure my accuracy in relating their accounts. My final analysis in my two-part responses is wholly my interpretation.

Homework and Behavior

The object is…the embodiment in physical form of all the actions everyone took to bring it into being. Becker, 1998, p. 47

Homework I

When I read and completed initial coding of all of the transcripts, I found a long list of significant topics and themes (see Chapter 3, Table 10). I determined that I wanted to select one topic to examine closely as a means of beginning my analysis process. In the two group interviews, one topic of discussion that the student teachers raised both times was their questions and frustrations about homework. The conversations became talk about what they thought the homework issues revealed to them about the children and families.

Since “homework” is a concrete and everyday school routine that the student teachers could see, were responsible for, and talked about, I first decided to investigate the homework issue more closely. I liked the idea of starting with something routine, something that was important to my participants, and something that was not necessarily related to “diversity.” From Becker’s suggestion, I knew that I could learn something by examining this “concrete” object. Student teachers often talk about their everyday difficulties in managing procedures and children’s resistance to those procedures, so I thought that this would be one way to learn about my participants’ concerns. In addition, I believed that if I examined something as “simple” as homework, I would not be emphasizing a more complex idea like “ethnic identity” from the beginning of my analysis process and possibly narrowing my focus from the beginning.

During the first group interview (February 17, 2005), the four student teachers raised the issue of homework after I asked the question, “Can you think of anything that might not have happened in this school if it was not multicultural?” I have chosen to include some longer transcriptions of the conversations so that my readers can “hear” the way in which the participants asked questions, shared concerns, and responded in relation to each one another.

This is their initial response.

Susan: I don’t know about a multicultural reason, but yesterday, and I actually said this to somebody, “I am so frustrated because I’m not quite sure how to relate to or get through to kids that didn’t grow up with the same ideals about education as I did.”

Dana: Okay.

Susan: In my house it wasn’t an issue – it was you go to school; you do your best. This is your job. You go to college later on. This is what you do.

Faith: You get home. You do your homework.

Quiet laughter

Susan: You get home; you do your homework. It wasn’t even talked about. This is what you do. And my mother wasn’t a real big disciplinarian, so it wasn’t like – “I’m
going to yell at you if you don’t do it,” but it was just the expectation, and so we did it. And these kids – I feel like they have no internal desire at all. This is not what they should be doing; I feel like they respond more to stern adult figures who tell them this is what they have to do. But that’s not what I come from, and so I’m not quite sure – especially since our program doesn’t really encourage that – they’re all about the intrinsic stuff…. I’m wondering how am I supposed to relate to this when I don’t come from this at all?

I was pleased that the group was considering the differences in values between what they wanted to find in school and what they thought they were finding in school. However, I was thinking that in my own third grade classroom, there were children who consistently didn’t do their homework, but there were many children who did their homework. Why did this discussion sound as if the whole culture of the school was resistant to homework?

I had also heard Susan talking about her belief that children responded to “stern adult figures,” and I wondered what this meant. The concept of “stereotypes” was in the back of my mind because I wondered how the student teachers were making these generalized statements about the families and children, so I asked.

Dana: Do you see differences among the children? Do you see differences like some do, and some don’t, or do you want to talk about that a little bit?
Faith: Yeah, and it seems like the ones in my class that do [emphasis added], have the parental involvement, and those that don’t, do not.
Cameron: Yeah. Don’t have it. Yeah.
Dana: Can you give some examples of that?

The discussion then turned to family situations that either didn’t support or made it difficult or impossible for children to do their homework. Cameron told this story.

Cameron: I have a little boy … in my class … and his family owns a Mexican bakery, and every single night his older sister has to work in the bakery….And his parents don’t want her to be there alone, and I think she works until, you know, basically after school until 9:00. So they tell him to go there so that she’s not working there alone. So he’s at this bakery every night until 9:00. And he never has his homework done because he’s there, and while he’s there-
Faith: - He’s doing work-
Cameron: - He’s doing work. He’s not just sitting there. So, basically he’s working until 9:00 every night, and so some kids that you know—that’s their home life. It’s just not possible for them to get homework—you know parental involvement or not; it’s not. It’s just not even possible you know.
Faith: So what do you do in those situations where you—they encourage—They encourage us, and through the faculty meeting, we found out to give some type of homework every night?

(At our most recent faculty meeting, several teachers had done a presentation on “homework.” According to their report, they had read about research that demonstrated that the average number of minutes a child spent on homework each night was positively correlated with
higher test scores.) Then the group’s discussion turned to the teachers’ varying homework policies and procedures and the student teachers’ questions and disagreement about the homework policies. This is how the homework discussion evolved.

For my analysis process I returned to Becker’s interest in “objects.” “Naming the object of interest is the beginning of conceptualization” (Becker, 1998, p. 122). Becker suggests describing an artifact or action with words that literally describe the artifact without its common label so as to better understand what the artifact represents. Therefore, I “name” or describe “homework” here without using the term “homework,” to see what actions and events come together to create the concept of “homework.”

Homework forms vary, but the most common generalized description of homework for this school would be that a teacher would distribute a paper (usually a copy of the same paper) to every student. The paper would have black written text (on white or colored paper) which could include numbers, pictures, and/or diagrams that were related to a topic that the children and teachers had talked about in the classroom. The child was supposed to write on the paper in some way in response to the text, the blanks, or math problems that were related to the topics from the classroom talk. Sometimes the papers that are created in this format are called “worksheets.” These are sheets of paper that carry some form of schoolwork to the child’s house. Becker stated that, “For our purposes, the point is that a piece of dirt, physically real as it is, is what we make of it” (1998, p. 50). I am curious about what this group is “making” of “homework” and used this description of “homework” to now describe what was happening at school with the pieces of paper.

The student teachers then talked about one problem in particular. The fourth grade teachers had set up two field trips, one to a movie and the second a day trip to an important historical site. The teachers set up an incentive program or a check system in which they placed a check by a child’s name on a class roster for each paper that was taken home and brought back to class. If a child missed five checks (a check for each separate paper or “homework assignment,”) the child was then eliminated from going on the trip (“five strikes, you’re out”).

The field trip incentive program for going to the historical site lasted six weeks. During the first week of the incentive program, Lily reported that already, “Some classes have four kids out.” Faith and Lily, who were both in fourth grade classrooms, described their concern for this kind of policy and worried because “the kids who are going to make it are the ones who always do their homework” (Lily).

At one point in the discussion, Cameron said she was worried because sometimes the children were expected to write on and complete the papers with resources that the children didn’t have at home such as dictionaries, a computer, or the Internet. She wondered how the children could be expected to complete the paper. Once, Faith referred to a family member as a “resource” for children when they needed to write on the papers. “They might not have that resource at home that knows how to do it,” she said. The student teachers talked about the difficulties that some of their students had in writing on the papers that were sent home. They wondered what to do because they knew that if children, like the boy who worked in the bakery, stayed up late to do their work, “they would be zombies the next day.” However, their teachers insisted on giving the papers to the children (four times a week for Math, according to Faith and Lily) and expected them to come back to school completed with the children’s writing.

Cameron used her teacher’s homework policy as an example and told us that Ms. Kellymae doesn’t give “homework.” Instead, Ms. Kellymae hands out the same kinds of papers during class, calls them “class work” and gives the children 10-15 minutes in class to begin. She
then has the opportunity to see if the children can do the work independently and gives them help. They can take the papers home to complete.

I was hoping for the group to connect their discussion to something they had discussed previously about differences in home expectations. I inserted, “I’m connecting this to things like the poverty seminar that we’ve talked about or in courses about being culturally responsive. Can you think of anything that would influence or does influence your thinking about some of these behavioral things or the homework thing? What’s making you feel badly about this?” Cameron talked about her cooperating teacher last semester who didn’t give homework at all. Cameron made this statement about her former cooperating teacher’s homework policies:

She [Her teacher from the previous semester] changed her expectations in response to her kids. She was like, “They’re not going to do homework. Don’t give it to them. It’s not going to happen.” So, you know, I’m thinking, if you know the kids that are not ever going to do their work, and if you have a classroom with a whole bunch of them that are not going to do homework, why are you still giving it?

The group again discussed the fact that they were required to give papers to take home and complete four times a week. The participants questioned the value of sending the papers home if they didn’t know how to do it, and Faith said, “Well, if Mom doesn’t get it, or Mom and Dad don’t have to do this or don’t know this in the real world, why do I?” In other words, why would children think that putting written text on a paper at home was important if their parent doesn’t understand it, or if the parents don’t use the concepts or skills on the paper in their every day life at home or at work?

Consequently, these student teachers were thinking and talking about several issues related to the papers. First, they were remembering their own prior experiences where they had been ‘responsible’ students – they had brought back their completed papers to school on a regular basis. Second, sending papers home to write on at home is a school routine. Their teachers required them to send papers home to be written on at home. The children in the fourth grade would be rewarded if they did and would have privileges removed if they didn’t. Third, they had heard that the more minutes the children spent writing on the papers at home would increase the children’s test scores. The children, or Gilmer Park as a group, needed to increase their test scores, according to the expectations for state standards. Fourth, they had heard other messages from their university program or other teachers about creating school routines that were related to the children’s culture (culturally responsive practice) and they were wondering what they thought about how they would make such adjustments based on the culture of the children and families at Gilmer Park.

It seemed that the discussion had begun because they thought that when the children didn’t complete these papers, then it meant that the children didn’t “have the same ideals about education.” Yet, they readily said that they disagreed with some of the teachers’ homework policies, and they were also disappointed or frustrated when the children didn’t bring the papers back to school in completed form. They also explained some of the reasons why a child couldn’t bring in the completed paper (working in a bakery.) I wondered if by the end of this discussion, they realized that during our talk they had changed from talking about families’ “ideals about education” and were actually talking about the frustrating homework policies and about only some of the children’s responses to the papers they were supposed to write on at home and bring back to school.

I wondered what created the context for a generalized assumption or statement: “I am so frustrated because I’m not quite sure how to relate to or get through to kids that didn’t grow up
with the same ideals about education as I did” (Susan). Faith and Susan had added, “You get home. You do your homework,” and Susan had added, “I’m wondering, how am I supposed to relate to this when I don’t come from this at all?” So, Susan was originally asking about how to “relate” to different values. However, after those beginning remarks, Faith, Lily, and Cameron had been the discussants during the remainder of the group discussion about the papers going home and not coming back to school with writing on them. Susan had not added any more to the discussion, so, I turned to Susan and asked if this discussion was “getting at…what you were bringing up about how to relate to families or children where the goals are - ”

Susan: I’m more thinking about in class - it’s not even the homework.
Dana: It’s the behavior? [As a researcher, I shouldn’t have introduced this word, but as a student teacher, I had felt this concern at times myself. Sometimes my roles as researcher and participant were muddled.]
Susan: It’s the behavior and the attitude towards school.
Dana: Okay. [I backed off here and used a more neutral response to see how the conversation would proceed.]
Susan: It’s when these kids – like especially Green Group – that’s the big problem in there. They come in and they goof off.
Dana: My group is the Red Group and they’re really pretty good, but the Green Group comes through my class and I have had a horrible time with them and in particular these last two days. [I had to admit my frustrations, if I were to be truthful.]
Susan: They just don’t listen.
Lily: Everyone’s getting yelled at in the hallway.

From this exchange in our conversation, our conversation or topic turned from “homework” and “values” to “behavior.”

Behavior

I told Cameron, Faith, Lily, and Susan about how I had had such a difficult time with Green Group. I had tried to ignore some of their behaviors when I had had the responsibility to take them to and from the lunchroom, but had recently realized that I couldn’t ignore them. I explained my frustration this way.

I mean they were pushing and shoving. They were twirling. They were going back and forth in line, and I would tell them to stop, and they wouldn’t do anything I said. If I said something to them, they would talk back. They’d get attitudes.

I told the student teachers that I realized I couldn’t just take the Green Group back to the room after lunch with their disruptive behavior in the hallway and get them back “together” and pretend that everything was okay. Susan added, “They argue constantly with the teacher.” We discussed the actions we could take that the other teachers used for behavioral issues, such as “silent lunch,” which meant that a child would sit at a table and eat with the other children who “had silent lunch,” and they couldn’t talk. The student teachers expressed their frustrations with “consequences” like “silent lunch.”

Cameron: Well, and after a while the consequences don’t matter anyway.
Susan: They don’t care.
We discussed the Green Group and how “as a group that’s true” (Dana), but “there are three kids in there that I feel so bad that they have to be in there” (Susan). We talked about how another third grade teacher had had a “horrible time with them” (Susan) and that they were “totally belligerent” (Dana). Susan added these comments.

Susan: So, look at this. And look at these kids and the way they act, and I think; I would have never dreamed – never dreamed of acting this way in school. You don’t do that.

Faith: Home life.

Susan: Yeah.

Cameron: [Unclear remark on the tape.]

Faith: Well, see when my parents were called at home, it was a big thing. But if parents don’t have the same respect for school and the same understanding of – just like you were saying – thought of education and esteem for education, then ‘call home’ might not mean much to them.

In this exchange, our conversation had once more returned to “value” of education. I said that my experience with “calling home” had been when I observed when Tison had told a child she was going to call her “mama” because the child had been disrespectful and had “gotten an attitude.” I watched the child begin to cry and beg Tison not to call her mother. It seemed like the “call home” mattered to this child. Lily said that “calling home” worked “with some of my fourth graders.” Susan said that her teacher had “called home” last week, and the children had cried, but “their behavior did not change in class.” We proceeded to talk about other things a teacher could “do” as a consequence for inappropriate behavior. The list of consequences included such actions as taking away privileges, taking away recess, or removing children from art or music class. Lily said that these children are the “same kids that aren’t doing their work.” Faith said, “’Cause they’re playing when everyone else is doing work.”

The group didn’t end this discussion with any answers, but Cameron suggested that she could ask Ms. Kellymae about her opinions about children’s behavior and homework because she admired Ms. Kellymae’s policies. It was time to leave school and return to campus for our once-a-week seminar.

Homework II

When we met again a month later for our second scheduled group interview, I gave each of my participants a list of possible questions for us to discuss. I had developed these questions after rereading the texts of the previous interviews. (see Chapter 3, Table 8 for a copy of these questions.) At the second group interview, I wanted the student teachers to have autonomy over the questions that they wanted to discuss, but I wanted to make suggestions by providing this list. In the middle of the questions was a question about the homework issue. It read, “What’s happened with the homework issue?” The conversation proceeded in this way.

First, Susan was talking about Christopher, a Black boy and recent immigrant from Liberia, and the fact that he was falling asleep in school because he had stayed up till 3:00 a.m., watching a movie (according to him). I understood her concern, because I had tutored him in math that day, had seen his eyes closing, and had asked him about his sleepiness. He had told me about the movie and the 3:00 a.m. sleep time. I understood Susan’s worry. I thought, “What about bedtimes and a parent who reminded and insisted that a child get enough sleep?” But I also knew that Christopher’s parents could have been asleep after their hard day at work and
caring for four young children when they returned home that night. Christopher was smart enough to be able to figure out a way to watch a movie without his parents knowing. During the group conversation, Cameron said that “so many” of her students have their own TVs in their room and stayed up late playing video games and then they “come in and sleep through class.” She continued, “These are the ones that don’t do their work at home and don’t participate in class that much when they are alert, and so they’re the ones – they really need to be awake.”

Faith added, “That’s when a home-school connection is important. Do you guys write notes to tell them?” Cameron shared a story about a child whose mom knew that he “acts up in class, doesn’t do his work, goofs off at home, lies about homework.” The mom would “give threats,” but “he’s not improving.” In these conversations, my participants talked again about completing the papers at home or “goofing off” at home and lying about the papers from school on which they were supposed to write. Faith was looking at my list of questions while we talked, and she directed the conversation towards homework by noticing “homework issue” on my list of possible questions. Then this discussion of homework continued.

Faith: What homework issue were you referring to?
[Faith was wondering what I meant by “homework issue” in my question. She didn’t automatically recall the discussion from Group Interview I, or the fact that we had discussed several issues related to “homework” and she was asking me about which issue that the question was referring to. I answered in the following way.]
Dana: Last time when we met, you all talked about one of the problems was the difference in the value that you all put on education and what families and children put on education. Then we ended up talking about how it’s sort of represented sometimes with homework and kids not doing homework. I don’t think that’s all we were talking about, but you ended up talking about homework. Kids weren’t bringing it in, and it didn’t seem like it was important.

Faith: My least favorite part of the day is the homework check.
Lily: You mean literally doing it or seeing who does it [Unclear word on the tape]?
Faith: The literally doing it, because the kids get so hurt or upset at me…. “Uh! You just don’t want me to go on the field trip.” …. I get it over with in the morning, then the rest of my day is great … It can’t get any worse than my homework check… it’s just really frustrating.

Then the fourth grade student teachers discussed again their frustration and disagreement with the fourth grade policy that correlated bringing these papers back to school and going on the field trip to the historical site. They thought that the children who weren’t bringing the papers back to school completed would benefit from the field trip, but they couldn’t go. Lily expressed it this way, “I think some kids would benefit from that, and now it’s homework? Aw, come on.” She said she was not upset or frustrated with the children when they didn’t bring it in. She was just “disappointed.”

Susan interjected another issue: “make-up work,” which meant that when the children didn’t bring the completed papers back to school, teachers would insist that they write on the papers during the school day or take them home another night to complete. Her teacher expected Susan to grade each assignment and create packets of the papers for the children who hadn’t turned in their work. Susan didn’t understand how she was supposed to get children to complete
the papers in school since the day was already sectioned into sequential time slots for each subject without any extra time allotted for make up work or free time.

Lily explained that her teacher “hunts them down.” Susan said that her teacher would call home to tell parents about the packets, and “very few of them actually” completed the packets even after the phone call home. Cameron reminded the group that “there are some that no matter what you do - will not do their work.” Susan thought that they were old enough in third grade, and that “that’s their responsibility… and it’s ‘points off’ for them, and that’s the grade,” rather than insisting on completing the papers another time as make-up work.

Faith thought that “one way to solve the homework issue is to teach organization skills…my kids are very, very, very unorganized.” Faith went on to tell a story about how she learned to organize her papers in a folder with brads in second grade. “My students have at least … zero organization.” The students discussed the possibility of creating a school wide policy that required every child to have a planner as a solution to the problem of organizing papers and taking papers home for completion. They finished this conversation by discussing how they would develop a plan in their future classrooms that would include homework expectations. Susan said that at Gilmer Park, or in her classroom. “There just doesn’t seem to be any kind of place for - ‘You’re supposed to do it’ – but then they’re kind of free not to.” I told them about a professional teacher book that discussed the value of teaching routines at the beginning of the year, such as organizing papers and homework policies.

**Discussion**

The students were concerned about how to develop policies for how children should organize and take papers home to complete, and what the children would be able to do or not do based on completion and non-completion. They were also worried about how to interact with children’s behaviors that were difficult or different from what they were accustomed to. The student teachers thought that these examples of not completing papers, disorganization, and behavior at school represented how the children and families valued education. They discussed the fact that some of the children did not bring in their papers completed on a regular and non-regular basis, and they discussed the ways they could instate “consequences” for inappropriate school behavior. They wondered about what they would do if they had the power to determine other policies and procedures. All of this discussion was about the actions that the children took in regards to this piece of paper they were supposed to put words or numbers on or about how they “behaved” while in school.

In particular, the paper, while it concretely represented the teachers’ policies and the topics being discussed in class (teacher/school actions and beliefs), it also became a representation of the desire to go on the field trip (for fourth grade), responsibility, organization, children’s activities at night (student actions and beliefs), and family value of education, home-school connections, parental interest in school, and parents’ ability to do the work themselves (parent’s actions and beliefs). There was minimal talk about how the children completed the papers (i.e. correctly or incorrectly or what the children learned by doing the papers). Cameron and Faith raised the issue of whether the children knew how to complete the papers correctly, and Susan talked about her dilemma about needing to use the papers as part of their assessment (in form of a letter – A, B, C, D, or F) on another piece of paper that would carry an overall assessment home to the parents (report card) in the form of letters on the paper.

I wondered how the parents viewed the pieces of paper. The paper now represented family patterns and values. Did the parents realize that teachers made judgments about their parenting skills and family values based on how this piece of paper left school, went home, got
written on or not, and then brought back to school the next day? Did the fact that a child came to school without a completed paper mean that the child was disorganized, irresponsible, didn’t value education, didn’t know how to do the work, didn’t care about learning?

I realized during my analysis that these pieces of paper were the school’s and teachers’ potentially daily contact with families. What did families think about schools, based on this piece of paper? How did these papers portray classroom learning to the parents? What was school learning if a parent used this piece of paper as an indicator?

All of these questions of significance were embodied in a piece of paper that was also embodied with problematic issues in the papers’ conception. What about the children that I had in my classroom like Andrea, Carlos, Tyrone, Cynthia, Patrice, Bradley, and others that brought their homework in consistently? Why did I not hear the stories about their successes? Why do teachers focus only on children when they do not bring the completed papers back to school in making judgments about a school’s community?

Susan had expressed another concern about how the children valued education. She first said that she didn’t know how to “relate or get through to kids that didn’t grow up with the same ideals about education as I did.” She explained that she was concerned because of the children’s behavior in class and their “attitude towards school.” She thought that one group of children in particular would simply “goof off,” “they just don’t listen, they “didn’t care” about consequences, and they “argue constantly.” I expressed my frustration also by saying that I didn’t know how to handle this group’s behavior in the hallway. Susan said that she would never have considered “acting this way in school,” and Faith said that “home life” was a factor.

Therefore, in this conversation about behavior we heard Susan considering that the children’s behavior was a way to assume whether the children valued education, and she was wondering how to relate to people who valued education differently than she had. It seemed that they were ready to assume that because the children behaved in certain ways that they did not value education. I wondered about an appropriate way to measure “attitude” towards education.

When I reread the group interviews, I found that during the second group interview, the student teachers also said during a discussion, other than our “homework” discussion, that they had only been able to attend one PTA meeting because their university seminar was scheduled on the same night as PTA. It didn’t seem as if the participants had had any conversations with parents (or much contact) about whether the parents “valued” education. When we discussed the student teachers’ experiences with parent-teacher conferences in March, Cameron told a touching story about a student who had immigrated from Columbia. His mom was worried about his success in school and cried when she heard Ms. Kellymae’s and Cameron’s positive remarks about her son. This story spoke of a mother’s strong desire for her child’s happiness and success in school.

Yeah, and we had this one mom…I mean it just tore up my heart in a good way. She came in, and they moved up here from Florida, and this little boy has been in three schools this year. So, she came in, and she was just so concerned about him. Their family is from Columbia. His English is good…. And apparently she does not speak English – not much. I was really surprised because he speaks it. I was just kind of assuming that the parents were okay. So he had to translate things for her. She came in, and she was just so worried about him because he has been in three schools this year. He’s doing very well. I mean his schoolwork is good. He’s a good kid. He never acts up… yet she was just really concerned about him just because of how much he’s moved. So we … it was one of those really neat moments, when we got to assure her that everything’s going well, and she
started crying because of our report of how well he was doing, and it was just amazing to see how much she cared about him and just how happy... to just see how incredibly happy she was that he was fitting in, in school, and doing well. You know that was so powerful.

Cameron had a specific example of a parent who cared about her child and expressed this “care” in her positive and personal contact with Ms. Kellymae and Cameron during a conference.

I began to wonder more about how teachers make assumptions about children and families. I don’t think that any of these next insights are particularly new to teacher education: Some teachers talk sometimes in negative ways about children and families; some teachers sometimes make assumptions about families; and student teachers learn about teacher discourse from teachers already immersed in teaching discourse. I did hear these four student teachers trying to break through those common judgments about families when they found and described good reasons for why children did not do their homework (working in a bakery until 9:00; not understanding the assignment; not having the resources at home to complete the paper) and when they talked about how they couldn’t make assumptions about a family based on when a child didn’t bring the paper back to school completed. But at the same time, there was conversation among them that still maintained that there were children and families who did not care about school, based on the uncompleted papers and the participants’ perception that uncompleted papers meant lack of value of education.

The term “stereotype” kept echoing in my analysis again, although I knew it was true that there were children in the third grade who did not bring in completed pieces of paper for Tison and me. However, just because it was true that some children did not bring in their completed work, I did not feel like I could make judgments about their families’ value of education. I considered how “newcomers” (student teachers) were learning from “oldtimers” (teachers at the school) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) about how to describe and talk about children and families. There was truth in the action on the object (some children did not bring the papers back to school completed), but perhaps not in the analysis and labeling of the action (children don’t care, lack of responsibility, problems with organization, parents’ value of education). I thought that we needed to replace the labeling of the cause of the action on the object. How does “does not do homework” translate into “does not value education?”

I also realized that we may need to use Lave and Wenger’s “newcomer” and “oldtimer” labels differently in the context of education. We know that student teachers are not entirely “newcomers” to education. They are in many ways “oldtimers” because they have spent years in public schools as students and know the metaphors of education well because they are embedded in school cultural talk. They are also “oldtimers” to the cultural production of assumptions about family values towards education. The student teachers might be newcomers to this school’s procedures and policies, but the assumptions about “chaotic” families and lack of value of education by lower socio-economic groups are rather pervasive because they go beyond the school walls. These assumptions (supposedly about education) are simply an extension of the cultural assumptions about people in general that are presented in media images and popular texts. It doesn’t take much modeling for a new teacher to assume that a family is chaotic or disorganized or doesn’t think that education is important.

Therefore, this simple piece of paper we call “homework” had been a good concrete place for me to begin. I saw in my analysis how my participants described the children and families based on this object and activity and then continued this discussion with the issue of children’s behavior and attitude towards school. Their conversations became descriptions of
themes such as how we understand and relate to differences (between themselves and others); attempts to understand the culture of the community (Did the families here value education and were they able to be a resource to their children?); questions about teacher’s choices in being culturally responsive (Should they have different expectations for homework here? How did the homework policies at Gilmer Park match or not match the needs of the children?); and their assumptions about children and families based on this paper and these behaviors (responsibility, attitude towards and value of education, and organization).

Questions
Throughout this analysis, I asked myself these research questions.

• Why do we make negative assumptions about families’ patterns such as responsibility, organization, and values based on an unfinished piece of paper and a child’s behavior or attitude towards school?
• How could university programs address how we use such concrete artifacts and actions to make possibly inaccurate assumptions about families?
• How could I take what I learned from examining this concrete artifact to examine student teachers’ responses to other concrete artifacts and daily routines in the school?
• How can we create other processes that set up more positive intersections between school and home?

Although Susan only mentioned the issue, that these children need “stern adult figures,” once in these conversations about homework, behavior, and values about education, I knew that I had heard some of the student teachers say at other times that they thought they would need to be more “strict” or “stern” in this city school. Therefore, I wondered how this might be related to their perceptions about the children and families and my concerns about stereotypes and behavior.

• How do we “relate” to children in our classrooms whose behavior and attitudes are different from our own?

Case Study Analysis: Cameron

Background and Preconceptions

Family and School History
Cameron grew up in the university town and attended the local public schools. She said that she “had wonderful teachers” and “a lot of professors’ spouses” taught there, “so that was neat.” Her mother works for the university (“at the computing center”) and her dad was a professor in computer and statistics at another university nearby. When I asked Cameron to describe her own socio-cultural identity, she said, “Right. Just the typical middle-class White family, I guess.” She described where her parents had grown up and lived and then said, “But just pretty much average. We were never poor, but we were never rich, you know.”

Cameron acknowledged that her university town and public school experience was not as “normal” as she had once thought it was when she was growing up. She said there tended to be a “certain socioeconomic class and also a certain level of ability” in her schools because of the university influence. There was a division between her school and some of the other county schools which were more of a “mix of the different socioeconomic classes and different hardships that people face and the different levels of ability of the school.” She realized that at the schools she attended, there was a
Concentration of a certain kind of family and a certain kind of kids....We had the other types of families and stuff, but it was sort of the minority.... there was like this solid division between the kids like that. I would say it was one of the biggest issues in my high school. It was the professors’ kids over here, and you got the locals over there, and there was not much in between.

I asked her to describe her schools beyond her description of socioeconomic class and ability. She said, “We had a lot of people from other countries there. We didn’t necessarily have a lot of African Americans.” She thought that because of the university, her school included people from other countries, such as “Asia and India,” and that it was “cool growing up thinking that it was normal to have people from around the world living right next to you.” She added later in the first interview, “So I guess growing up, my idea of diversity was probably more people from other countries than it was people from my country that were different than me.”

Cameron had pursued and completed a degree in accounting at National University. While she was a student, she worked in a local day care center and found that she loved working with children. After graduation, she moved to an urban area for her first job in the accounting profession. When she worked at this job, she realized she did not like “going to work in a cubicle” and that one year at this job “was enough to convince me that that wasn’t what I wanted to do.” She said that she would look at her photo album on her desk of her children from the day care center and ask herself, “What am I doing here?” She decided to return to the university to become a teacher. She was an “alternate” student in the Master’s program because she had returned with a completed bachelor’s degree in another discipline. Therefore, she did not take all of the education and early childhood courses that the other student teachers had taken in their undergraduate program.

Prior Experiences with “Diversity” or “Multicultural Settings”

When I asked Cameron about her experiences with “diversity,” she told me about a friendship that she had developed with an African-American co-worker last year during her work as an accountant. Cameron said that she and her friend were the “same age, same stage in life.... so we kind of teamed up.” Cameron went on to tell me stories about how her friend (Julia) had taken Cameron to the county where Julia presently lived, which was predominantly African American. “And so I would go to her house there...and so I would go to the grocery with her and go to the mall with her. And everywhere I went I was the minority.” She said that “people were sort of like, ‘Why are you guys friends?’ - You know?” Cameron said that one time she and Julia were on a subway, and a guy walked by and “started talking about ‘crackers,’ and why was she [Julia] hanging out with them [crackers]...kind of making comments under his breath, but definitely loud enough. He wanted her [Julia] to hear those things.”

Cameron said that she would go to Julia’s house and “she would have all of these people over, and again, there I was, the only White person there, and it was that same thing of, ‘Wow, this is what it’s like you know to be in their shoes most of the time.’” Cameron said that Julia had told her “a lot about reality as she sees it - that I have never seen from my perspective. And so I think that that helped calm any fears I might have had about coming into a school like this, where there are a lot more African Americans.”

Cameron said that this friendship and her experiences with her friend were definitely the most helpful to her. She compared her relationship with Julia to her university experiences in the following manner.

You learn so much more from life experiences than you do from professors and books. Like that is good background information to have, but I think I already learned so much
from her [Julia] than the insights that professors gave me - I was sort of like, “Yeah, but
that is the tip of the iceberg....I know the whole iceberg now, and that is just this little
piece.”

In all of Cameron’s interviews, she would often return to these experiences with Julia and
say that this friendship had done “a world of good for me in terms of just opening my eyes to her
reality” and that Julia “really opened my eyes and gave me a different mind set coming into this
than I would have, had I not known her. Instead of the two of us being friends in my world, she’s
the first friend I’ve had where we were also friends in her world.” And Cameron said, “I had like
tour guide to show me around."

Preconceptions about the School

The student teachers had the opportunity to select whether they wanted to do their student
teaching in either a rural or an urban setting. Since Cameron was an “alternate” student, she did
not have that opportunity. She was placed in the urban or city setting by the field program
leaders. When I asked her about “any expectations” she might have had before coming to the city
school, she said that her expectations were that she would experience something like what she
had seen in the movie Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer, [Producer], 1995). She thought that the
students would be “sort of… a little rougher and harder on the teacher - that was the sort of image
I had, I guess.” I asked her if she had had that image before she had seen the movie, and she
explained that she grew up “assuming that most bad things happen in the city, because you hear
on the news about all of the bad stuff that is happening in D. C. and New York.... And then my
parents were sort of afraid of the city.” She said that when she and her family went to visit
relatives, she remembered that her parents would make sure that they locked their car doors
when they drove through “certain areas of the city – you know the not touristy areas.”

I asked Cameron if her parents’ fears were about the city or “other cultural identity
markers,” and she said that her dad was “a little racist, so you know, certain areas of the city
where people were a different color, he would sort of make certain comments about those
particular areas.” She explained that her father had developed this perspective because of what
he had grown up in, and that her mom had “tried very, very, very hard to not let that pass on.”
Cameron explained that she didn’t bring up her dad’s perspective “a lot because I don’t want
people to think I have developed those ideas because I haven’t, but it definitely has had an
impact on my view of cities and what I grew up thinking about cities.”

Later in the interview, Cameron eventually revealed how she interpreted the university’s
intent in placing student teachers in the city school.

But it’s interesting because when I heard “inner city” and “diversity” experience, I was
assuming they were getting us into where African Americans were. I didn’t even think
about people from Central America, South America, people from Asia. I don’t know; I
didn’t think about it, but there is a lot of those, too.

It wasn’t until the end of the semester that Cameron revealed more about her
preconceptions about the school as she described how her perceptions had changed over the 15
weeks. She told me that she had expected “the environment to be a little colder” [meaning the
environment at the city school]. She added that she had believed that in an “inner city school,”
she would be working with parents who “didn’t care and that didn’t parent and didn’t do their
jobs in that regard.” She had expected to find some parents who didn’t care about their children.
She also told me that before she came to Gilmer Park, she had read an article about teaching a
specific math program in New York City. The article had said that this particular math program,
that was based on an inquiry approach, didn’t work because with inner-city school children,
teachers need to “just give them information and drill it enough” for the children to learn. “The touchy-feely stuff doesn’t always work for inner-city kids.” Cameron continued and said that she expected that she would see teachers that were “a little bit strict,” or “a little bit more structured and just a little bit colder, not necessarily in a bad way.”

Beginning Perceptions

At the beginning of her first interview, Cameron said, “It’s going well. I managed to get the model fifth grade class. I was dreaming of all the problems I was going to have …. but most of the good ones got in this class.” Later in the interview, when I said, “Tell me about the population at this school,” she answered:

It looks like, for the most part, the socioeconomic class is pretty similar, at least in my classes …they are mostly pretty similar with maybe an outlier or two, but it’s pretty similar. And definitely the White kids are the minority in my classroom. But the funny thing is, I don’t have the same feeling in my classroom as I did when I went to Hamilton County. [Cameron is referring to when she went home with Julia to Hamilton County. There, she went to places with Julia and was the only White person.] I guess because I am not the only one maybe, I don’t know. [She means at Gilmer Park, she is not the only White person.] Yeah, we have a couple of White children and then African American children. We have some from Mexico, Honduras, Columbia. We used to have two from Asia, but one just moved yesterday, so now we have one.

I told Cameron that I thought that about 10% of the school population were children from other countries who were learning English. She explained to me that all of the fifth graders who were learning English had been placed in her classroom.

During the interview I asked Cameron about her feelings regarding being at the school, and Cameron said, “Actually a lot of relief because I was scared, and it’s not as bad as I thought….but I love my class, and the kids are really great, and I guess it didn’t live up to my fears.” She said that even though Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer, [Producer], 1995) had influenced her to be fearful, she also said that she thought “a lot of it was the fear of the unknown….so now that it’s not the unknown anymore, it’s not as scary, and it didn’t live up to my fears. So that has been good.”

Narrative Themes:

Diversity, Diversity and Structure, Race and Cultural Identity, Realities and Normal, Sensitivity and Relationships, Socio-cultural Self-critique, Explanations for her Changes, Family Connections, My Student Teacher Connections, My Teacher Educator Connections, and My Questions

Member Checks: Cameron sent me an e-mail that said, “I read your writing tonight, and overall, it looks right. The only thing that you may want to change is in the “Prior Experiences with Diversity” section.” [In my original document, I had said that Cameron had gone with Julia to her predominantly Black home town, but Cameron said she had gone home with Julia to where she presently lived. Julia had originally grown up in a “predominantly White community” and when Julia had become an adult, she had moved to a “predominantly Black community.” I have made that change. There is one other member check which you will read later in this case study. Cameron stated, “It was actually really fun for me to read your writing. It brought back a lot of fun memories from my student teaching experience.”]
Diversity

During the semester, Cameron was in the midst of re-constructing a more complex understanding of diversity, and she used her past experiences and the school experiences to formulate her ideas. I label her “complex understanding of diversity” as a theme in her narratives. She explained that she had a different perspective on diversity issues than her father, and in particular in relation to race. She referred to her experiences with Julia and how Julia had given her “a lot different mind set coming into” this diverse setting. She told me that when she had been in school, she would have thought that a diverse classroom would include “people from other countries” rather than “people from my country that were different than me.” Therefore, she previously thought that diversity was mostly related to other people’s nationalities, ethnicities, and language. She had also explained that she thought “diversity experience” meant that she was going to be working with African Americans. This could be viewed as a contradiction in her terms, but I believe she was using the word differently in each context.

Her stories revealed how she was changing her interpretations of the concept of “diversity,” and how her interpretations might influence her teaching. One of her first impressions about “diversity” factors was her experiences with the children in her classroom who were learning to speak English. She told me two stories during the first interview.

Cameron had been surprised to encounter so many children from other countries and expressed specific concern about one boy in regards to his academic progress. She said that he was from Mexico and had “been in the country less than a year.” She said,

He still does not understand much English. And so I have been trying to work with him, and I am like - What are we doing wrong here that he is not getting it? … How in the world is he going to catch up? You can’t just give him a book and say “page whatever” …. I don’t feel like he is getting the help he needs …. Working with him has been an interesting experience for me, just the frustration of not knowing what to do with him or how to help him.

Cameron felt unprepared to teach and understand the special needs of a child who was learning English, but who was expected to learn the same material in a fifth grade classroom. She saw that she would need to know “how to help him” while she taught the rest of the classroom. Cameron experienced the frustration of appreciating his differences, but not knowing how to provide different instruction for him.

In another story about language differences, Cameron described a concern of hers that was a “social” issue, not an academic issue. Cameron said that she had five boys in her classroom who spoke Spanish, and she had realized that they were “talking about things they shouldn’t be talking about” in Spanish so that no one could understand them. The school nurse had told Cameron to be aware that one of the boys was very “mature” and “gets excited about young women” and that when the boys were speaking in Spanish, this “is what they are talking about.” Since her cooperating teacher was aware of this issue, her teacher had told the boys that they couldn’t speak in Spanish in the classroom. Cameron said that she realized that this was what was happening with her and these boys. She explained.

From their facial expressions and their tone of voice, it seemed to be a different level – not just “they fall in love with the student teacher.” It’s like - I am concerned about what they are saying. And now I am paranoid about helping them with work, and I am now completely paranoid about what I wear because I get the impression that this one kid in particular knows way more than he should about girls. I am like, “I don’t need that headache, when I am trying to teach them because I want to help them.”
This was a problem I had never faced or considered as a teacher. When I heard Cameron’s story, I realized what issues this kind of situation would raise for teachers in regards to honoring children’s home literacies while maintaining “appropriate” school behavior and conversations. At this opening point of the semester, Cameron was telling me that to have children who might speak inappropriately in another language was something she had not anticipated and was wondering what to do or how to respond.

Cameron also acknowledged social class differences as a factor in understanding “diversity.” Cameron shared how much she had learned from a seminar on the topic of class identity. I asked her how she was using what she understood about socio-economic class identity in “thinking about this school and the differences even in the classroom.” This is her response.

Yeah. We have a lot of differences in our classroom because we have one little boy, who most of his clothes have bleach spilled on them, and you can tell that’s just what they can afford to put him in. We have one boy, who you know has to go to work cause his family owns a bakery, and he has to go to work after school. So, yeah there’s actually a wide variety…. but somehow not as defined as it was at Riverside [her school from her Fall placement.]

Her ideas about social class factors drastically changed when she was enrolled in her field placement during the fall semester at a rural school. In this school, which was only ten minutes away from her home, she found that the population was entirely different from where she lived. She said that she was “shocked” because she had assumed that “the stuff” she heard about the families at the school only “happened in the city… because … bad stuff happened in the city.” Cameron explained that there was “a $5.00 field trip and there are kids that can’t go. And there were kids there who had parents in jail and kids that were living with their grandmothers because the parents were on drugs and couldn’t take care of them…I was like ‘my gosh.’” She saw differences in the children’s home experiences and how poverty had affected their lives.

In January, Cameron attended a seminar at National University on socio-economic class and identity (Payne, 1996). This seminar helped her construct a different appreciation for the power that social class had in defining one’s life by explaining stereotypes, assumptions, and values related to social class groups. This knowledge base changed her understanding of social class from being merely a representation of income and work to a more complex understanding of class as an “identity” and an important diversity factor.

Cameron admitted that she used to think that “diversity” meant skin color only, as she implied in her comment about what she thought her “diversity” experience would be during this student teaching semester. During her experiences at Gilmer Park, Cameron said she now understood that “there is a lot more to it.” She told me that she knew that diversity also included socio-economic class, “differences in families,” and could also be “tied to religion.” She described her previous experience at the rural school as “very diverse” because even though the children “looked the same” (White like Cameron), they were “very, very different” from her own life experiences.

Subsequently, Cameron understood that diversity could mean how children were different from each other based on multiple factors such as race, ethnicity, nationality, language, socio-economic class, and religion. Cameron also understood that diversity could also mean that her children were different from her. I believe that as Cameron revealed her understanding of “diversity,” she also revealed that she realized she was teaching children that were not like her or “others.”
Diversity and Structure

Cameron had equated “diversity” experience with “inner city” and had told me about her expectation that the teachers would need to be more “strict.” In her final interview she confirmed this belief from her experiences in Ms. Kellymae’s classroom. She said that her teacher Just knows that they need structure. She is very loving towards them and they know that she loves them. It just comes out differently. She sets certain expectations for the classroom, and you will obey while you are in the class...She was like “I don’t care what you do at home, but while you are here this is what you are going to do.” So, she just sets certain standards for discipline in the classroom that my teacher last year did not. And that might be the difference in the two teachers, you know.

Cameron also used the word “strict” and explained the reason that she would need to be more structured in an inner-city school. She said, “You have to be a little bit strict you know... because some of these kids don’t have structure at home, and they need, they almost feel safer when their school does have a lot of structure, because sometimes home is chaos.” I was not sure what Cameron meant by “chaos.” I wondered if she thought that the children’s homes were “chaos,” based on what the children said, what her teacher told her, or her own assumptions about the children based on generalized perceptions of the families. I wish I had thought to ask her what she meant by “chaos.” Member Check from Cameron: “I was wondering if it’s too late to answer your question about what I meant when I said that my children’s home lives were ‘chaos.’ That was based on the stories that my two cooperating teachers had told me about the kids’ home lives. I heard stories of parents on drugs, parents in jail, lots and lots of family members living in a small space, parents working evenings and weekends, etc.”

Race and Cultural Identity

As Cameron talked about her experiences with Julia and at Gilmer Park, she revealed her more complex understanding of race to me. She understood that race was not just “skin color,” but was a cultural identity. She compared this recently developed understanding with her perspective on diversity and race from her family and childhood. She said that she had “grown up with one reality” and had thought that, “everybody was pretty average.” These words convey her former belief that her life as a White person was “average” or normal. Cameron said that when she entered Julia’s African American world, “their world, them showing me around their world, I realized how much more it encompasses.” Cameron expressed an understanding that White people see the world based on their White and majority perspective. Most importantly, she had found that there were other ways to see the world besides this “average” White perspective. Cameron knew now that being in the majority affected one’s reality. “Wow,” she said as she explained her response to being in the minority when she went home and out to the mall with Julia in her predominantly Black community. “This is what it’s like to be in their shoes.” Cameron saw being Black, and a minority, as a different perspective, or a different way to see and interpret the world.

At one point, Cameron talked about how she used to have “stereotypes of African Americans and Hispanics.” She said she used to think that they “looked like this, do this, behave like this.” She admitted that she had been “almost fearful of certain groups because of the way I thought they would behave or act. There were certain groups I looked down upon because they didn’t act like I did.” She claimed that we develop those stereotypes from our parents, society, and television. Her experiences with Julia let her see that African Americans do not fit stereotypes and that there are alternate more accurate understandings about people than her previous inaccurate and stereotypical understandings about people based on race.
During Cameron’s third interview, she again demonstrated a complex understanding of race as a cultural identity, and not just “skin color.” She was perplexed about how the school identified children by race, particularly with “mixed children” and asked about what those labels meant. Cameron said of her classroom that “not quite a third are Hispanic; we have one little boy from Vietnam…” She went on to ask:

Cameron: I am wondering though … how do they classify the mixed children? …Because we have some of those.
Dana: There is not an identifier in the school statistics for bi-racial. And I think there was a push a couple of years ago to include a bi-racial category.
Cameron: It makes no sense to put them more in one, because I have a little girl in my class whose mother is White, father is Black; she is equally both.

In this description, Cameron was wondering about the complexity of labeling children by a racial category or according to skin color, and she used a child in her room as an example. She acknowledged that there are children in her classroom that are labeled one or the other, Black or White, despite the fact that they come from multiple racial “categories.” This racial labeling did not make sense to her. After this simple description of children in her classroom and the questions their identities raised for her, she went on to talk about more generalized and complex perceptions and questions about racial identity. She revealed that she viewed race as a construct with multiple influences.

And see that gets into another thing … what exactly encompasses race? Because is it just skin color, or is it the cultural? Because that could influence how you define it, too. Because you could take someone who by skin color is very, very dark, definitely African American, but possibly was raised in a predominately White community. And they are not going to look quite the same in terms of personality and characteristics and things like that, as somebody who maybe was a mixed child who was raised in a predominately Black community. And so race involves so much else, so much more than skin color.

In summary, Cameron exhibited a more complex understanding of the concept of “race” by showing that she knew that “race” could be, but should not be, a negative stereotype. She understood that “race” was “not just skin color,” and that racial identity also included positive cultural factors and other perspectives or “shoes.” Cameron acknowledged the significance of race in personal cultural identity and understood that race mattered in people’s lives.

At only one point did I hear Cameron take a more “color-blind” approach to her talk about race, a viewpoint that infers that race is not a significant cultural factor. She was telling me about talking to her father about her fifth grade children. Cameron said she had told him that she didn’t “see” their skin color. I wondered if this was Cameron’s way of attempting to show her father that she did not “use” skin color as a negative stereotype and in her assumptions about and relationships with her children. She knew that her father would have. She attempted to demonstrate to him a different knowledge system about race.

**Realities and Normal**

I address in this section the evidence of Cameron’s insight about how people perceive “reality” and “normal” differently. When I use the word, “reality,” I am referring to the notion that people view things that happen around them differently, or people construct different beliefs about the world or “realities.” “Realities” becomes what we think is true or real about our experiences. When I refer to the term “normal,” I am referencing the idea that in our
understanding of our experiences or “realities,” we also construct ideas about what we believe is “normal” or “average” or “acceptable.” Although “normal,” “average,” and “acceptable” are different constructs, I use the terms interchangeably in this context to connote the idea that we construct beliefs about what people should be like or should act like. We have used this concept for “normal” behavior against which all other behaviors can be judged.

I believe that Cameron’s system of understandings about diversity, cultural identity, and “others” are directly related to her beliefs about “normal” and the construction of “reality.” Cameron recognized that different people have different “realities” or beliefs about the world or experiences in the world, based on their cultural identity. She shared a story about Julia that caused her to realize that her White experience was not the only “normal.” Cameron explained that Julia had grown up in a mostly White rural community and this White community “impacted her outlook” [Julia’s]. Cameron told this story about Julia’s identity before Cameron told me more about her own [Cameron’s] view of “reality” and “equality.”

She [Julia] told me she used to put pillowcases on her hair and say she wanted long straight hair like White girls and things like that. So she shared with me how that impacted her growing up in a mostly White society; where now she’s sort of embraced her culture and her background.

I was surprised. Tison had told me a similar story. She said that she and her friend would hold a pillowcase at the back of their hair and feel how it could swing from side to side to see what a White girl’s hair would feel like. Tison had asked me to explain to her why beauty was so determined by White culture. When I asked Cameron how hearing Julia’s pillowcase story had influenced Cameron’s work with her children, she replied.

It’s made me more sensitive. Instead of thinking that we’re all just the same – which I always thought that equality meant the same – but it’s different. So recognizing that we’re equal, but not necessarily the same and being able to realize that they might have a different reality than I do. Also, I guess I don’t know exactly how to explain it, but to be sensitive to the fact that I’m sort of coming into their world and to be sensitive to how they might feel about that.

Cameron had developed this critical understanding that valuing “equality” didn’t mean we were the “same.” Cameron realized that people who were different from her might have a different reality and might have different standards of “normal” than White middle-class standards.

Since Cameron had explained that she considered her own schooling experience to be “normal” in her first interview (before teaching in her rural placement in the fall), I asked her what she considered to be normal at the end of the semester. She said she thought it was somewhere in-between her school (which was in a university, small-town community) and her fall placement school (which was in a rural and lower socio-economic area and where there was so much “going on in these kid’s homes lives”). She said, “Probably somewhere between the two where you have more of a mix of the different socioeconomic classes and different hardships that people face and the different levels of ability of the school and you know all of those things.” She continued to refer to her concept of “normal” throughout the semester because she realized that her childhood understanding of “normal” was not accurate for her now.

Sometimes Cameron shared her discomfort with the assumption that the cultural identity of “White” was “normal.” She said,

We look around us and we say this is what I see - what’s here - this is what’s normal.
And going out and realizing that there’s actually a heck of a lot of people who don’t live
in my normal world, and they have their whole world that’s normal to them [She’s using a questioning tone]? It sort of rocks your world of what’s normal.

Cameron described how she had come to realize that all people did not consider a “middle-class” standing to be desirable. She became conscious of this concept about class identity during the seminar on social class. The seminar leader directed the attendees through an activity that demonstrated that a member of a social class group did not want to be like another social class group because each group had its own set of values and behaviors with which they felt comfortable. Cameron said that in regards to African American families, “we assume that they all want to become Bill Cosby.” Cameron thought that Bill Cosby had “sort of joined the White world … had joined that middle-class…and if you didn’t look at the color of their skin, they did things like we do. Assuming that everyone wants to become like that is not necessarily accurate.” In this case, she used a television representation of “normal” as a reference point for her explanation for how we develop expectations for people’s life choices regarding “normal.”

At times, Cameron addressed her beliefs about “normal” with questions. “Who says they even want to act like I do, and who says I shouldn’t act more like them?” (about her fifth graders) “Who says that the other cultural groups shouldn’t behave the way they do?” “Who says that the way I behave is the right way?” “Who gets to decide these things?” “Who says I’m normal?” “Why can’t we all be normal?” “What is wrong with that?” And sometimes she would give her own answers. “Nobody is right. Nobody is more normal.” “It’s just different, and it seems simple, but it really was a wild moment for me when I realized that there is no reason that everybody should act like I do.” Once she questioned and answered, “Who is in control of our society? Predominantly White males. Yes, so they get to decide what is socially acceptable.”

In Cameron’s final interview, she stated that the most significant thing she had learned while at Gilmer Park was, “Don’t ever assume that all the kids should look like me and behave like me.” She summarized her ideas about “normal” in this emotional way.

I have become very passionate about this that we shouldn’t all act alike, and there is no reason for anybody to ever think that we should all look, act, and think the same, you know. And to truly embrace the differences and say, I appreciate the way that you live your life. Maybe I don’t live it that way, but I think it’s great and maybe I can learn some lessons from you.

Cameron shared one story that had a contradictory element. In this case, she questioned another family’s values about their child’s behavior. Even though she did not use the words “reality” or “normal” in this account, she compared what she viewed as “acceptable” (or my construct “normal”) and what her children believed was acceptable behavior. This story came directly from her experiences with the children. Cameron was so concerned about this issue that she and Faith had a conversation with Ms. Kellymae after school one day about the topic. Since they had my tape player, they taped the conversation for me sometime in March.

Cameron told me that her children were completing a writing assignment in which they were composing a possible solution to a “pretend” conflict situation between children in a classroom. Cameron said that she was surprised to find that every single child, except for one, had written that they would fight to resolve the conflict. Ms. Kellymae explained to Cameron (on the tape) that the children’s parents would encourage them to fight during conflicts and that “taking up for yourself” was valued in this community. Cameron said that she thought it was “interesting” that the parents placed such value on being “tough” and “not being the weak ones.” Both Faith and Cameron said that their own parents would never have even raised the topic of “fighting” unless they had gotten in a fight, which, of course, the student teachers said would
never have happened in their lives. “It wasn’t an issue in my schools. It wouldn’t have come up,” Cameron explained. Faith added that she couldn’t remember “fighting” in schools until high school.

Cameron said that she was wondering if “maybe that’s why there’s more fighting in these kinds of schools, not that the kids are naturally more aggressive or anything like that. It’s just that the parents are actually encouraging it, then obviously there’s going to be more fights.” Cameron added that she was equally “shocked” that the children were so honest about their ideas about fighting. She said that if she [Cameron] had considered fighting as an alternative, she wouldn’t put that in a paper ‘cause I’d be worried about what the teacher would think.” Cameron realized that if the children’s parents read their child’s paper, they might say to their child, “Good job.” “They don’t even know that it’s wrong because their parents have taught them that it’s right. So maybe they’re not embarrassed to say it in a paper.” Both Cameron and Faith were perplexed about how parents could tell children to fight. They realized that this situation set up tensions in the classroom because of different expectations for acceptable behavior between home and school. Cameron and Faith wondered what their response should be as teachers if they were teaching children who thought that fighting was “acceptable” (or in my words, a “normal” response).

This was the only incidence in which I heard Cameron express the conflict between her passion for accepting other standards for “normal” (“acceptable”) and establishing standards for acceptable behavior at school that were not related to a family’s viewpoint.

Sensitivity and Relationships

Cameron expressed sensitivity towards “others” and an understanding of the importance of being sensitive in relationships in many instances. I use “sensitivity” to mean that she considered how people felt, and she used her own feelings to respond to the people around her rather than only using what she thought she knew cognitively about them. She also used her understandings of the way diverse people can have diverse “realities” as a way to perceive and relate to her children’s and parents’ actions. Her narratives revealed this theme of sensitivity in her understandings about teaching “other people’s children.”

During Cameron’s second interview, Cameron expressed “sensitivity” when she worried about whether her children exhibited “sensitivity” to each other. She began our conversation by telling me about a child (ELL) who hadn’t read well in front of class and then his classmates had ridiculed him. Cameron wondered how to handle children’s judgments of other children who were learning English. “You can’t make children be sensitive to each other,” she said. “I just hate to see kids be mean to each other cause I know how much that affects them.” While she expressed this doubt, she still wondered how she could help the children in her class “understand his position.” When she pondered how she could help the class, she revealed her desire to teach children to see from someone else’s perspective, or to develop sensitivity in their relationships with one another. Cameron said, “I tried to tell them it wasn’t fair, but how do you make sure that he’s okay? …. But that kind of stuff, I feel like they’re just being mean. I just can’t stand that, and it’s hard to deal with.” We talked about what she might do in the future in her own classroom to help children become understanding about other children who had “language barriers.”

Cameron also expressed sensitivity when she took into account the differences between her expectations and the children’s ideas about acceptable interactions in the classroom. She told me about how the children sometimes would “talk out in class.” She said that she thought the children were “generally a lot more verbal” than what she was accustomed to and said, “I always
look at the heart behind kids actions, and these kids, they’re sweet kids.” She said she did not want to expect them to conform to her cultural understandings for the level or amount of classroom dialogue.

Cameron’s expectations about what she would experience with parents in a city school had been transformed. Thus, she expressed sensitivity about the parents’ lives. When I asked Cameron if she had had any positive experiences with the families or school, this is how she answered.

Oh, we had parent teacher conferences yesterday. That was a good experience, just realizing – I know they’ve told us in class not to assume anything about the parents - which is still - until you meet them, you still have some (chuckle) ideas in your head that “oh maybe so and so’s mom doesn’t care” or something …. So to have some of the parents come in - especially the parents of the kids that maybe aren’t doing quite as well - to have them come in and realize they’re just as concerned about how their kids are doing, and that maybe they don’t know as much how to help, or maybe their schedule doesn’t permit them to help as much as say the one whose mom is a PTA president. Just because they can’t help as much, doesn’t mean that they don’t want to.

In another conversation she said something similar.

I sort of had this idea coming into inner-city schools that we would have to deal with a lot of parents that didn’t care, and that didn’t parent and didn’t do their jobs in that regard. And I have been wrong. There are still parents that don’t care, but there are parents that don’t care in Middleville [our university town.] … I expected a much higher percentage of that than I have seen. Most of the parents we have talked to care very much, and they are very dedicated to their children, and I am a little embarrassed to say that I didn’t expect that, you know. So I have learned that I can’t make those assumptions. I can’t assume that inner-city kids are bad kids – their parents aren’t paying attention and don’t care, you know. And a lot of times even if they are messing up and are not doing the right things doesn’t mean that they don’t care, and it doesn’t mean they don’t love their children and want the best for them … Maybe it means they are doing the best they can …. I have just learned maybe to give them a little bit of a break …. The parents maybe are doing the best they can.

In both statements, I heard Cameron using evidence from her experiences to change her preconceptions about the families in a positive way. She had struggled with stereotypical assumptions about families in the city, despite coursework that had encouraged her not to make stereotypical assumptions, and the parents at Gilmer Park had been the evidence that she needed to help her see their lives as much more complex than the simple interpretation and judgment that the parents in a city school “don’t care.”

Cameron expressed her sensitivity to “other” people’s perspectives or “realities” by demonstrating her ability to see why African Americans might make judgments about her because she was a White person. First, she said that Julia had helped her become aware of “the emotional state of this culture and how they might feel” because African Americans might still have “feelings about what happened in the past.” She said she understood “why they might resent White people, and why that [feeling] actually might be okay.” Cameron’s ability to see from another culture’s perspective caused her to be sensitive to and question her relationships at the school with people who were African American. This statement represents how she wanted to be “sensitive” to the fact that she was an outsider in a predominantly African American school.
And to realize that some of the tension and the resentment and anger and whatever went both ways, to realize that they [African Americans] might not be excited about me coming into their world and to be sensitive to that....to be sensitive to the fact that I’m sort of a guest in their world right now.

Cameron knew that it would be wrong for her to come in and “pretend to be an authority” on another culture or community. She thought this awareness of her position as “different” or outsider made her more sensitive and able to develop respectful relationships.

In addition to these examples, Cameron said that she worried about “how the other teachers in the school looked at the four of us coming into this school.” She wondered what “assumptions” the African American teachers, in particular, made about the student teachers from the university. Cameron said that perhaps she worried because “we’re coming into an African American school.” She continued.

I wonder if they think anything like, “These guys are the prissy kids from X college who are coming into the inner city school. And I just wonder if there are any thoughts like that about us being naïve about the realities of their world.

Cameron said that she wanted to say to the teachers, “No, I understand, not that I fully understand.” In this statement, she wanted to exhibit her sensitivity to the African American teachers by saying that she acknowledged that they had a different reality and were equally “normal” and that she respected their differences. At the same time this statement meant that she was also sensitive enough to know that it would be presumptuous for her to act as if she could ever fully understand a Black person’s experience since she was White. Cameron asked herself and me these questions about this dilemma.

How do you let the parents and your colleagues know that you respect them? … How do you let them know that you see yourself as being on their level, as being equals with them? That’s more important…. Just letting them know, especially the parents, that you’re not the stereotypical White person who might think the thoughts that they fear you think…It’s such an important thing to communicate, but you can’t come right out and be like, “Hey, so, I’m not a racist.”

Cameron’s sensitivity was based on her enlightened understandings of diversity and “others” and persisted throughout the semester in all of her conversations with me.

**Socio-cultural Self-critique**

This sensitivity towards her relationships and her ability to accept other “realities” and “normals” as valid were both related to and embodied in her ability to “self-critique” based on her socio-cultural lens or critical consciousness. I use the term “socio-cultural self-critique” to mean that Cameron was able to analyze herself thru a socio-cultural lens, or could see how her socio-cultural identity could affect an event or an interpretation of an event. Her worry about how African American teachers viewed her is one clear example.

Cameron was able to critique herself and her own typical White middle-class background. Cameron did not seem to be afraid of saying that White could be a negative identity when she talked about how African Americans viewed her and when she wondered how they might view her at Gilmer Park. I have shared examples of her ideas that White identity should not be considered the only “normal” and her ability to critically assess the dominant paradigm of Whiteness. For example, in “Realities and Normal,” she critiqued Whiteness in her questions and comments such as, “Who says they even want to act like I do, and who says I shouldn’t act more like them?” Another example of this perspective occurred early in the semester during her first
interview. She was describing what it felt like to be the only White person at a Jamaican restaurant with Julia and she stated the following.

I was like - I wonder how they feel about the fact that I am here with them, you know? I was wondering what they thought of that and feeling out of place. And I was like, you know what? We are so comfortable being the majority. We don’t understand. So that was really eye-opening for me and just talking to her [Julia] about what her experiences are like.

One remarkable story of Cameron’s “socio-cultural self-critique” began when the four student teachers took the tape player with them in the car after the first Group Interview, at my request. During the last five minutes of their car ride home, Cameron raised a problem that had been troubling her. The story is charged with how Cameron thought her socio-cultural identity affected a lesson she had taught (socio-cultural self-critique). On the tape, I heard Cameron tell the other three participants that she had been teaching a lesson on the Civil Right Movement to her fifth graders. She told the participants that when she was teaching the lesson, she “became uncomfortable sitting there realizing that my ancestors did this to the ancestors of some of the kids in my class.” She added that she was “ashamed of it, but there’s nothing I can do about it because those are the facts of history, and we can’t shelter them from the facts of history.”

During this Car Talk, Susan told Cameron and the others that it made her angry when White people felt guilty, because the history of slavery and the Civil Rights movement was over, and she did not feel “ashamed” of herself “for what my ancestors’ lives were like.” Despite Susan’s response, Cameron continued and said that she was not trying to “take responsibility for them [White ancestors] doing that [slavery], but I’m saying that it was collectively our race of people who did this… and that makes me ashamed to even be a part of that race when we’re sitting there talking about it.” She also told the group that she might be ashamed because she realized that “things still go on today… there are still very racist people today.”

Cameron also self-critiqued when she reviewed how she and her White friends might have responded to the same kind of lesson on slavery or the Civil Rights Movement when she was in school. “I read about it, and I was like, “Well that’s nice history you know? But to be in a classroom with children whose ancestors were very, very much affected by it, it’s just very different for me.” I asked Cameron about this Car Talk during our second individual interview. There had not been a resolution in this conversation among the four during the Car Talk tape; each of them had responded and expressed different viewpoints.

Cameron explained that when she had researched for the lesson and learned more about the facts of segregation, her new knowledge about those historical facts had changed her perspective once more. She said that she had never known that White people gave African American schools “all the used stuff,” for example. She wondered if she had ever learned this fact in school and forgotten it, or if her teachers “didn’t teach” about how badly White people treated African Americans. She said that she knew that Black people weren’t considered to be “equal,” but she didn’t know if her teachers had gone “into the details.” She added, “Before, [in her school’s study of history] it was like, ‘Oh, well, that’s a part of history you know.’ But now it just hit me a lot differently this time and just thinking how unfair it was.” This new knowledge deepened Cameron’s appreciation for all that she had learned from Julia. She was reinterpreting history based on her socio-cultural knowledge and could critique what she had previously believed. Cameron wondered if she may have had such a strong reaction to this historical data because of her experiences with her father’s perspective.
Most importantly, Cameron said that it “hit” her when she looked “into the faces of my kids” that if “we were still segregated, I would never have the opportunity to teach most of my children.” In fact, she said she was amazed at how “shocked” her students were during her lesson on slavery. She added:

And I used some pictures in my unit to try to get the point across because my kids respond to pictures, and I can remember the shock I saw on their faces as we talked through slavery. And I was really surprised because I was like, “Don’t they know?” Don’t they know that this is their ancestors and this is how they were treated? And so I guess I was really surprised at how little they knew about it.

Cameron said she was “a little bothered by the reaction” she had gotten from Susan, and that Lily had told Cameron that she was “really glad” that Cameron had said what she did. I had heard the tension between the participants in the Car Talk tape.

In this story, Cameron was able to critique her teaching through a socio-cultural lens and recognized that as she taught these topics (as a White person) to a predominantly African American classroom, it made her think differently about what she was teaching. She reflected and said, “If I had a class full of just White children, they would be like, ‘Okay, that’s a part of history.’” In this classroom, she knew that she needed to be “sensitive” to who her students were and be “sensitive to how they might feel about that;” this story became another illustration of her “sensitivity.” I believe that in this instance the very content, “slavery,” changed because of the audience’s identity. Cameron also could see that the difference between her cultural identity and her audience’s cultural identity changed the content and the import of her lesson.

**Cameron’s Explanation for her Changes**

Whenever I asked Cameron what caused the change in her perceptions, she would mention three things I have already related. First, she said that her experiences with Julia “did a world of good for me….just opening my eyes to her reality.” Cameron said that “everywhere I went I was the minority.” Cameron said that she and Julia had many discussions, and she disagreed with Julia at times. Cameron told me, “I would like fight her on things, Like, ‘Oh no, that is not the way it is; that is not the way it is.’ She [Julia] was like, ‘You don’t know….I am telling you this is the way it is.’” Cameron recounted one significant story for me several times. She said that she and Julia were talking about the effects of racism and slavery on Black people today. Here is Cameron’s account of Julia’s history lesson on historical racism that affected Cameron dramatically.

African Americans were considered to be equal to animals at one point in our country. She [Julia] would talk about that, and she was like, “How in the world are we supposed to respect ourselves when at one time, our culture was considered to be animals, and we were considered to be 3/5 of a person?” …. She was like, “How are we supposed to recover from that?” And she says society tells us to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps and get with the program, and how do you as a culture recover from that? There are still so many people living that grew up in segregation where a lot of this was around, and she was like, “It’s just still too prevalent, and that gets passed down; the feelings that the parents have get passed down.

This historical fact seemed to change Cameron’s prior belief that African Americans should be able to “pick themselves up by the bootstraps.” Also, Cameron’s experiences as a minority in Julia’s community helped her recognize that her prior belief, that “we don’t have any race issues in America” (which Cameron shared with me during this conversation) was “naive” and “oblivious.” Cameron said that she saw that “the effects are still real today.”
Cameron added that Julia “told me a lot about reality as she sees it - that I have never seen from my perspective. And so I think that helped calm any fears I might have had about coming into a school like this where there is [are] a lot more African Americans.” As I explained earlier, Cameron said that her experiences with Julia were more significant to her than anything she had “read or talked about” at the university.

Cameron also recounted her experiences at the rural school as having changed her perspective dramatically. She said that she couldn’t believe that the school, which was only ten minutes from her university town school (and in the same school system), had a population that was so different from her own school – a population that was lower socioeconomic and families with more “issues.” This also caused her to change her assumptions about what she should consider as “normal.”

Cameron repeatedly spoke about the seminar she had attended on the differences in socioeconomic class in January (Payne, 1995). She was surprised to hear that people in a lower socioeconomic class wouldn’t necessarily want to be middle-class. She had assumed that people who were poor would desire a middle-class life. This notion helped her see that not everyone wanted or needed to be like her in regards to “class,” and the related “behaviors” and “values.” This socio-cultural understanding about class values and assumptions changed her perspective about cultural differences again. Her “typical middle-class” standing was no longer desirable and normal to everyone else partially because of this seminar and experience with a differently “classed” group of people.

Cameron’s Family Connections
Sometimes when Cameron talked about race, she would add her worries about her father, who she said was still “working so much off of stereotypes. He has probably never been around images or pictures or media representations that really aren’t stereotypical.” She added that if he did, he would excuse “them away.”

In her second interview, Cameron said that despite her changed perspective, she wasn’t “far enough away from my dad to not feel ashamed” of his perspective. “I’ve had such rich experiences through interacting with my friend up in the city and through working with these kids here ... that I would love to share with him or with anybody who doesn’t have that same viewpoint.” She thought that this might be something her dad would have to experience himself, and that being “told” about this new perspective wasn’t the same as experiencing it.

In her final interview, Cameron said that she wished she could explain her viewpoint to her dad, and she was concerned that he had no interest in changing his ideas about African Americans. He was coming to visit her at school soon, and she was “wondering what he is going to think about it and wondering what he is going to say.” Finally, she shared these thoughts.

And then another thing - as I have been going through the semester and thinking about my dad, and the past couple of weeks, I felt like I really need to confront him, which will not be an easy thing to do because his thoughts on this are very strong, and he gets mad about this issue. But before I was kind of like – I can just let him be; I will think my way, and he can think his way…. But now, I guess because of the experiences I have had…I can’t just let this go. I have come to the point where I just, not that I ever liked it, but I hate it. I just hate it, and it just drives me crazy, and it’s one of the things I am passionate about - trying to get rid of it. And if I am trying to get rid of it, why not start with my father?

Cameron’s family and personal experiences made her school experiences more cathartic, I believe. She thought she might need to talk to her father about his perspective because
“sometimes we have to rock the boat because some things are not acceptable, you know?” She was particularly alarmed to think that her father would have negative attitudes towards the children she had come to know and love in her classroom. She ended the semester with this passionate perspective about promoting respect for people who are different from her and her own family, and in particular African Americans.

My Student Teacher Connections

I had some specific connections with Cameron’s stories based on my own “student teaching” stories. I was initially impressed by Cameron’s transformed perspective which she had developed through her friendship with Julia. I loved hearing Cameron’s enthusiasm for her friendship with Julia because her enthusiasm mirrored my appreciation for how Tison was helping me see her world. Cameron’s transformed perspective reminded me of my own transformative experiences with Tison.

I had chosen to become Tison’s “student teacher” because I already had a “critical consciousness” and this consciousness had compelled me towards my research questions. However, Tison had become my friend and had informed me over and over again about her “realities” and “normals,” and how her African American identity affected her life. Therefore, my student teaching experience in the school had given me similar concrete experiences to those that Cameron had had with Julia.

I also had experiences with the children that raised questions for me that were similar to some of Cameron’s concerns. When Cameron described her concerns about her children’s (and their parents’) views on fighting, I was reminded of how I sometimes found myself in a contradictory position. I wanted to embrace other cultural viewpoints and thus be “culturally sensitive,” but at times the cultural or even individual viewpoint that I witnessed was one with which I disagreed. For example, there was a day at school when Tison heard through the children that Deandra (White female) had told Tyrell (Black boy) that she wanted to have “woo woo” with him (or make “woo woo” with him). Tison spoke to Deandra and called her mother because Deandra, (a girl who was able to be academically successful) had also stopped completing homework assignments.

When Deandra’s mother appeared in the room after school with Deandra at her side, she began to explain to Tison that she had been worried about Deandra because she knew that she was “talking dirty” on the phone to Tyrell and she (the mother) had told her to stop. In addition, she explained in a loud, agitated voice that she was upset because Deandra’s 14 year-old sister was already pregnant. The mother said that she had assumed that Deandra’s sister was going to make it through high school without getting pregnant and that she had always thought that Deandra was “going to be the one to get pregnant.”

I sat at the side of the room and took notes as Tison responded. Deandra was looking back and forth from her mom’s face to Tison. She had a curious smile on her face which could have been interpreted that she thought it was funny that her mother already knew she was going to be pregnant as a teenager or that she was enjoying the attention or that she simply smiled because this was an awkward conversation. As a student teacher (and mother), I knew that I would never have announced to my child that I expected her to get pregnant before she graduated from high school. Deandra was the child who had regaled me with stories of the video game she liked to play in which the player got to “kill the cops” and there were “prostitutes who said ‘come up and see me some time.’” I interpreted the picture of Deandra’s social world and how she moved through that world through my socio-cultural lens of a middle or upper-middle-class woman. My beliefs about parenting would never have allowed me to make such a statement to
my child, but I realized that Deandra’s social world was not mine. She had social knowledge that was “regular” to her. Neither she, nor her mother, would have considered that thinking about pregnancy at age nine or understanding prostitute’s words was “inappropriate” as I would have termed such childhood knowledge. While this was a connection I had with Cameron based on my student teaching experience, I did not necessarily have an “answer” to this dilemma in my attempt to be “culturally responsive.”

Cameron shared several stories about her children who were learning English. When I worked in Tison’s classroom this was my first experience with children who spoke another language. I was enthusiastic; however, I tutored my two children in the hallway and could give them individual attention. I had no idea how I would have altered my instruction if I was in a classroom by myself and had children who couldn’t speak my language. I did not think that my “sensitivity” would have helped translate my words and the texts they needed to master.

Cameron told me that she felt “completely unprepared to work with ESL students” except for what she learned through her experiences at Gilmer Park.

As a student teacher, I also connected with Cameron’s worries about how the African American teachers viewed her as a White woman. When Cameron told me about this concern, I shared a story about myself. I explained that Tison had told me that Ms. Jade had asked Tison if I [Dana] was “okay.” I knew that Ms. Jade meant, “Is Dana an ‘okay’ White person?” or the inferred negative question, “Does Dana think in stereotypical ways about Black people?” So, Cameron’s worries were justified in that at least one African American teacher considered that a person’s racial identity could influence relationships at the school.

Tison told me that she answered Ms. Jade and said that I was “okay.” I told Cameron that this had made me feel good, for somehow, the idea that Tison perceived me as “okay” let me know that Tison and Ms. Jade now trusted me as a White person to understand and respect their perspective. They knew that I realized that race mattered. However, I told Cameron that I didn’t really know how Tison knew that I was ‘okay.’ This was something I was truly curious about. How can a person of color, an African American person for example, tell if a White person is “okay?” And what does “okay” mean from their perspective and experiences? I had also realized that being “okay” was related to my somewhat intangible research question, “How does a person in a dominant group “get it?” and “How can teacher educators create contexts in which future teachers “get it?” Therefore, I listened for this subtext or theme throughout the semester. This student teacher connection was related to my questions as a teacher educator.

My Teacher Educator Connections

As you will read later, each of the other student teachers talked more about the children’s behaviors in their classrooms than Cameron did, and they sometimes wondered about how to relate to the children because of the children’s interaction and behavioral styles that were different from their own. Cameron did not talk as much about the children’s behavior, except for the “fighting issue” and her struggle with how to handle the differences in her beliefs about fighting at school and the children’s and families’ beliefs about fighting. However, Cameron was in a classroom with a highly experienced cooperating teacher who had been teaching for 39 years, 18 years in this particular school. Ms. Kellymae had a reputation of having superior “classroom management” skills and understood the community. She seemed to be highly respected both in the school as a leader and by the families. This classroom context may have influenced Cameron’s perspective on the children and the school, because her teacher was able to create relationships with her children and a classroom environment that did not promote conflict and was an environment that supported cooperation and resolution among the children.
I also appreciated talking with Cameron because I had had a similar awakening in my understanding of how White culture determined and invisibly controlled what was “normal” in our world (hegemony). I was intrigued with how she described her rejection of “White middle-class” as normal. As a teacher educator who believed that one of the primary components of being culturally responsive was having an understanding of the social construction of knowledge, I wanted to hear more about how Cameron had developed her perspective that allowed for multiple realities and norms. Her critical consciousness seemed to permeate most of her interpretations of her experiences.

As a teacher educator, I was particularly curious about how Cameron’s beliefs about the university’s intent to place her in a “city” school had affected her perceptions of the children and families. Cameron’s “fears” about the school reminded me of a conversation that Tison and I had during the Fall semester. We were discussing the university’s placement of student teachers in city schools or urban contexts. Tison exclaimed, “I don’t see why the university sees this as urban, or a city context. To me this is just regular. This is a regular school.” In this moment, I realized that the university had held the power to name this school as “urban” and as a “diverse context.” If this school was “diverse,” it’s identity as “diverse” was compared to “not diverse” or probably a mostly White, successful or “normal” school, by White “normal” standards. Naming the school as “urban” also set up perceptions of the school as being more “challenging;” the children would be “rougther and harder” or more mean to each other; the teachers would need to be more “stern and strict;” and the families didn’t value education.

To Tison, this school neighborhood was where she had grown up and lived her life. Therefore, university educators had named her life as “different” from “normal.” Tison perceived her life as a “regular” life. In the summer, when I was writing and analyzing, Tison and I had a phone conversation. She had moved away to another city and had secured a job in a large urban area in an all Black private school in the center of the “inner city.” Tison told me that if I wanted to study “urban,” I needed to come to her new school. This place was what she thought “urban” was like, and whereas she had never been afraid in her old neighborhood, she realized that when she had to travel into this city area to teach her kindergartners, she was worried about whether she would be safe. This was another dilemma for me as a teacher educator. I knew that in the future I would want to plan experiences for student teachers in diverse settings, but how could I do that without creating stereotypical assumptions about what the student teachers would experience?

**My Questions**

As I re-read Cameron’s transcripts, I kept asking myself, “How can a university create experiences or contexts that would engender such a perspective as Cameron’s? I heard Cameron over and over again express a complex understanding of culture and race, reveal a constructionist viewpoint on “realities and normal,” discuss and exhibit sensitivity to others and a sensitivity about her own cultural identity, and reveal an ability to self-critique based on her cultural identity. She knew that race mattered. As I thought about her responses, I developed the following questions.

- How do we assist teachers in changing their consciousnesses so that they realize that culture and race are related in complex ways?
- How do we assist teachers in developing an awareness that our culture, race, and ethnicity can change our relationships in the school and classroom? or How can universities assist future teachers in developing a sensitivity about relationships based on socio-cultural identities?
• How do we explain or demonstrate the merit of socio-cultural self-critique so that teachers can examine how their socio-cultural identities affect their relationships at school?

• Can a university create experiences like Cameron’s experiences with Julia in which student teachers could experience a “different reality” or a “different world,” other than a White and-or middle-class reality? or How do we create contexts at the university to help student teachers embrace a constructionist perspective which acknowledges that there are multiple realities in the world?

• How can student teachers develop an understanding that their experiences are not the “norm,” and that it is not the teacher’s task to compare children’s actions with their own experiences and to make judgments about children’s behavior and values based on those “norms”?

• How does the university’s act of “naming” the context as “city/urban,” create misconceptions or inaccurate preconceptions about the school and the community? How does this “naming” make those who live in this community feel about the university?

Case Study Analysis: Faith

Background and Preconceptions

Family and School History

Faith’s family had lived in a suburban city outside of a larger city in the Southeast in the same house since Faith’s first birthday. She said that she was “one of the fortunate groups that hasn’t had a family of divorce.” She talked about her relationship with her family members: a sister, mother, and father. She summarized how she felt about her parents, “I have great parents, and I hope I show them as much as they show me, that I love them.”

Faith told me several stories. She described her father’s work (“he owns his own landscaping company,” and before that she said that he “owned his own water company”). While she talked about what a “hard worker” he was, she said he always took off from work on Sundays to go to church. She explained that she thought since her mother had always been involved with church, this might be why she (Faith) was always “so involved” in church, too. When she talked about church, her narrative about her life transgressed into a difficult event from her past. “This is one of the harder times in my life,” she said. Through tears, she told me how the pastor of her church, and a close friend of the family and especially of her father’s, had committed suicide a few years ago. From this story, I could hear and see her sorrow, and I could also see how the church had played an important role in her life and her family’s perspectives and beliefs. Throughout the semester, she told me several times about how her religion informed her views on issues related to diversity. During our first interview we had this exchange about religion.

Faith: My mom’s side of the family is very religious....we just decided this Christmas that next Christmas we don’t need to exchange gifts... We know the true meaning of Christmas, and it’s not about gifts. It’s about getting together to celebrate God’s birth. That’s why. I feel bad - is it bad that I’m talking about religion this much?

Dana: No, no, no.
Faith: Because when you said something about your job interview, I was going to say, “I was saying a little prayer for you,” but then I was like, “That might not be the space but…”
Dana: No, that’s fine.
Faith: Now that I know that you are also involved in church, I know that it was okay.
Dana: Thank you.

Note: I had told Faith, when she had talked about her grief about her pastor’s suicide, that the pastor of the church I attended had committed suicide a few years ago, also. From this empathetic exchange she knew that I had contact with a church. Faith knew that I was interviewing for a job that week, and she wanted to let me know that she prayed for me about the job interview.

Faith had attended public schools in her suburban area. The high school was surrounded by a commercial district, farmland, and neighborhood developments. She said that her high school (whose name was related to a Civil War hero) had a population of “probably 30% African Americans, maybe 5 -10% Asian, and then the rest Caucasian, so it wasn’t too diverse, or not too diverse. It wasn’t lacking in diversity.” She went on to explain, “I’ve seen more schools that are more diverse; however, I think due to it being a suburban school, it had a mix of culture - a variety of cultures.” I presume that Faith meant that her school had some diversity, but not a lot of diversity.

I asked Faith, “How would you describe your own socio-cultural identity?” She replied, “Middle-class - we’re actually currently building a house - we’re moving - which is making me sad.” She then talked about her parents’ long-term plans for building their dream home. She said that they didn’t “live extravagantly” but that “it’s not that we were lacking in anything.” I returned to this question and said, “You were talking about class - what about your race and ethnicity? How would you describe that?”

I actually have - believe it or not - look at my skin tone. (laughter) [Faith had very fair skin and light brown/dark blonde hair.] I actually have American Indian in me... My grandmother, my mother’s mother, I think was 50% Cherokee maybe. I don’t know. So, I have a little bit in me, but other than that, I am Caucasian. There isn’t really any diversity within my family.

Faith continued and told me a family anecdote. Her father didn’t like her to watch *Will and Grace* on TV because he thought that it would “encourage them to make more shows like that.” She said she thought that in her family, “Some of us are more open-minded than others.” Faith’s explanation of her own socio-cultural identity gave me some insight into her perspectives on diversity.

Faith said that while she was growing up, she thought she had wanted to become either a lawyer or a person that would find the “cure to cancer.” It was not until she worked in a child-care center as a summer job, that she considered teaching as a possibility. Then she entered the Early Childhood Education undergraduate program and now the graduate program in Teaching and Learning at National University.

**Prior Experiences with “Diversity” and “Multicultural Settings”**

I told Faith that I was interested in her previous experiences with diversity or multicultural issues that might have prepared her for coming to Gilmer Park. She immediately said that she always questioned herself “about handling situations with people who are maybe minorities... due to an experience I had when I was a junior in high school. I was in Florida City
with my ex-boyfriend.” Faith went on to tell a story about her first date with this young man and that they had gone into the city to get a special dessert. When they returned to their car that was parked on the street beside a parking lot, Faith said that the parking lot was full of cars and the stereos were “bassing out,” and “it was all African Americans.” When she and Corey (her date) got in his car, the car wouldn’t start. This is how she told the remainder of the story. Visualize two juniors in high school sitting in a parked car with an engine that won’t start. Corey is in the driver’s seat, and Faith is in the passenger seat.

Corey goes, “Don’t look to your right,” and I mean this is my first night knowing him, and I was like “Why?” He goes, “Just don’t look to your right,” and I was like, “Well, why?” and finally he didn’t answer me, and so I looked to my right, and there was a gun pointed through the window. And so for about an hour, hour-and-a-half, people were surrounding the car - jumping on it - taunting us - telling us - and me - me being the emotional [person] that you have seen thus far – [the guy] ended up saying, “If you cry - I’m going to shoot you for every tear you cry.” And so I’m terrified. He’s [Corey] terrified. We don’t really know each other that well. So it’s not an experience that you really know how to handle.

Faith went on to say that the people outside her car became distracted when a new car and stereo came into the parking lot. Faith and Corey were able to get out of the car, get in a friend’s car that was waiting close by, and find police to assist them. They found out that a wire had been cut in the car so that it wouldn’t start, and the tires had been slashed when they returned. She summarized her answer to my question about whether she had had experiences with diversity and multicultural settings in this way.

I question myself especially when dealing with someone who is African American, if I am prejudiced in any way. I think it’s something that I need to be mindful of....I have about six students in my class - five or six students in my class that are White, and then the rest are African American, so I constantly monitor - am I calling on these students more than these students? I think it’s good to be mindful of, but I don’t want it to be my only thought while in the class though. I’m trying to balance it right now. But that’s the biggest cultural or diversity issue that I’ve had to deal with.

I remarked that this was a rather “extraordinary event” and asked her if she had had other experiences that wouldn’t have been that –

Faith: Negative.
Dana: Notable - negative or positive ... I mean how have you come out of that still feeling like you would not think racially - like in a bad way? ’Cause some people would come out of that experience thinking differently.
Faith: I don’t go to that area - I think I have more of a Florida City phobia now - of that area of Florida City…..not the people.

Consequently, this fearful event was her story for other “diversity” experiences. I wondered if this experience influenced her feelings about being in this city, but she never mentioned that it did. Although Faith said that she had expectations about the city, she never talked about a relationship between that city experience and anything at Gilmer Park, except for “monitoring” herself when she was with African Americans to make sure she wasn’t “prejudiced in any way.”
Preconceptions about the School

From the beginning interview, Faith said that she had chosen the city context for her student teaching semester because she was applying for her first teaching job in a city (Alabama City), so she thought that if she …

Actually had this experience - student teaching with these students…that I would be more prepared …. to enter a classroom with students in Alabama City….I think being here will give me a better feel. This is not something that I’m familiar with - like I said, in my high school it was probably thirty, thirty-five percent of another race than myself. So, I’m not used to seeing a class with me being a minority….I just think I will be better prepared in the future for my next experience.

Since she was applying to work in a city setting, this response did make me think that she did not have a “phobia” about every city.

Faith explained that she was surprised because she had “thought that there would be more diversity among the teachers at Gilmer Park, based on what she had heard from the students who had done their field work at Gilmer Park in the Fall. Faith said that the previous students had said that “diversity was everywhere,” and Faith thought that this meant she would see “diversity across the board.” She realized that this assumption was false, and she thought that there weren’t many African American teachers at the school.

From these early accounts, I could see that Faith was beginning the semester with a plan or awareness that she was coming to the city to learn about teaching people that were different from her. Even though she described her frightening experience in another city, she thought that this did not affect her work at the school except for the fact that she “monitored” herself when calling on children to make certain she was being fair and equal. However, this was her only account of any experience with diversity outside of her school experience that she offered to me when I asked my question about previous experiences with diversity.

Beginning Impressions

Faith had significant stories to share with me about her life during her first interview. Therefore, I was not able to ask her specifically to describe the school population at Gilmer Park. I used her conversation about the school and some stories that she told me about her children as a way to understand some of her first perceptions and descriptions about the school context.

Faith did describe to me how she enjoyed “going across to watch Ms. Brown (another fourth grade teacher who was African American) and that she enjoyed seeing how the children “interact with her, and it is different than how they interact with me or Mr. Houston” (her cooperating teacher who was White). Faith said she assumed that I would “get a lot” from my teacher, [Tison], since she was African American. My assumption was that she realized that she and I, as White teachers, could learn about interacting with Black students from Black teachers.

In this initial interview-conversation, Faith also told me that she had “kind of” gotten a “culture shock” from an experience in playing Scrabble with one of her students. I will include this story in a section below entitled, “Children’s Social Knowledge and Experiences.” Faith shared other stories during the semester that were related to what her children knew and experienced outside of school. This first story about the Scrabble game was her beginning impression to this theme in her interpretations of the school.
Narrative Themes:

Diversity, Race, Children’s Social Knowledge and Experiences, Family Dynamics, Religion, Behavior and Challenge, My Student Teacher Connections, My Teacher Educator Connections, My Questions

Member Check: Faith sent me an e-mail response after she read her “Narrative Themes,” which I never received. When I sent her a second message asking for her response, she replied, “I had already sent the final okay about a week ago! Everyone [everything?] sounds great.”

Diversity

Faith explained in her first interview that her own high school wasn’t “too diverse,” but “it had a mix of culture - a variety of culture.” In this statement, Faith used the term “culture” as a way to describe her school’s population who she said were African American, Asian, and Caucasian. Since she used the word “culture” for those “racial” groups, I wondered if this meant that she perceived such group or “racial” identities as a “culture” rather than simply “race” or “skin color,” even though she discussed such racial groups later as if they were based on simple physical attributes.

After Faith told me about her diversity experience in downtown Florida City, she admitted that she monitored herself when “handling situations with people who are maybe minorities.” She wanted to make sure that she wasn’t “calling on these [italics emphasis? added] students more than these [italics added] students.”

She explained that despite this experience which had made her “mindful,” she didn’t “judge who I’m friends with based upon characteristics of that person, because I think if you do, then you miss out on so much that people have to offer.” She added that she and Lily were “really good friends.” I assume that Faith meant that she didn’t determine her friends based on their skin color or race because Lily was Black. Faith said, “If I only had a cookie cutter friend, then why have more than one? … I think people who are from divorced homes or people who are from different cultures …. people from different backgrounds just have more to teach me.” Thus, Faith expressed that she could learn from others’ perspectives and seemed to value having “diverse” experiences or friends. She also included in this statement her perception that diversity was related to multiple factors such as “homes,” “backgrounds,” and “cultures.”

In Faith’s second interview, I returned to the issue of how she “monitored” herself, and I asked her how she was thinking about this conscious decision to monitor herself when she was teaching. Faith replied.

I think I’m doing well with it … and I still question that when interacting with them, but it’s not that I go, “Okay, I need to call on this person and then this person.” … I try to meet with everyone during the course of the day or even when they’re coming in. I make sure to say hi to each of them. Even if some pass by, then I’ll go, “I didn’t get to say hello to you. How was your night last night?” So, I try to make a conscious effort to, when I do something to one person, I do it to every person …. So, that they know that I care about them as a person, not the group as they’ve come [in]…. Yeah, I think I’m doing well with it…. But now that you mentioned it…. I’ve noticed that it hasn’t been something that I am doing …. I think the worry is changing more to classroom management.

She also described a “wish” of hers. She said that she wished that she could have seen her classroom before the children had arrived, that she could have observed the children during the previous semester, and that she could “be there the whole year instead of this half-year thing.”

Although these concerns about the university’s placement plan and classroom management do not directly correlate to “diversity” in Faith’s use of the words, she talked about
spending more time at the school after she had talked about how she monitored interacting with “diverse” children, getting to know them, her worries about classroom management, and teaching styles. I do think her desire to spend more time at the school is related to “diversity.” Perhaps she thought that if she had a longer experience at the school, she would have gained more in-depth knowledge about the children and their families through a more extended period of practice. I will address her worries about classroom management in a later theme entitled, “Behavior and Challenge.”

During the last interview, I asked Faith if she could describe the population and culture of the school now that she had been here longer.

Faith: I would say it’s not as diverse as I thought it would be. Of course I am a minority, but within the context…. I expected, I guess I had heard from other student teachers last semester. I expected for me to walk within a classroom and be the only White person within the class. However, I probably have six or seven White students in my class and a student of Hispanic descent and then the rest are African American. I don’t know if I said now - if I said it was more diverse or less diverse.

Dana: You said it was less diverse here than you expected it to be.

Faith: Yes, in the sense of, no, hold on. I am confusing myself. I think I thought when coming in here that it would mainly be African American - meaning diverse for me. However, within the context of the school, I think it is more diverse than I anticipated. Does that make sense?

Dana: Okay. Yes, it’s more diverse meaning? [I am asking her what she means by diverse.]

Faith: Many mixes of people….And not even of just race, but family dynamics. We have students that live in foster care, who are in homeless shelters, who live with only mom or only dad, who are with married families, divorced families. I don’t know if I said grandmothers yet, but I mean there are so many different family make-ups. There are so many different types of support. I have one student in my class - she came from Africa and her mom works all day and then goes to school at night. So, she might not have the assistance that she needs for homework at night. There are other students who have both parents at home at night who are both college educated and get the opportunity to have that extension at home.

First, she said that she thought that the school was not as “diverse” as she thought it would be. (She thought she would be the only White person “within the class.”) She also said that the classroom was “diverse” – “meaning diverse for me.” (She thought the school had a population different from her and that she was in the minority.) Faith added that she was “not used to seeing a class with me being a minority.” She said that she also thought that the “context of the school … is more diverse than she anticipated.” She also thought that the diversity at Gilmer Park was not just based on race or cultures, but on “family dynamics” as in “divorced homes,” “different backgrounds,” and amount of “family support.” So, she again has used a construct for “diversity” that includes factors related to home experiences. Whereas Faith described the diversity in her own schooling according to race and culture, after her experiences at Gilmer Park, she included “family dynamics” as a factor that made people and groups
different from one another. She later described Gilmer Park as “so different” when she compared it to her school from her fall placement in the rural county.

In the statement below, Faith reveals that even though she has included many factors when she talked about “diversity,” she had only considered “race” and “ability levels” as the significant “diversity” factors when she first arrived at Gilmer Park. Therefore, we can see how Faith’s construct of diversity has changed. Faith said that she and Cameron had talked about their perception and construction of the concept of diversity. This statement gives teacher educators an insider perspective on what these teacher candidates had perceived about diversity from their coursework.

We [Faith and Cameron] were saying how … no matter how many diversity classes you take, no matter how many diversity assignments they make you do or papers they make you write about what diversity is, it never prepared us the way being in this school has, and mainly because when we thought diversity, we thought race. And we learned being within the classroom, that that is not all. I mean we also thought ability levels, too. I mean those were the two that we paired with diversity. We didn’t pair the backgrounds of the students or the experiences that they would have had prior to coming into a class. It was more of a race thing than anything. When we were told diversity. We thought race for a reason.

Faith’s experiences during her fieldwork changed her ideas about the meaning of “diversity.”

When I asked Faith how she felt when we talked about diversity, she said she “didn’t mind talking with peers” and even Lily, “who is of a completely diverse background compared to me, a single parent home, and African American, and came from African descent….I am fine with it.” She explained that she found that it helped her to talk to peers “because if I am having a hard time comprehending something, they can help me see how they see it maybe, tell me how they see it, and I could possibly gain insight from that.” Faith went on to say that talking with a complete stranger would be different also because she “wouldn’t want to step on any toes by stating what I believe, although I don’t think what I believe is offensive in any way.”

I asked Faith in the third interview if she could share anything more about her ideas regarding diversity or multicultural issues. She told me she was unsure about how to talk with her students about diversity since she was “the most diverse in her class.” I believe that in this statement she meant that she was in the minority in her classroom, or different from her mostly Black students. I also asked Faith if she had changed her perspective on diversity while teaching at Gilmer Park. She said that she didn’t think that she had had any negative feelings about “diversity” before coming to the school, except for wondering if she would feel accepted as a White person. She explained that when she saw how the children interacted with her cooperating teacher and that they interacted with her in the “exact same way, I wasn’t fearful anymore…. And it might be because we are both White [she and her cooperating teacher], and they have learned to give respect to all three of the other White teachers besides Ms. Brown” (Black female 4th grade teacher). Consequently, it sounded as if Faith had been concerned about how she would relate to the Black children, or how she would develop relationships with them, because of her White identity.

Race

Faith talked about race in several other contexts besides her perception that when she had thought “diversity,” she had mainly thought “race.” For instance, she explained her beliefs about “race” and “marriage” during our interviews; these explanations illustrated some of her other
understandings about the construct of race. During our first interview-conversation, she told me that her family was “strict” in their beliefs about bi-racial marriages.

Yeah. We’re strict – and it’s not like you’re kicked out of the family … but I guess due to our religion and due to our beliefs – we believe that one race should be with one race. I think my parents would have a hard time if I did date someone. Not that I go, “Oh, I’m not going to date you because you’re Black.” But I think my parents would have a difficult time stomaching that. Just due to our upbringing, I guess. I do have a cousin who is homosexual, which he is not actually out of the closet, but it is known by all, and I think my parents have a difficult time with that, as [does] everyone in the family. But he still comes to events.

Faith thought she could be friends with someone who was Black, but “mixing relationships” through marriage was not an option for her. In the previous Theme, Faith said that she didn’t mind talking to peers about “diversity.” She went on to say that she was “always cautious,” however, about talking with students who have a “White mom and Black dad or vice versa interracial relationship. And in my mindset that is just my religion has taught me that it is not appropriate.” Therefore, she was more careful when she talked to a bi-racial child. She continued and explained that “certain things that I believe about diversity … might be seen as offensive to some students and teachers.” She said that she would “monitor expressing my opinions that would be seen as offensive.” Consequently, from this further explanation, it sounded as if she realized that this opinion about inter-racial relationships might be offensive to others, though not to her because her religion told her this view was correct.

Since “bi-racial relationships” was a negative concept to Faith and she had mentioned the bi-racial children in her classroom, I asked her how she thought and felt about or related to her bi-racial children. She said,

Oh, I am fine with it. You mean - what are my reactions to them as people? Oh, I am fine with them. There is only one student in my homeroom, two, that I know for a fact come from that background, but there is no difference between them. Of course, one of them does have behavioral problems, but I don’t feel that it comes from my belief about, or my feelings towards her parents. So, no. I don’t even feel negatively toward their parents. I just think, okay, that is something they will do. It’s not something that would come in my life … my parents have the same belief obviously, and that is probably where I formed my belief.

In one sentence above, Faith mentioned a bi-racial child with “behavioral problems.” She explained that she did not perceive that the child had behavioral problems because she is prejudiced, or perhaps she has said that she does not think the child is exhibiting a behavioral problem in response to Faith’s negative reactions to the child’s bi-racial identity. Either way, Faith did not believe that her beliefs about inter-racial relationships affected her relationship with the child, aside from the fact that Faith needed to be cautious about how she talked about bi-racial relationships at the school.

As Faith talked further about “inter-racial” marriage and her family’s beliefs, Faith explained more about her understandings about “race.” She said that her father had always told her that if she came “home with someone of that nature, that I better start finding an apartment because I wouldn’t be let back in the house.” She said that maybe because of her religion, she had always seen “people of other races as friends.” Then Faith talked about two examples of couples from different races – people that she knew - Hawaiian and Caucasian, and Asian and
White. Faith told me that she didn’t understand it, but she and her father did not consider those relationships to be “interracial.”

Faith had questioned her father about these marriages and had asked him, “Do you see that as wrong? Do you see that as interracial?” And Faith said that her father always answered, “No.” Faith continued her musings about the construct of race, “Well, why? I don’t understand; he can’t explain it, and I can’t explain why in my head I don’t see that as interracial as I do Black and White.” Faith thought that this way of thinking was “just one of those things. And in the Bible I don’t think it says like a specific race, but it sounds like I have a hard time understanding.” She wondered why she and her father both viewed “some situations in different ways than others.”

I suggested to her that reading something about those perceptions might help her understand more about this issue, and then I told her about an old movie (Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, S. Kramer, Producer and Director, 1967) and a recent remake of a movie (Guess Who? J. Goldberg, Producer, & K. R. Sullivan, Director, 2005) that addressed the difficulties in people’s understanding about inter-racial marriages.

Then Faith returned to our discussion about her religious beliefs and her definition of race, “I don’t know what formed that mindset either [that Black and White marriages are interracial]. Maybe when I was young and growing up and reading that, actually learning about that in my head. That is why I saw races as White and Black.” I asked her what she had learned and she replied, “Just like learning about what my family believed or through religious teachings. …I think I just have known it through my dad and mom. Is it written in the Bible?...now I don’t even know.” She wondered if perhaps “when it said races should not intertwine in that way, maybe in my mind the only races I knew was White and Black.”

I responded by saying that perhaps one of the reasons she may have had such ideas could also be because of negative stereotypes about Black culture. Faith answered, “I have never thought about that.” At one point in her life, Faith had only considered “race” to be Black and White people and had questioned this tenet, but had never been able to develop an answer that satisfied her completely. She saw the ambiguities in defining race as Caucasian, Asian, and Black but only defining inter-racial marriage as a marriage between a Black person and a White person. Although she had never been able to explain the ambiguity to satisfy herself, she held on to the belief that bi-racial marriages between a White and Black person were wrong according to her religious ideology. She had not connected her negative feelings about marriages between Black and White people with negative cultural assumptions about African Americans.

Another issue that had arisen within my group of participants was Cameron’s concern about teaching her mostly African American classroom about desegregation and segregation as previously discussed in Cameron’s case study analysis. The whole group had talked about Cameron’s story during their Car Talk. I wanted to hear what Faith was thinking about this topic now. During the second interview, I asked her if she had taught any lessons related to segregation and desegregation. Faith said that she had not taught any lessons about issues like that, but she said that she did have a “situation” with two students.

The “situation” involved a Black child and a White child and the names they called each other. The Black child had called the White child, “White cracker.” When Faith investigated, she found out that the White child had called the Black child, “Black cracker” a few days earlier. Faith asked the children if they knew what the words meant; they said that they did, and Faith talked to them about how those words hurt people’s feelings. Then she asked the African American student, “Would you call me that?” He paused, and Faith told him that he should, “Go
ahead and call me that.” Finally the boy said, “Well no, I’m not going to call you that….because it’s not nice.” She explained that she would not let him “say a not nice thing to someone in class.” Faith told the child that it was “okay if you’re not friends with him [the White child.] but it’s not okay that you hurt his feeling” When Faith talked to the White student, she asked if he would call an African American teacher, “Black cracker.” Faith explained to me that she tried to use someone that the children would respect, like their teachers, so that the children would see that calling someone those names wasn’t appropriate and was hurtful. Then she told me in this second interview that she had experienced one other situation with race.

I have one African American student. Her mom is White. Her dad is Black….but she says she’s White and she doesn’t like Black people. I’m not really sure. The home life with the dad is…. I’m pretty sure dad’s in the picture.

In these stories about her experiences with and knowledge about her children, Faith is trying to figure out how to negotiate children’s relationships as they use racial labels to hurt feelings or express anger, or in the case of the bi-racial child, as they develop bias or prejudice about people based on race. It is a challenging task for teachers to teach children how to relate respectfully to “others” with different cultural identities.

In Faith’s third interview, she shared a teacher story that she admired from a Chicken Soup publication that her teacher had read aloud in class that day. This story reveals some of Faith’s feelings about racial constructs and her ambiguity about identifying children as racial. The story was about a White teacher’s experience with an all African American classroom. The Black children in this class were talking about how this White teacher was different from them. Then the class had a discussion about what color their teacher was and determined that they would say that she was “clear.” So now, when this teacher talked about her classroom, or people asked her at dinner parties about the racial makeup of her children, she would simply say that her children were all “clear.” Faith liked this story and thought that now the teacher’s story had given her an answer she could use. Faith described her agreement with the story.

And I was like - what a great way - because she said she doesn’t teach to Blacks and Whites. She teaches to the child. And I mean, I think that is the same way I feel.

Somebody asked me the other day how many, and I had to go around the seating chart in my head going - okay one, two - this is how many. But I mean, I never noticed that before.

Faith liked the idea of thinking about her children as being without color, or “clear,” and seemed to settle her ideas about racial identity and her children with this story that used a color-blind approach. The story not only implied that color didn’t matter, but that if color didn’t matter, a person could see straight into a child’s real self as in a see-through anatomical figure.

Children’s Social Knowledge and Experiences

Faith sometimes expressed “shock” about the social knowledge or experiences that the children had outside of school based on the stories the children told her. For example, when I asked Faith if she had “any stories about the children” at the end of her first interview, she told me about this first impression.

I kind of got a culture shock this morning in enrichment. They were playing Scrabble….I was helping with one table …. and one of the girls at my table had the letters HIV, and she got it on the board and I go - I kind of took a breath at first – “Wow, fourth grade” [she thought] - I don’t think I would have even considered HIV as one of the terms. Then I told her of the rule – “We can’t use abbreviations, and that’s an abbreviation for that virus,” and she went, “Oh, okay.” So, she pulled it off the board. But it just kind of made
me step back and go, “This is what they deal with. This is something that is in their life,” and I guess I never thought. So, it was just another reminder of where I am and the times that these kids are living in. So, I guess that was a little, not disturbing so much, but eye-opening. [It] Just let me know…. and it just makes me wonder what’s going on in her life that she does know that - and why does she know that - or is it just everyone? - Because nobody questioned what it was.

Faith also told us a story in our first group interview that supports this Narrative Theme. This story gives some important insights into Faith’s descriptions of the children and families and is another example of her concerns about the children’s social knowledge. At this group interview, after we had talked about general topics, I proceeded to ask these open-ended questions, “What happened today? What’s on your mind?” Faith said that the guidance counselor had conducted a lesson with Faith’s fourth graders on setting short term, medium term and long-term goals for their lives. Faith was surprised at one of the girl’s goals.

And one of my kids started writing her goals. The first one was to be a model; the second one was to not have a baby before high school was over, and I went to talk to her about that one, and I said, “Why is that one?” And she said, “’Cause mama said she’s going to kick me out of the house if I do.” She’s like, “So, I’m going to wait ‘till college until I have my baby.” And it makes you step back every once in a while when you hear things like that.

Faith asked the child if she had set that as a goal because her mom had warned her about the consequence or because “you want it, too?” The girl had replied that she thought it was the right choice, too, because “I don’t have money right now, and I guess I won’t have money then either.” Faith was shocked that not having money was her justification for not having a baby. Faith said she would never consider wanting to have a baby herself even now. She said that having this conversation made her think.

Just be aware of the households that your kids are coming from….like I’ve heard bits and pieces of our classroom and households, but now whole stories. And that helps me to put together the whole stories that the kids are coming with I guess….And I don’t think her father’s active in her life either.

Faith said that she thought the mother had used this statement as a threat but would never really kick the girl out of the house, and that her own parents (Faith’s) have always “jokingly” said that “if anything of that sort happened,” that they would “kick her out of the house or disown” her, but Faith said that she knew that her “parents would embrace” me even more.”

During Faith’s second individual interview, she told another story about her children’s social knowledge. Her class was playing a word category game which required the children to use their oral language in response to the category: “drinks besides soda that you could have at dinner.” Faith said that when the children answered, the first four responses that the children gave were “‘beer,’ ‘liquor,’ ‘wine,’ ‘vodka,’” Faith was surprised that the children thought that these were drinks at dinner. Mr. Houston explained to Faith, “It’s all in what they’re exposed to.” Faith summarized by saying that the children experienced “quite a different life style.”

As a final example of her concerns, Faith told me about a child in her classroom who had become homeless and was living in one shelter in the morning and another in the afternoon. The child’s mother had come to school one morning because she and the daughter were worried because they had lost her Reading Log that was a graded assignment. Faith was worried and surprised and said, “It’s pretty disturbing….But that is the life she has to worry about, so when she doesn’t come in with a vocabulary sentence, it just doesn’t seem like a big deal to me.” Faith
has revealed her “shock” again that one of her students would have such an experience as losing her home. In this story, Faith demonstrates sensitivity to the family’s situation and realized that she needs to be prepared to “handle” this kind of “social knowledge” in the classroom.

Faith would have assumed a child would not have been familiar with any of these topics (HIV, liquor, pregnancy, homelessness) according to Faith’s own childhood experiences. Later, she refers to these social issues, along with other family dynamics (Narrative Theme: Family Dynamics) as a factor in making and resisting assumptions about families in the city.

**Family Dynamics**

Faith often included the issue of “family” or family dynamics during our interview-conversations. I include in this theme of Family Dynamics how Faith viewed the importance of family, how she described the different family structures in the community, her perception of a family’s interest in school, her attempts to provide family-school communication, and her beliefs that she needed to change her instruction based on what the children experienced at home.

Faith often mentioned the influence of her family on her present beliefs, said that she was one of the “fortunate” who had parents who were still together, and spoke with high regard for her father’s work ethic. During the third interview, she did admit that her “view of family is skewed,” because her family was so supportive of everything she did, compared to other families she had observed.

She used references to the “family” or “home” when she discussed the children’s social knowledge. “Just be aware of the households your kids are coming from,” she said after she told us about her fourth grader who was planning when she would have her baby. Faith added that she didn’t think the girl’s father was “active in her life either.” She was surprised that the children knew so much about alcoholic drinks for dinner, and she said her children experience “quite a different life style” [than Faith’s]. When she talked about diversity at the school, she considered “family dynamics” as a diversity factor and named many different family structures from her children’s homes. In fact, Faith was the only student teacher that used the words, “divorced families” and often used “divorce” or “single parent home” as a factor in diversity when she described children or when she talked about ways that children could be different.

Faith often talked about the children’s backgrounds and noticed how different their “family make-ups” were. She expressed concern that “a very, very low number” of parents came to PTA, considering how many families were in the school. She thought maybe only ten families were represented on the night she attended. She said that “it might have been that they have night jobs, and I understand situations like that …. But I was pretty disappointed too, because one of the reasons I really wanted to do it [attend PTA], …was to get to know some of the families and see the students interacting with their siblings and things like that.” Faith went on to tell me about seeing one of her children at PTA, and how the girl, who had recently been involved in a fight at school, interacted with her own sisters.

Which it’s amazing, because that one girl who got in a fight – interacting with her siblings - she had four other sisters; it’s her and four sisters, all younger. And she was so loving and would hold their hand and guide them. I even commented to her later on in that week, “Wow, you are just a great big sister. I saw you with your little sister, and it was nice how you helped her get water in the water fountain.” So, I mean it’s just shocking that between family and [unclear word on tape] - that also was in the culture, too.

I asked her what she meant, “within the culture?” She replied.
Family being an important thing or not an important thing. And I think you can see that through the divorce of families, maybe family-wise an important thing, or even through participation and support through the students - because I think I saw parents come and pick their kids up afterward, but they didn’t come [to PTA] ….Which again might have been circumstances like meetings or jobs.

In this discussion, Faith has expressed again how significant it is to a child for “family” to be “an important thing.” In these descriptions of the children and families, I wondered about Faith’s perceptions of “family” and why Faith would think that family wasn’t important, even if divorce had occurred. However, I knew that many people who speak negatively about divorce say that parents should stay together for the “sake of the family,” or other comments that promote family stability through marriage. Faith judged whether the concept of family was “important” to a person based on factors like “divorce,” “participation,” and “support” of children.

Faith also said during this interview, as she had said in the second interview, that she didn’t think there were the “home issues” at Gilmer Park like she had seen in her Fall placement rural school. Despite the low attendance at Gilmer Park’s PTA, she said, “So far the parents seem to be really involved.” Faith remarked that she was “impressed” that some students would go home and “ask their parents for assistance at night.” The children would “come in excited the next day” and describe how their father had helped them with their work. Faith added, “I think it’s great that there are those parents that are willing to help and able to help.” She knew of two students whose parents were college educated. Faith also believed that she had received some good responses from parents when she sent notes home.

Faith spoke often about how she made connections with the children’s families and said that “getting to know parents” was one of the most significant issues related to working in the diverse setting. Even though she was disappointed about the PTA meeting, she described other ways she had made connections with families. She seemed happy to be responsible for the weekly notes her teacher sent home and hoped to get notes back from the families. She told me about a specific phone call she had conducted with a parent about a child’s make-up work during the child’s suspension from school. Faith said that she had “learned some [parents] are very concerned about notes that are sent home,” and so Faith used “notes home” to stay connected to parents and communicate with them about a child’s progress. She also knew that “there are those parents …when I wrote … I didn’t get any call back.” Faith questioned herself about whether she would do home visits next year with her own classroom, based on this desire to know the families at Gilmer Park. Despite these successes, Faith expressed that she wished she had made more attempts to communicate with parents.

Although I sent a letter home…although I did that, I would liked to have called the parents, … “Hi, I am Ms. Seitz. Feel free to come in. I stay after school until about this time most days.” I wish I would have done that.

Faith had typically seen parents as supportive, and she considered knowing the families as one of her most significant teaching considerations.

Faith mentioned what the children had experienced at home when she discussed some other concerns. For example, she thought that one factor that was making Gilmer Park seem more challenging or stressful to her was the absentee rate at Gilmer Park. She thought it was higher than the rural school. Since her fourth graders rotated through subject specific classes with several of the fourth grade teachers, she was trying to figure out how to manage eighty children’s homework, grading, and class work for her subjects. When children were absent, she
wondered if she was supposed to “ask the students to make this up even if they didn’t receive the lesson beforehand? Do you grade them full credit-wise or skew it a little bit because they didn’t get that instruction that day? So, make-up work has been challenging for me.” She posited that perhaps the absentee rate was connected to factors that were related to the city setting and said, “Maybe there is not a stress for school in this city, and maybe there is not the health, what is the word I am looking for? Like healthy habits. You know what I am saying? Maybe they don’t have healthy habits, so they can’t stay healthy within the home during the season.

Faith was wondering if children might be absent because families did not have “healthy habits,” but she did not cite evidence of this problem. She expressed her worry and a possible assumption about the families’ habits.

In another example of how the children’s home lives affected her classroom teaching, Faith said that one of the most significant things she had learned while being at Gilmer Park was “flexibility.” I asked her how “flexibility” was related to the diverse setting. She said that she needed to have “flexibility” because at times she felt like she had to put her “lessons on hold to teach life lessons” that the children had not learned at home. She mentioned specific behaviors like how the children walked in the hall or how they were “being rude to the cafeteria lady in line and how that might make her feel.” She interpreted her need to discuss these behaviors because, “some of those life lessons come from their cultural and life-styles within the home.”

Faith’s need to be “flexible” became related to the children’s knowledge or lack of knowledge from home. She also explained that she sometimes changed her expectations for her students, depending on their life circumstances, such as when her student “became homeless” or another child’s family was evicted from their apartment. Faith said that making these adjustments to her expectations, based on her children’s family circumstances, was another kind of “flexibility.”

At the end of her third interview, Faith added that she had realized that “consistency is another thing I have learned…. I think that my kids or my class get their way a lot at home if they push enough, and sometimes it’s just easier to say, ‘Okay, yeah…..’” She said that her students might be “pretty mad” at her cooperating teacher “right now or crying” because of something their teacher had said or expected of them, but she thought that the children respected her teacher “in the long run.” She continued to talk about “consistency” and how her need to be consistent might be related to the children’s families.

Consistency is… I mean that is with any kids these days - I think that they are not getting that consistent factor within the house. These students might have added inconsistency as living experiences - Is so and so going to be home at night or are they going to be working? - Is dad going to show up this weekend when he was going to?

Faith believed that she needed to be consistent at school because of a lack of consistency at home which she described as whether the parents were at home or around according to the child’s expectations.

In the following statement Faith raises the paradoxical issue of how to understand the families at Gilmer Park without making stereotypical assumptions about them. This was a struggle for other participants and me.

I have experienced a lot of family dynamics that I guess if it weren’t multicultural, then I wouldn’t have been able to explore. And a lot is stereotypical reasons, I guess. Even though I try not to be stereotypical, I am aware of when things seem stereotypical. Like
where a person lives’ might denote that they partake in some activities that aren’t seen as even legal by society standards.

I asked if she had an example, and she then told me about a child (and the child’s family) who had been evicted, and Faith said that her cooperating teacher had inferred from the child’s comments that the eviction was related to the family’s actions involving drug sales.

So, I think those experiences might, although they are stereotypical and a stereotype, that within this culture maybe it’s found more or more frequently occurring. But although I think it’s wrong to assume we are walking into a setting; I don’t think you should say, “Okay, the parents are going to be drug dealers, and the parents are going to be evicted…or they are going to be living in poverty.” Because that is not at all what some of the student’s life styles are, although it does fit the mold for some of the kids.

Her concern about understanding people without making inaccurate assumptions was a concern with which I had also struggled as a student teacher and wondered how to address this issue as a teacher educator. If Faith placed such a high value on understanding children’s families, how could she learn about the differences she was experiencing in “family dynamics” without making inaccurate judgments or using a stereotype?

Religion

Faith was quick to share some of her religious beliefs with me and had told me that she came “from a very religious family.” She asked my permission to talk about religion when she told me that she had prayed for me about my job interview. I had answered that it was ‘okay’ and was pleased as a researcher that she let me hear about this “social world” of her religious ideology. Although I never asked her, I assumed that she had chosen her pseudonym, Faith, because of its religious or spiritual connotation.

Faith applied religion in several ways during our conversations. First, she used religion to describe parts of her own family background and the role it played in her family’s beliefs. She referred to her religion to substantiate her beliefs about race and bi-racial marriages. She referred to the Bible, a religious text, as a possible source of answers for those beliefs. Faith used religion as she discussed or compared her beliefs with others at the school.

Once Faith told me she had noticed a bumper sticker in the teachers’ parking lot that she thought would “be seen as very offensive to some people.” It said, “God Please Protect Me from your Followers.” She thought that this bumper sticker made people feel uncomfortable because she had heard some teachers talking about the bumper sticker. During her second interview, she compared her religion to another teacher’s. She said, “Her religion’s a little different than mine, too,” after she explained that one teacher’s perspective was more negative about school than Faith’s perspective about the school. Faith also shared with me that she and her cooperating teacher talked about their churches with each other, but only after they had a friendship. She thought that her teacher could respect Faith’s beliefs and she could respect her teacher’s beliefs. “Although, ours are essentially the same.”

Faith discussed several times that she did not want her beliefs to offend anyone, and so she monitored what she said. As I discussed in Faith’s section on “Race,” her construct of race (that race was only Black and White) and her ideas about bi-racial marriages were partially dependent on her religion; however, she was conscious about how that religious belief and perspective could offend or affect her relationships in the school. She explained her cautious perspective.

I am very careful about offending people; I don’t think it’s fair to make people uncomfortable or offend them because of their beliefs….Even though I won’t believe
many of the things that they believe. I don’t think it’s up to me to say you are wrong, and I am right….I just don’t want them to feel awkward.

Behavior and Challenge

Faith first raised the issue of her children’s “behavior” when she told me she had become frustrated at times “when the techniques that I’ve seen work in other places, and I try with this group, haven’t worked.” She said she knew that you “can’t do the same discipline strategy every year, and it work the exact same way,” but she said she was going home every night and trying to think of something new to try the next day. The “techniques” she mentioned that hadn’t worked were “the whole hand-raising thing,” “that rhythmic clapping thing is too young,” and “clicking the lights.” This was early in the semester; however, throughout her student teaching, Faith told me stories about the children and her attempts to develop ways to relate to their behaviors.

A researcher’s note: Faith told me that her cooperating teacher had said that their children “have a hard time making a mountain out of a molehill.” Lily had told me in one interview that Faith’s group was “a little rambunctious,” and that “they attack each other; it’s like total competition.” Lily made this judgment by comparing her fourth grade homeroom class, which Lily thought was “a pretty good group,” to Faith’s homeroom. I knew from experience that individual and group behavior can differ from classroom to classroom. If Faith’s class was more “rambunctious,” this could affect Faith’s overall perceptions of the school and children. Anything that I write here about Faith’s classroom is developed from her perceptions of this particular class. However, she did interact with all of the fourth graders, not just her own homeroom.

Faith was mostly worried about how the children treated each other. She said that the children were “mean to each other in that class. Just mean. I don’t remember ever experiencing situations in my class when I was in fourth grade - or any kindergarten or middle school - people just blatantly being mean.” She told me that she didn’t understand how they couldn’t be “supportive of each other’s successes.”

For example, Faith described “four girls who were constantly conflicting and it’s just attitudes.” Faith said that one day two of the girls had gotten into a fight and “one got a whelp on her head in the middle of it. So, I mean it was something that was physical.” She also worried about one girl, who was involved in this conflict, who said, “Nobody wants to be my friend.” Faith expressed her concerns about how to resolve conflict between the children when she discussed the children’s and families’ beliefs about fighting with Cameron and Ms. Kellymae. The families and children thought that hitting back was a correct measure for dealing with conflict, but the teacher and school policy did not view “hitting” as an appropriate measure for conflict resolution. When I asked Faith during her final interview if what she had expected about “diversity” had either changed or been confirmed at Gilmer Park, she replied in a way that I didn’t expect.

I didn’t think the behavior problems were going to be the way they are. I had been prepared there were going to be fights, but I guess the verbal behavioral patterns I didn’t expect, and the lip smacking, I don’t recall ever. I didn’t know what it was called, but I have had teeth sucking and lip smacking. I heard them all, I guess. But yeah, I guess that was never a behavior that I had encountered. …That is what everybody up in 4th grade calls lip smacking, teeth sucking, they said other names for it, but it’s just that reaction of - “Why are you making me do this?” I didn’t see that, but it’s like a non-verbal but yet verbal way of expressing, “No.”
I asked Faith if this was what the third grade teachers that I worked with called “Attitude.” “Yeah, it sounds like that same response they have,” she replied. When I asked Faith what she wished she had known before this semester, she replied that she wished she had known how “challenging this context is.” She said she was shocked by “situations that have arisen” and gave the example of her student who had become homeless. She wished she had learned how to “handle situations like that,” and she wished that she would “have known a good technique for managing 80 kids because I feel lost at times.” Part of this concern about managing this number of children was about behavior and part of this concern was about managing all of the assignments, grading, and planning for the children’s needs. Although the homelessness issue was not related to behavior, I thought this statement indicated an overall feeling that the context was challenging and heard this feeling in her other statements about the children’s behavior.

Faith said, “I have a hard time because I am more of a caring and loving type person. I am a touchy-feeling person. I like to show I care for them. Because I have that feature, I think that has been harder for me.” Even though she knew some people thought teachers needed to be “stern” at this school, she questioned whether being “stern” was effective and attempted to find other ways to “manage” her children. She described a lesson in which her children were “bickering.” Faith said that she “walked out in the hall, took a thousand deep breaths, and walked back in.” Then she told the children how “frustrated” she was with them. She told me that she was “in tears” over this.

On another occasion, she had explained to her classroom that they had hurt her feelings. In both cases, Faith felt like when she spoke with her children about how she felt and used emotion, they responded to her and their behavior improved. Faith liked this approach of talking to her classroom about her feelings about their behavior as a way to connect with them, rather than a “stern” approach.

Faith shared an account of trying a kind of “time out” in the hallway if children needed to “take a breather.” Faith said she initiated something she entitled “Let’s Get Together” which was a sign-up procedure for children to ask for a conference with her about an individual or group “situations.” She explained, “Sometimes I’ve tried to say, ‘All right, now think about what you’re doing. Is this what you’re supposed to be doing? Look inside yourself and see if this is appropriate school behavior.’” Faith was looking for answers to her worries about the children’s behavior and attempting to use strategies that fit what she believed, despite some messages that she had gotten about needing to be “stern” and “strict.”

Faith read a book, Essential 55 (Clark, 2003), between her second and third interviews, and came to the third interview excited about the book’s suggestions. She said that she would like to “rewind back” and wished she had read the book before she had come to Gilmer Park. A teacher from Harlem had written the book, so she thought that if these 55 rules had worked in that city neighborhood, they would probably help her in this city school. She gave me some examples of ideas from the book that related to her experiences and worries. There was one rule about saying “thank you” which reminded me about her concern with “life lessons” and how her children had not spoken or said, “Thank you” to the cafeteria person. “No lip smacking was one of his rules,” she said about the author’s rules. Since “lip-smacking” had been something she had been frustrated with, she thought that the book “explains a lot of things.” She thought that if she had read Essential 55 before student teaching, it would have “prepared me for a lot of the things that the students have done this semester.” It sounded as if Faith would try some of the ideas in the book with her own classroom in the future.
Despite this frustration with how the children treated each other, Faith thought that the children treated her with respect. I asked Faith how she had felt while “being here in this diverse context,” and she said that she felt “comfortable.” She added, My kids, although they have the behavioral problems and they are harsh to each other, they have always been kind to me. I don’t know why that is and why they choose the adults that deserve all your respect and not your peers….Yeah, I haven’t felt awkward at all.

As I analyzed Faith’s narratives, I reread her stories in which she discussed the children’s families. I realized that some of those discussions were also about the children’s behavior. For example, when Faith discussed being “consistent” and “flexible,” these were partially teacher attributes that she thought she needed to have in response to her children’s behaviors. (She needed to be “consistent” because “I think that my kids or my class get their way a lot at home if they push enough.” Faith thought she needed to be “flexible,” because she needed to teach the children “life lessons” in response to the children’s behaviors. These concepts - flexibility, consistency, or life lessons – which I first related to the Narrative Theme: Family Dynamics are also related to the theme of Behavior and Challenge. I realized that “behavior” was a larger issue for Faith than I had acknowledged at first.

My Student Teacher Connections

In my student teaching experiences, I had faced some of the same dilemmas in trying to understand differences in cultural patterns without developing a stereotypical understanding of the children or their families. Faith expressed this concern when she said that she had had some preconceptions about the families, she didn’t want to think that those preconceptions would always be true, and then admitted that sometimes these assumptions were true. I also connected with Faith’s attempts to understand what she called the “verbal behavioral patterns” that her children exhibited. For me, this topic of “verbal behavioral patterns” and “stereotypes” coalesced in experiences I had with the children and with explanations that Tison provided for me about “attitude.”

I had struggled to understand some of my third graders’ “attitudes,” as Tison and other third grade teachers had called it, when children spoke negatively, turned away, moved their neck back and forth, and rolled their eyes as the spoke. In particular, I had worked all semester on how to communicate with several girls and especially one girl who was very strong-willed. Tania, a very bright and engaging child, would “snap” into an attitude when she had a disagreement with her girlfriends or when she didn’t like something that Tison or I did. Her “attitude” was not always quiet and negative. Sometimes, it was a loud production of stomping and yelling across the room or playground as the classroom gazed at her in a stunned manner. She could not seem to “let it go,” and often her “attitude” would become this dramatic scene in front of the whole classroom. Sometimes it took her hours to return to her normally happy and smiling self.

I wanted to talk to Tania about her behavior or “attitude” and help her come up with other ways to resolve her conflicts and anger and attempted to do so throughout the year, without much success. So, another connection I had with Faith’s remarks was my own experience and questions regarding how to understand “attitudes.”

This problem was related to a worry I had about making stereotypical assumptions about the children’s behavior. I had noticed in my Research Journal that whenever Tison and I had talked about children with “attitudes,” it was almost always Black girls. Tania and her three friends were examples of these Black girls with attitudes. I decided to talk to Tison about
“attitude” during our interview-conversation in December. I was perplexed and embarrassed to notice this “stereotype” in my Research Journal. I told Tison that I had something to ask her that “almost made me nervous to ask.” I told her that as I had studied my Research Journal, I had discovered that every time she and I had referred to “attitude,” it was with Black girls, except for one instance when it was a Black boy. I asked Tison if she could talk about this. I told her that I remembered having White students in my college class that “would sort of get an attitude” when they didn’t want to do the work, and they were mad with me. Therefore, I knew that I had used the word “attitude” with White women. However, in my Research Journal, my observations looked like a negative stereotype. I was uncomfortable, but knew that my notes were from Tison’s comments about “attitude” in the classroom, too. I told Tison that I felt like I could trust her to hear my question and know that I was simply trying to understand how I should interpret my notes about “attitude” without believing or creating a negative stereotype. Tison laughed and explained.

You know it’s always been an issue. That’s one of the main reasons why Black men say that they date White women, because Black women have attitudes, okay?…Okay, so Black men have always said that – “Why Black women always have a chip on their shoulder? Why they always got an attitude – always quick to have an attitude – They always on guard, right?” I will agree because I went to school with all Black women, okay? … So it’s the female that’s kinda like this.

Tison said she knew that some White girls get an attitude but “our attitude is different from a little White girl,” and she described that a White girl wouldn’t really get “smart” with their teacher. She said that White girls

Might be sarcastic; they might say a little smart comment, but it’s not an attitude …..Yes, they [Black girls] do have, and I think it does have something to do with race ….but when those little girls [the Black girls in our class] get an attitude, it’s more to it than when a little White girl or you know a little White boy gets at you.

[In these quotes, I have compressed several pages of transcribed conversation. Some of the ellipses represent skips in the conversation as we referred to specific children or when I gave short responses to Tison’s remarks.]

Then Tison referred to how Black women are depicted in movies as “more outspoken.” She added that in “our own Black movies…. they always have an attitude, just really outspoken right?” Tison also told me that she had to “check” herself because “I do have an attitude sometimes, but I don’t let it show. I get really on edge with people quick.”

We agreed that we did not think that all Black girls would get an “attitude” at school, and we could name children that wouldn’t. We discussed some of the Black boys who might or might not get an attitude, although they never had with Tison. She said she thought whether a child got an “attitude” had a “lot to do with who the teacher is….If they were with the right teacher like a little White girl” [young White teacher].

I never resolved the tension between what I thought could be a negative stereotype and the confusion I experienced when Tison essentially explained to me that “attitude” could be a possible cultural manner of expression for many, not all, Black girls and women. I tried to hear Tison’s viewpoint as one that was informed by her own experience and judgment; she was my “cultural translator.” I kept reminding myself about the White university students that had “attitudes” and my advisor’s story about a White girl in an elementary school class who would get an “attitude.” However, in addition to my contradictory information, Tison said that from her viewpoint, White women’s attitudes and Black women’s attitudes were not the same.
I was never totally satisfied with what I learned about this topic. “Attitude” was certainly something I had never done thorough research on, and I didn’t do “in-depth” research on this topic during this research year. I do not have a summary statement about Black girls, White girls, (or any gender, race, or ethnicity) and “attitudes.” My point is to say that from my experience in Tison’s classroom, it would have been possible for me to have made a stereotypical assumption about Black girls and then I could have had that assumption confirmed by Tison as culturally accurate. Would I have had the same impression if I had asked another Black woman about “attitude?” This confusion provided me with some real life experience in “seeing” how difficult it is to determine what is truly a cultural “difference.” How does one know if an understanding about a behavioral pattern is culturally accurate or inaccurate? If I want to teach in a culturally responsive manner, should I have some way of determining the accuracy and inaccuracy of my understandings about another’s culture? My final statement about “attitude” is that I was confused as a White woman and as a researcher.

My Teacher Educator Connections

As a teacher educator, I appreciated how forthright Faith was in sharing her viewpoints. At our first meeting for coffee before the student teachers arrived at Gilmer Park, and when I had the student teachers sign their consent forms, Faith said several times that “she would say whatever she was going to say whether people knew who she was or not… she wasn’t worried because she knew she wasn’t going to be abusing any children or anything, and so she wouldn’t have anything she would be afraid to reveal” (My Research Journal, 1-17-05). Therefore, I looked forward to hearing her stories and explanations.

My queries about “attitude” were equally related to my role as a teacher educator as I was continually considering how my struggle with accurate and inaccurate cultural knowledge could inform how I taught teacher candidates to determine the difference between these two ambiguous entities.

As a teacher educator, I connected with Faith in other ways. I had also grown up in a home that was “very religious” and knew what it was like to have based many of my opinions and judgments on what I thought my religion or the Bible taught. My viewpoint is very different now, but I did not explain my newer religious perspective to Faith. In contrast to Faith, I had never believed that my religion or the Christian Bible made statements about racial understandings or beliefs about “inter-racial” marriage. However, since I had been influenced by my religious roots, I was personally and professionally interested in how religion was a factor in Faith’s assumptions about working in a diverse setting. Her religious influences were evident in her conversations in many ways. I also grew up in a home with parents who were still married. Faith used the words, “I live with both parents… I’m from one of the fortunate groups that hasn’t had a family of divorce.” When she mentioned “divorced homes,” I felt as if she saw those children as being less “fortunate” than children in families who were not divorced.

Since Faith demonstrated that her religious perspective informed her understanding of race, I thought a great deal about the “separation of church and state” premise with which I have always agreed. I have not raised the issue of personal religious belief in any of the university courses I have taught in the past, aside from discussing how to provide classrooms that respect and honor families and children that come from diverse religious backgrounds. I have also addressed with student teachers the issue that our classrooms should not privilege specific holiday references that are related to traditional Christian themes. However, Faith’s remarks forced me to think about the influence of religion on teachers’ perspectives about diversity that I
might not ever hear about if my students do not have the forum to express or discuss such beliefs.

I wondered about the implications of teacher educators’ “silence” about religion and this “silence’s” influence on our belief systems. I realized that such “silence” about religion acts to empower religion as a belief system. By not talking about our own religious perspectives in courses that prepare teachers, do we create a sense that our religious perspectives don’t matter in our understandings about children and our classrooms? By not talking about religion, do we deny that religion is a cultural factor, despite the fact that religion has shaped culture? Does our silence about religion possibly promote the “natural order” or accepted values of the status quo and thus privilege the dominance of Christian images in our nation? Does silence assume “Christianity” or make Christian the “norm”? Even though Faith and others may not raise personal religious belief or perspective in a university course because of the constitutional assumption of the separation of church and state, religious assumptions influence some people in their views of other people.

My Questions

- How can university professors open the door for conversations about how our religious perspectives inform our understandings of others and informs our roles as teachers and cultural “shapers,” without offending people or inappropriately blending church and state beliefs and policies?

Relationships with people are critical to Faith - her relationship with her cooperating teacher, wishing that she had connected more with the parents, being relieved that her children treated her with respect, watching how the children related to one another, her relationship with her own family, and her attempts to resolve relationships between her children.

- How can we emphasize the role of relationships in school beyond calling it “creating a classroom environment” or “classroom management?” This sounds as if we believe that if teachers put certain behavioral strategies (rules and consequences) in place or organize our materials and desks in a certain way, we will be consistent and nurturing. How can we make “relationships” a central feature of our classroom pedagogy?"

Faith was concerned that the children might not respect her because she was different from them.

- How can teachers learn how to relate to different cultural identities? Faith wished she could have known more about the children’s families and recognized the significance of relating to families. As educators we do not need to talk only about “school-home connections” or “parent-teacher conferences,” which refer to phone calls, “notes home,” classroom newsletters, and report cards. Shouldn’t we also talk about teacher-parent relationships so that we examine how our socio-cultural identities can affect those relationships?

- How can universities support or engender student teachers’ actions to learn about the children’s families while they are in a field placement? What is important for them to know about families? What is not important for them to know? What kinds of field placement schedules could support student teachers’ need to know about families?

- How can student teachers better understand and value different family structures, besides an “intact” family with two parents and children?

As Faith and I tried to understand the children’s “attitude” responses, we, or certainly I, felt the tension of thinking stereotypically and trying to understand people who responded differently than me.
• How can any knowledge about a person help a teacher understand that person while not creating negative judgments about the person? How can this knowledge help student teachers create positive relationships with the children’s families?

• How can teacher educators create space in university classrooms to talk about the tensions between “stereotypes” and “culturally responsive?” When is an understanding about a cultural pattern accurate and when is an understanding inaccurate or a negative stereotype?

Case Study Analysis: Lily

Background and Preconceptions

Lily grew up outside of Washington D.C. in an outlying city. Her family consisted of her mom and Lily’s twin sister. Lily’s mother had immigrated to the United States from Eritrea by escaping through Sudan because of “a war going on there.” Lily said that she and her twin were born in the United States and that her mother “had us, and she just raised us” with help from an uncle who lived nearby. The summer before this study, Lily had visited Eritrea with her mother and sister for the first time; she said that the trip was “great because it was like connecting.” She called it “eye-opening. It felt good on the inside - you know what I mean?” In Eritria she met some of her mother’s siblings and her grandmother. Lily said that her culture was very important to her and described how she belonged to a group in the D.C. area that consisted of a “whole bunch of Eritrean kids.” She said that her mother was very involved in raising money for women in Eritrea and doing “stuff at the Embassy.” Because of her mother’s involvement and influence on her, “It’s almost like I have it [Eritrean culture] in my blood,” she explained.

When I asked Lily how she would describe her socio-cultural identity, she answered, “I identify myself as a Black woman; however, I’m very into my culture....I feel like it’s very - a part of me.” I replied and asked, “You said you identify yourself as a Black woman, but not as an African American?” Lily answered.

No, I think I do identify myself as an African American woman; however; I think for some people it stops there; whereas you know, I can tell you about my country; I can tell you a little bit. And I think that reflects in me also.

Lily considered her family to be middle-class, “maybe middle-middle-class” and said that her mother, sister, and she always had “the nice things.” Her mother worked at the Department of Agriculture as a computer operator. Lily said, “I noticed...we lived in an apartment and...all my friends had like big houses and stuff, and I just said, ‘Okay, we don’t have that.’” When Lily described the cultural identity of her neighborhood, she said, “It was a mix Black-White, and there weren’t that many Hispanic people living there yet, and then as time went on...now a lot of Hispanic people are living there.”

Lily attended public schools in her city and said that she believed that her schools were “predominantly White;” however, there was a “pretty good amount of Black people and Spanish or Hispanic people.” She said that the number of Hispanic people had increased in her community and said, “Even as I went through school, you could see more of a foreign population.” She remembered that in high school, “there were a lot of ESL students, and most teachers were usually White.” She thought that the school was “mostly middle-class” with “a couple of lower middle-class.”

Lily participated in a senior year service project at her high school in which she volunteered at her own elementary school in a third grade class. While she volunteered, she
considered teaching as a career, and she told me that she had reflected, “I think I could do this - I really like it.” Although she applied to the university as an “undecided” major, when she had the chance to make a choice of a major again, she decided to “do education,” and she had “stuck with it.” She had chosen the city context for her student teaching semester because she wanted “to work with more Black children” and because she might seek a teaching position in Washington.

*Prior Experiences with “Diversity” and “Multicultural Settings”*

When I asked Lily about “what other kinds of experiences “she had had in relation to diversity, she talked about “diverse learners” or “kids with labels” in her high school. She said that these students were “in the slow class,” and while she was in the “regular class,” they would be “roaming the hallways.” She said that she would feel so bad and wondered why “we put them in that room...cause everyone knows why they’re in that class... and almost everyone thought they were the dumb kids.” She went on to say that she thought “it would hurt things like self esteem” to be in the “slow class.”

Since I had heard Lily talk about her own African culture, I used the term “multicultural” and said that she was a “multicultural thinker.” I asked if she have any other experiences that she wanted to share that she thought prepared her to work with people who are different from her.

Yeah. And I think I’m also different cause I’m a twin. I think I’m different, too. People always ask me, “What is it like to be a twin?” And I’m like, “I don’t know. It just feels like I have a twin because I don’t know what it’s like to not have a twin.” ….it’s hard sometimes to describe why you think the way you think.

Whereas this is how she answered my questions about her other experiences with diversity and multicultural (different learners and twin-ness), she had talked about her experiences with diverse groups throughout her first interview. In fact, Lily identified with multiple cultural groups.

But see I feel like I’m almost in the middle...like I’ve been exposed to every culture of course... I mean the cultures that are around me - White culture - I was in Girl Scouts for so many years, and I was always around my friends in that setting. I saw how they were, and then I saw how my African American friends and families were, and I see how my family and other families in Eritrea are. So it’s like I have all these mixes, but I’ve always been observant of that.

Lily had grown up in a more multicultural or diverse context than the other three student teachers. It sounded as if she had had experiences with several cultural identities.

*Preconceptions about the School*

When I asked Lily about her expectations about the city experience, Lily said she was surprised because she had anticipated that “there would be ‘more issues,’” or “stuff from home coming into school,” and that it would be “a little more exciting” at Gilmer Park. She later told me in her last interview that she had expected the area right around the school to “be more city” and to have a “little more hustle and bustle.” Instead, she had found the school to be “regular to me ... this reminds me so much of my schooling.” Lily remarked that she had not expected that there would be “more issues” because there were more Black kids at the school; she had thought that perhaps there would be “more issues” because it was in the city. This statement reveals her preconception that “city” would correlate with children who brought “issues” to school.
Beginning Impressions

When I had asked Lily why she had chosen to do her student teaching in the city, she said that she “wanted to work with more Black children…That’s honestly why.” She continued the conversation by comparing Gilmer Park to her rural school placement last semester. Although her talk is not purely a description of the children and families at Gilmer Park, I can use the following conversation to infer what she may have perceived initially about the school.

Do you know what I’m finding? I’m finding that - okay- last semester I was over at Riverview, and I had mostly White. I had all White students basically - you know like two Black children in my classroom, one child was Black and White. Excuse me - I felt like there were more issues in that class than this one.

When I asked Lily what she meant by “issues,” she said, “I guess in class - well, I guess stuff from home coming into the school.” She said that the “stories” she had heard about the children’s lives at Riverview “made me not care more, but it made me go, ‘Oh, my gosh. I want to work harder to make this child feel good or help them out and make sure nothing goes wrong with them.’” It sounded as if, at this early point in the semester, Lily did not think she was as needed in this classroom in the city as she was in her fall placement classroom because the children at Gilmer Park did not have as many “issues.” She explained, “I was expecting it to be a little different, and it’s really not.”

Lily thought that the challenges at Gilmer Park were mainly about “kids learning and things like that.” Her teacher had only mentioned “little things” about “things going on at home,” and they did have one child in class who hadn’t “come to school much,” but she had not heard about many more problems. Lily admitted that at Riverview Elementary, her rural school placement, “There were a lot of things going on with my kids so… I felt more needed there.”

In the first interview, Lily talked about her interest in and connections with the Black children. When I asked about her “beginning impressions - or - how would you describe the school,” she replied, “Well, I noticed there were a lot of Black children. Before I was like ‘Okay, that’s cool,’ but I thought – I still thought it would be different. But I think I’m still going to learn more, and maybe that will be different.”

Narrative Themes:

Diversity, Race and Cultural Identity, Culture, Teaching Differently, Racial-Cultural Connections with the Children, Cultural Disconnections, Changed Perceptions, My Student Teacher Connections, My Teacher Educator Connections; My Questions

Member Check: When I sent Lily this document for her review and to seek her “member checking” response to my interpretations, she returned the document to me with some additions and corrections. I have included her “member checks” throughout this section.

Diversity

As with each of my participants, Lily’s prior experiences had influenced her views on diversity, and since she was Black, since her mother had immigrated from Eritrea, and since she had attended schools with diverse populations, these experiences were significant factors in her perspective on “diversity” and “culture.” Throughout the semester, Lily included many factors in the construct of diversity ranging from culture, race, nationality, family, learning style, personal difference, socio-economic class, and ability.

In our first interview, I asked Lily how she would explain the terms multicultural and diverse. She said that when she heard the word multicultural, she thought of
Cultures - like traditions - like kind of a way a group of people might do certain things....
I think of it on a global thing but...I feel like I think of multicultural as people from
outside coming to the U. S. and they’re still having their ways of doing things from where
they came from but...am I explaining that well?
When we talked about the meaning of “diverse,” she answered.
I think the same thing, except when I think about teaching, I think about how kids learn -
what things they like to - as well as diverse, even maybe like their home life. With
diversity, I think a lot of different things ... like in their interests, their personalities, and
things like that.... And how they respond to a lesson I created - how each of them or how
each group kind of does.
When I tried to clarify in my mind how she viewed the words “diverse” and
“multicultural” differently, I asked, “So, diversity would be more about differences, and
multicultural would be more about differences in culture?” Lily responded, “Yeah, but I think -
in diversity, I do still think about culture or race kind of.” Later in this conversation, she referred
to the concept of “diverse learners” and included people with special education labels. In
addition, she recognized “being a twin” as a “personal difference” and as a factor in being
“different” or “diverse.”
Lily often compared her own diverse school experiences with Gilmer Park and thought
the two schools were similar. At the end of the semester, Lily said she that she didn’t know if
this was true. She explained that at her own school there were “a lot of African students” (from
Africa) and that Gilmer Park only had a few different nationalities represented. In terms of
ethnicity and nationality, Lily did not think Gilmer Park was as diverse as what she had
experienced as a child. In regards to family structures, Lily assumed and said that she thought
that most of the students at Gilmer Park lived with one parent.
Lily had a “hard time determining” the socio-economic class of the children at the school
because they didn’t have “trouble at home with money...and they came to school dressed very
nicely.” Lily confirmed this difficulty in determining the children’s “class” when she told me
about the children who talked about family members who had stolen things.
It seems so - one of the students in my class – I know his dad is a police officer. I know
another student that his mom’s – he always calls his mother at work, and he seems okay –
stable or whatever. I remember last week one of the girls was like, “Yeah my cousin
steals from the store.” I was asking her what she thinks about that basically, and you
know, and “Hey, that’s not really cool.” Then another girl comes in, and she’s like,
“Yeah my uncle steals diapers for his something-something.” I was like, “Oh, gosh.” I
was like, “Okay,” and then I immediately said, “Well, maybe they don’t have enough
money to get those kinds of things.” So,...I really couldn’t tell what her money situation
was.
Lily seemed perplexed about determining socio-economic class, but she had a complex
understanding of diversity and talked about these multiple factors throughout the semester.

Race and Cultural Identity
Lily shared many of her perceptions about topics related to race. During her stories and
comments about race, she demonstrated that she knew from personal experience that “race” was
more than “skin color” and that race was a significant factor in one’s cultural identity. She
readily noted that she had wanted to student teach in the city because she “wanted to teach more
Black children,” and she thought that there would be more “Black kids” at Gilmer Park. When
she said that she had expected to find more “issues” at the city school, she explained that she
simply thought that children in the city had more “issues;” she hadn’t had this preconception because the children would be mostly Black. Her reason for her decision to student teach in the city was that she thought she could be a model as a Black woman for the Black children. She believed that, in regard to racial issues, “stuff cleared up kind of in the 60’s but not really.” So, “there’s a lot of racial issues,” and “there’s still stuff that goes on today.” The following is her statement about her premise that since “racial issues” still occur, she wanted to be a teacher who helped Black children overcome negative stereotypes.

I just feel like sometimes Black children lack certain things…and I feel like as a Black woman I want to be the one to teach them and boost things with them like their self esteem and make them feel smart and not go into these old stereotypes…cause you hear those things, and you might fit into that, but you don’t want to hear…some of the stuff…it’s just negative.

During one interview, I asked Lily if she had heard her children making any racial statements in her class, like Faith’s story about White and Black “crackers.” Lily said that she hadn’t “sensed” any racial issues among her homeroom children. She made this judgment based on the intense way that the other fourth grade classes had responded to her lesson on Jim Crow Laws. She said that these other classes were very “aware of race.” However, she thought that her own homeroom class didn’t “seem as aware of things like that.” She did know that a White boy in the fourth grade wasn’t “allowed to ride the bus anymore” because he “used to say things” to Black children on the bus. “The funny thing is,” she said, “I would have never suspected, but now I’m kind of wondering….He interacts normally with me and Black students in his class….You have these thoughts, ‘Well, maybe he doesn’t like me.’ So, it’s kind of weird.”

I found another example of Lily’s perception that race could be considered a cultural identity when she told me about a White girl in her classroom who “actually relates to the Black more.” Lily said that a Black girl who sat next to this White girl was actually best friends with the White girl’s sister. “I think they hang out a lot, and they know each other’s family business.” Lily said that “even the way she (the White girl) talks sometimes - even some of the things she says” made Lily assume that the White girl associated more with Black people, or in my words, assumed a Black cultural identity.

In addition to these behaviors, Lily made this assumption based on something the White girl had said about “hitting.” Lily thought that African American parents told their children, “If someone hits you, you hit them back.” This particular White girl had said, “My daddy said if somebody does this, I need to hit them back.” Lily assumed that since the White girl thought she should “hit back,” and African American parents told their children to hit, this belief was another indicator that the White girl “relates to the Black more.” Lily thought that hitting was a cultural pattern of Black people and said, “I was like, okay, there’s a lot of similarity.”

I responded during this conversation by saying that my stereotype about “hitting” was that I connected “hitting” with “lower socio-economic groups” which I didn’t think was a fair assumption and could be a negative stereotype. There was no resolution in this conversation, only our shared speculations about the behavior of hitting and stereotypes.

During the second group interview, the four participants had a conversation about other evidence of a behavior related to a “cultural identity” or perhaps a “racial stereotype.” The group began talking about the children’s clothes and then talked about the stereotype that Black people like to have shoes, and in particular Black men. Several of the participants said this was something that they had noticed and didn’t understand how a person could spend money on shoes if they needed money for other essentials. Lily became a “cultural translator” for the group
in attempting to explain her perceptions of why some, or many, Black men liked to spend money on or have nice shoes. (Note: When I sent this transcript to Lily, here is the conclusion that she wrote about this story, her “member check.” In conclusion, Lily explained that “this means that their material possessions are something they may value in order for others to perceive them as having money through the material possession of nice shoes, for example.”)

These were additional examples of our attempts to “understand” cultural patterns and the tension between knowing if the “understandings” were accurate, inaccurate, or positive or negative stereotypes. These tensions were even evident when we had a cultural translator like Lily. I wanted to refuse to acknowledge such a stereotype about shoes, but I listened to the conversation because I remembered my own quandary about “attitudes” and how I needed to feel safe enough to ask my question of Tison.

Lily compared her cultural identity with the racial-cultural identity of African Americans and expressed concern that an African American would not know about his “roots.” “Roots” were an important theme in her racial-cultural identity. She said, “I have a problem….I think sometimes African Americans as they grow up feel …. I don’t know what they feel …but a friend of mine used to try to explain to me how he felt. He didn’t know exactly where his roots were. I was like, “Wow, I guess that would kind of hurt, if you don’t know exactly where you come from.” Lily said that she didn’t grow up with a father, and this sometimes made her sad, but she said that at least she had one parent, and she knew her roots. She thought it was “probably difficult being a Black person ’cause you’re in a place now where you’re a minority still.” She said her friend explained to her that even if he went to Africa, where would he go to find his home?

Culture and Identity

When Lily and I talked about issues related to race, I inferred that she saw race as a factor in cultural identity, and not just skin color. Lily had cultural experiences beyond being Black. She talked about her and her mother’s cultural ties to Eritrea and how this cultural connection “was in her blood.” “She brings her culture from her country,” Lily said about her mother. Lily said that her “skin color is the same” as African Americans, and she identifies with them (herself as an African American), “but there’s still our culture…there’s diversity within each of those roots just like someone from a different African country in Africa would be different from somewhere from our country.”

Lily connected some of her Eritrean cultural understandings to African American cultural understandings. She told me that when she went to Eritrea, her mother, sister, and she went to the beach and tanned. Lily said that she found out that in Eritrea, people don’t sit out and tan, and that her grandmother didn’t like Lily to get darker. In Eritrea whether a person had light skin or dark skin was a “big deal.” Light skin was valued more, and her grandmother was upset with her. Lily said she knew that people talked about light skin as being more valued than dark skin here in the United States, but hadn’t realized this was true in the African country. She laughed and added, “Okay, this comes straight from the Motherland.”

Lily talked about the cultural identity of her rural school. She told me that her Black cooperating teacher knew the “culture there, so she was able to work with the kids” in the mostly White, lower socio-economic area. Her teacher knew that the children talked about the possibility of going to jail, so the teacher would say, “I don’t want to see you guys going to jail.” Lily interpreted the children at that rural school as very similar to one another because of this community’s cultural identity. (Member Check: “I don’t know how to word it, but not that they
‘talked’ about it; people around them were in jail. So, they were aware of what their paths could be if they didn’t do things righteously, which their teacher emphasized.”

Lily said she was very interested in how children responded differently in the classroom to teaching, depending on race and experiences, as I will discuss more in “Teaching Differently.” She said she had always “been observant” of how people respond differently, therefore, she recognized differences in people’s interests and actions based on a cultural way of being or identity. She referred to her life experiences with all of the “cultures around her” in helping her see how that in her own life, she had been “exposed to every culture of course,” or at least the “cultures around her.” She saw how “my African American friends and family were, and I see how my family and other families in Eritrea are.” Through these experiences she had seen how different groups “were.” She was able to identify different “ways of being” (my words) based on a cultural identity.

Lily also discussed how her own racial-cultural identity influenced her interactions with others. She said that she connected with me, and that “personality type helps, but sometimes race obviously does, too…especially when you’re in a setting when you don’t see many people like you.” She explained her relationship with two other students in the university cohort. One was Black and the other was “Black and White,” according to Lily. She said she could talk about Black things with these two friends, and that “sometimes you can convey it to others, but you don’t know what it feels like here” [as to be Black]. She went on to explain that with her Black friend and bi-racial friend, talking to them was “sort of a comfort thing or a connecting thing.” She said she thought it was “a big deal” because this was how our “society” is.

Lily shared that when the university cohort talked about diversity and cultural identity during seminar, she and the other Black student and the bi-racial student had become accustomed to having to be spokespersons for African Americans. She said that they would often joke with each other when they could predict that this would happen in class. She said that by this point in their university education (the final semester of a five year program), she thought that the three of them were used to being expected to talk or answer questions about their race. She wished that the other people in the cohort would realize that these were just her and her friend’s individual perspectives. She said that she didn’t want to speak negatively about others’ opinions in the class; however, if she felt strongly she would speak up. (Sometimes, she admitted, she didn’t want to respond.) Lily said that by hearing other people’s opinions, which I infer meant White students’ opinions, it made her “more aware of things that are going on.” While Lily did not want her ideas to be taken as stereotypical views, she said she was often glad that she “spoke up” because she thought that maybe her ideas could “enrich” the other students in the class and hopefully help them develop a different understanding. For example, she hoped that maybe other students would realize that they were thinking something that they “shouldn’t be thinking” or that they needed to think about diversity issues differently.

When I asked Lily during her third interview how she felt as we talked about diversity issues, she told me that it was natural and refreshing for her. When she was a child she felt like an “oddball” or “weird” because she didn’t know of anyone else who was almost directly from Africa. She said when she was growing up, the few “diversity” events planned by her school did not address her own identity in an authentic way. So, she said, “It feels great to talk.” She began to tell me more about the complexity of her cultural identity.

Lily said that she felt like an “oddball” as an Eritrean American, and that she was “devastated” when people didn’t see her as being equally “African American.” For example, one day in fifth grade she wore a T-shirt to school that had a picture with a Black guy and lady on it.
A Black friend asked her, “Lily, why are you wearing that shirt? You’re not Black.” Lily said that you can’t realize “how much something can hurt a kid.” She went on to say that a comment like that makes a child “question things you don’t need to question.” She thought that there were “little things” that could take place in school that would be helpful. She further explained that because of this experience as a child and her emotional attachment to the issue, she thought that it would be easier for her to talk to her children about racial and diversity issues because of her natural sensitivity. She planned to teach her future students “about me and my culture to maybe make them feel better.” In each of these ways, Lily acknowledged the importance of racial-cultural identity with regard to interactions, feelings, and connecting with others.

Teaching Differently

Lily said in her first interview that she thought that there were “different ways to teach Black children.” When we discussed this tenet during subsequent interviews, she referred to having read Delpit’s (1995) work and Heath’s (1983) work in Trackton during her university courses. She thought that Black children did “respond to things differently - I just think it’s probably due to maybe how they are….how things are dealt with at home.” Even though she thought that Black children responded differently, she added, “I will not stereotype them and say all children …because I don’t think they do.” When I asked Lily if she considered if teachers responded differently to Black children, she said.

Now, that you bring that up, I think some of the teachers think that that’s the only way that kids will respond is if you’re very stern, and this is the way it is. And if you do something bad, you are going to get yelled at a little bit. Well, maybe not yelled [at], but you’re not going to be made to feel very good.

Lily thought that not all teachers believed this (that you had to be stern); she thought that the teachers at the school who did think that it was necessary to be stern thought so because “they’re in a city setting.” Lily added, “I don’t know if I agree with that.” It seemed that even though she thought that Black children “responded differently,” she wasn’t sure how teachers should interact with this different response style.

When I asked Lily what she meant by “stern,” she told me that “stern” meant that the teacher had “clear cut rules,” but there was “no niceness,” or “not a little edge of nice.” She noticed that if the children did “something bad, you’re not going to be made to feel very good.” She thought that there was one class, where the teacher was particularly “stern.” When the children were away from this teacher, they acted differently. She said that when the children were not around the teacher, “They’re breaking free, or they’re being more themselves.” Later she added, “I don’t think they’re able to be themselves in that environment.” So, Lily did not know if she agreed with this whole idea of being “stern” as an appropriate measure of “teaching differently.”

I considered “stern” to be an interaction style, and I heard Lily talk about interaction style as a form of “teaching differently” when she told me that she noticed the different way in which Ms. Brown (Black female 4th grade teacher) talked to the children and how the children responded to Ms. Brown. Lily noticed the intersection of culture and interaction through Ms. Brown’s style of communication. Lily said she noticed that even Ms. Brown’s tone of voice was different when she spoke to the children.

In her third interview, Lily brought up teacher interactions again when she explained that her cooperating teacher from her fall placement, who was African American, talked to the mostly White children in a “specific way…it might be the way they’re talked to at home.” However, Lily said she didn’t think she could be like her Black teacher at the rural school.
Because that’s not how I am. Probably that worked for her, and she was also a very loving teacher…. I think I learned even from that, that it has to come with what you’re comfortable with and with what you think is going to work. Lily had observed Black teachers in a mostly White school and a mostly Black school interacting differently, based on the cultural identity of the children in the community. Lily thought that when teachers changed the way they communicated, this was a form of “teaching differently.” At the same time, Lily was wondering how she could interact differently while maintaining her own personal style.

Lily talked about “teaching differently” in other contexts. She said she tried to “expect the same thing” for a particular ELL student who was capable academically but didn’t speak much in class. She wondered if the child noticed that some teachers “were slacking off on him” and not expecting him to do his homework. While she knew he might need “different” supports, she did not want to create “different” expectations for him as a way of teaching him “differently.” She said he was a good writer and that she tried to explain procedures to him and tried to figure out why he was not doing some of his work. She wanted to “have the same expectations…for that student.” In this case, it sounded as if Lily was thinking about how to not teach him “differently” by expecting the “same” from him as the other children. (Member check: “Setting high expectations for all, despite differences; all students need to be challenged.”)

Lily considered how her children might think about her lessons differently based on the children’s race and culture. She wanted to teach math concepts by relating the concepts to the children’s prior knowledge and experience or “to find things that relate more to the kids.” Making these connections was a way to “teach differently.” Lily described her Jim Crow simulation lesson and said that she was “really comfortable” doing that lesson and thought that it gave the children “a sense of empowerment for them to know what had happened and how it’s changed” [meaning laws related to racial equality]. She felt like she had “a little more drive” and “passion behind” teaching this topic well because she really wanted them “to understand how certain pieces of history have affected everyone.” Lily said that the way she felt about the content, affected the way she taught the children. She said that she “felt comfortable with it coming from me teaching them.” Her racial-cultural identity changed the way she enacted her teaching and viewed the content.

When Lily had been at the school for twelve weeks, her ideas about “teaching differently” were more influenced by her experiences at Gilmer Park and Riverview, than her knowledge about Delpit (1995) or Heath (1983) and how she thought those scholars promoted teaching Black children “differently.” Lily summarized her thoughts and in doing so revealed that she viewed the people in the Gilmer Park community now as very varied. She also revealed that her ideas about teaching differently had changed and were now correlated to the concept of whether a school community was culturally alike or different. I reminded her about what she had said previously, “Okay, so where you might have thought that there were different ways to teach Black children at the beginning, are you saying that…” Lily responded.

Yeah. I kind of don’t think that, and I said, maybe if this was a smaller community, and you know the kids were raised pretty much the same. Like I found at Riverview, there was a certain way to teach the children there cause I felt like a lot of them had the same things going on in their community. So, a lot of them were able to connect with one another. So, it was pretty much … more unified as far as how kids were raised and things like that.
Lily then compared Gilmer Park children, who she thought were very different from each other, to the children from her rural school placement. At Gilmer Park, there was “so much variety….they might not have the same views. They might not respond to the same things….that might not be how most of the parents raise their children.” When I asked Lily how she could tell that the children were more alike at the rural school, she gave many examples of “alikeness.” Lily said that the school and community were each small; her teacher knew most of the parents and grandparents; families knew other families; the children spent time with each other and influenced each other outside of school; and everyone was aware of everything going on. The school was mostly White, mostly lower middle-class; they all had similar experiences “they are more alike between families than more different.”

The alikenesses and differences of each group seemed to affect Lily’s perceptions about how she could teach children “differently.” Since the children at her rural school were “brought up similarly,” that might make it “easier to teach a certain way” or according to a common group culture. Teaching a “certain way” in response to the group culture became “teaching differently” to them as a group. Lily said that the children at Gilmer Park were so varied and different “even in their experiences” and thus, she implied, that you couldn’t teach them “differently” based on their culture, because there was not a common group culture.

Lily articulated her ideas about teaching a group that was culturally synchronous again when I asked her to explain her thinking about teaching Black children differently during the second interview. She responded by saying.

You know, I really, I’ve learned - I don’t think it matters. I think it really just matters how I’m responsive to whatever group of children….I don’t know if I’d necessarily - cause Black - White whatever - I think they’re so many different kids within you know within everything. I think every time - the best way for that group of students to work with me and how I can work with them.

I remained curious about her perceptions about teaching differently. So during her final interview, I asked her if she wanted to talk about that topic once more. She remembered that she had said in her second interview that she didn’t think anymore that you had to teach Black children differently. She explained that she had been thinking about this notion again. This time she expressed another new idea about “teaching differently.” “I’m also starting to think…I’m not really in what my mind envisioned as a city school setting, so I don’t know if it would be different in a city - more inner city school.” Lily had just seen the movie Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer, [Producer], 1995) the weekend before our interview, which was set in an “inner city” school. Lily had observed that the main character, a teacher, “had to teach them a certain way.” Lily added that the teacher had to “change even her thinking…cause that was the bad class.” Lily said that she knew that this was “just a movie,” but it made her think that teachers do have to teach differently in the city. Her perception of not needing to teach these children “differently” at Gilmer Park was now related to her perception that the school was not an “inner city” school or the children weren’t “bad.” Lily thought out loud about her beginning ideas about teaching Black children differently. She explained.

I feel like I’ve been doing the same things I’ve been doing at other placements here, at least I thought so….I don’t know if I can necessarily agree with having to teach students a certain way if they are from a certain race.

Lily’s experiences in Gilmer Park, at her other rural school, and with the movie, had influenced her to reconsider her ideas about teaching differently. Perhaps it wasn’t necessary to teach children “differently” according to race, but by whether children were alike as a group,
based on similarities in their family and community experiences, or perhaps, if the school was an “inner city” school. Her perception that the children at Gilmer Park had very varied backgrounds seemed to make it not possible or necessary to teach them “differently.”

Racial-Cultural Connections with the Children

Lily thought that she could relate to the African American children sometimes because of her racial connections with them. She said that “it’s nice to see a face like your own…somebody that has the same skin color…that’s how the world is…it just makes them more comfortable, and it’s even a good example for them.” Lily remembered having only one Black teacher herself. Lily said that this teacher “cared about all of us in her classroom, but you could just tell…there was a connection there just because you’re of a different race…I think kids need that.” In reference to her own students, Lily added later, “I think they respond differently to different race women.” This racial connection also affected the way she viewed the content that she taught, as described in her story about teaching about Jim Crow Laws to her mostly African American classroom. Lily tried to imagine what it would be like if our public schools had “a variety” of teachers such as from different cultures or countries. “That would be so different for all of us. I think that would change everyone’s experience.”

Lily thought that she could connect with her children’s interactions because of this cultural-racial connection; she gave an example of a slang phrase that her children had used that she understood. “I knew exactly what they were talking about,” and she wondered if anyone else would have understood the particular word the Black child had used (“junk” for “tooth”). Lily told me later that even though she talks “pretty clearly” (and like her mom - English), she sometimes would talk like her Black children, and she said that when she is “around certain people, sometimes I pick up on how they talk and talk like that.” (Member check: “For example, you don’t talk the same when comparing your professional life and home life.”)

During each interview, Lily told me about conversations that she had with her children about her hair, and she explained the cultural connections that Black women had with each other because of their hair. In the first interview, Lily called this connection, “that whole hair thing.” She said that the children often remarked about her hair. “Oh, Ms. Dulce your hair is so pretty. Is that all your hair?” “Your hair is really big, Ms. Dulce. What did you do to it?” “Ooh, how do you do it like that?” “What happened to your hair?” “Ms. Dulce, how do you do stuff with your hair?” And “Your hair is like a pillow today. I just want to put my head on it.” When she came in with a new style, a child might say, “Oh, Ms. Dulce, what did you do?” Lily explained, “They always ask me things about my hair and want to touch it…I mean I’m used to that, but it’s funny because it starts at such a young age.” Lily said that she tried to diffuse the children’s talk about her hair so as to make the beauty of hair less of an issue in the classroom. She acknowledged that “there’s just a big emphasis on beauty with the hair,” and that hair was “part of being Black.”

There was an African American girl in Lily’s classroom who Lily thought was “obsessed with being cute” and who often commented on Lily’s looks or appearance. Lily said that she noticed that the little girl was “always staring at me….It was weird.” The child would say to Lily, “You’re so pretty,” or “Your eyes are so pretty,” for example. Lily said she would try to refocus the child by saying, “All right, do your work,” or “Come on girl, get an A.”

Since Lily had told me about some of these racial or physical connections that she had with her children, I asked her during another interview how she thought her “own Black identity” helped her connect with the children. Lily replied that she had noticed how much the children talked about how she was “from Africa.” Lily said she had done a presentation for her class at
the beginning of the semester about her family’s history and connections with Eritrea. She explained that many of the Black children in the fourth grade would continually ask her, “Are you from Africa? Where?” “Are you African?” Their interest in her African roots pleased Lily.

**Cultural Disconnections**

Despite the racial connections that she had with her students, over the course of the semester, Lily began to describe experiences that represented cultural disconnections between her and her children. Her cultural disconnections represented how her impressions of the school had changed since her first impressions. When I asked her what she had learned about herself and her own socio-cultural identity while at Gilmer Park, she said, “I definitely feel…the funny thing is I feel different from a lot of my students.” I asked her, “In what way?” and she replied, “Like even ethnically.” She said that she didn’t think the children really understood her African background. When I asked her, “Why?” she gave several examples. She said that she wondered if this issue of feeling “different” from her students was related to the fact that she ate food at home that was from her country, for example; she said she was also accustomed to hearing her mother talk on the phone in her mother’s native language and the children at Gilmer Park would hear phone conversations in English. She said that these were “little” different things, but “they are different.”

Lily also realized that she came from a middle-class background and that this background possibly made her feel different from the children in her classroom. Her middle-class standards for behavior made her question her children’s behavior. She said that many of the children at Gilmer Park didn’t exhibit “responsibility,” some children had “attitudes,” and there wasn’t a general knowledge about “what school behavior needs to be or how they need to respond to a school environment.” She compared these behavioral issues to her own elementary school where the children “were more well-behaved” than the children at Gilmer Park.

Lily shared several examples of these behaviors. She talked about having difficulty with one particular child; she was worried that he didn’t “respect” her. She worried that some of the children did their work and didn’t turn it in, and she thought that knowing how to turn their work in was something that fourth graders should know by now. She said that this problem was “about responsibility and stuff.” Lily explained that responsibility was a ‘big deal” to her when she was growing up, so she compared her family’s standards for responsibility with the children’s standards at Gilmer Park.

A lot of things were a big deal in my household, and some of those same things are not big deals with these kids, so I strongly believe it comes back from what’s going on at home, or what your parents think are important, and what they’re teaching you.

Lily thought she could tell when a parent had taught a child certain things, and said that she could only think of one child at Gilmer Park who reminded Lily of herself, and who seemed to have a similar home life to Lily’s. The child’s mother even reminded Lily of her own mother, and the fourth grade girl was shy as Lily had been.

In another example of the children’s lack of responsibility, Lily questioned why her children didn’t start their homework when they got home. Instead, they stayed up late at night in order to do their homework; many were still awake at 10:00 doing their assignments. I asked Lily if there were other examples besides “responsibility” that she thought were not important to the children and that caused her to feel different from them.

Lily: Well, I guess some of it is even their behavior….Classroom behavior is another thing too - like even with the whole attitude thing….There’s a certain way you are
at school and a certain way you are at home….I just find that a lot of them don’t seem like they know what school behavior needs to be, or how they need to respond to a school environment….I can’t even put my finger on it exactly….some of them have bad behavior and do things … that I wouldn’t have done as a kid.

Dana: That is something that I hear you saying is different from what your school was like because at the beginning of the semester you said you thought this school was a lot like yours….but maybe this is a difference that you’re seeing…that on appearance maybe there were some similarities…

Lily said that the children at her own school were “aware of how they need to be at school…and here there’s not as many” [as many children at Gilmer Park who were aware of appropriate school behavior]. She also thought that some children at Gilmer Park knew how to behave but were influenced by children who behaved inappropriately at school.

I asked Lily in this last interview what she had “learned about the children and families” while she was at Gilmer Park that she didn’t know before. First, Lily said that “as with anywhere, I think whatever is going on at home is going to affect learning [and] what’s going on in the classroom.” She did not correlate the stories she told me about the children’s families during the semester with her feelings of being different from her children. However, I believe that these stories imply a disconnection between her and her children that she did not anticipate since she had originally thought that Gilmer Park was “regular” and reminded her of her own school. Lily expressed surprise about the children’s topics of conversation and what they revealed about their family influences.

In one example, Lily described a conversation she had with a child about her weekend in which a girl said she had had “a bad weekend” because her sister “got locked up.” Lily asked, “What happened?” Lily thought that the sister had taken her parents’ car, the parents thought it was stolen, and the “police were called in.” Lily continued and said that another girl had added, “Yeah, her mama and daddy been in jail, too.” Therefore, Lily thought that this arrest “was something that goes on.” Lily thought that “getting locked up” was something this fourth grader was accustomed to happening in her family.

Lily told another story about a girl in her classroom who had been moved from another homeroom to Lily’s homeroom because the child had been “outwardly rude and kind of had this attitude” in the other classroom. Lily said that when the child came to her cooperating teacher’s room, the child was fine. Lily said that the girl was “very bright,” and her work “amazes me.” Lily thought, “Great - she’s cool.” Now, Lily reported that she was “seeing it all come back,” and “she [the child] just had such an attitude, but I always make her laugh.” Lily said she had tried to ask her, “Why are you doing that?” and wondered if something was going on with her at home, but the student had given her no indication of anything “going on at home.” So, when Lily saw a change in the child’s behavior, she looked for an explanation by wondering what was going on in the child’s life at home that was causing her to exhibit an “attitude” in class.

Lily was “shocked” to hear that her children were “having sex talk” at the lunch table. She didn’t know if “they’re talking about the act of sex or what it was, but one of the boys said he got grossed out by it.” Lily explained that her cooperating teacher had called the boy’s mother, and the mother had said that “he doesn’t like girls any more, and he thinks that is so nasty.” Lily was worried about having to “deal with this kind of stuff” with her future children and their families.
In our last interview, I reminded Lily that in her first interview, she had thought that Gilmer Park was a lot like the school she had attended. Lily said, “I don’t know if it is – it resembled the schools I went to except I think there’s a higher Black student population here… I see a couple of different cultures here, like one girl in my classroom is from Bosnia, and you said one girl in your class was.” She said that her own school had “a lot of African students too, like from different African countries,” and there are “small amounts of students from different countries here in comparison to what I was used to.”

These cultural disconnections seemed to be related to differences in family patterns of behavior or values that Lily had not expected. She had made the racial connections with her students based on her physical attributes. I believe she was surprised about the contradictory nature of her identity in relation to her students. As we talked about Lily’s own socio-cultural identity during the last minutes of our third interview, she shared this final important insight.

Like sometimes - like when I told you the kid said to me, “You’re not Black.” Sometimes I feel like other Black people don’t feel like I’m Black. You know what I mean? Even though I think I’d be more Black than them cause I’m directly from Africa almost. But it’s funny because I even find that with adults too, who are African American, they’ll be like… “You’re not Black.” …. They don’t see me the same as they look at themselves or someone else who might have further lineage …. Sometimes I wonder, “What do they look at me as? Are they not really able to relate to me fully?” Here [Gilmer Park] they don’t have people from my country…. This was a new thing for them, so I wonder how they took it in, and if they’re still able to say, “Oh, well, she’s still Black like me.” I still wondered if they said that to themselves.

Lily said that she thought about this disconnection when one Black child got an “attitude” with Lily sometimes. Lily wondered if the child responded that way to her because the child didn’t feel like Lily was Black. Lily said, “For some reason, I feel like she thinks I don’t know what she’s doing, or I haven’t been around Black people. I feel like she thinks I’m unaware of something that she is aware of…. I don’t know how to explain it.” “Maybe it’s just my own brain thinking that, but it is something I do wonder.”

When I asked Lily what she wished she had known before coming to Gilmer Park, she replied that she “would have liked to have known more about where these students live and all that kind of stuff.” Lily said that she had driven around the school community during the semester, since it was required by the university program director. However, Lily had just recently found out that another part of the school community was across the divided highway and she had not seen that area. In the meantime, she had heard that across the highway was “not a really good area.” So, she expressed an interest in having a better understanding of the school district and community, rather than just her impressions based on their car tour and driving into the tidy neighborhood that was adjacent to the school.

**My Student Teacher Connections**

As a “student teacher,” I was thankful that Lily talked about her cultural connections with the children, so that I could hear from her perspective how she related to the children who were unlike me (African American children). She was willing to say that she knew that her Black identity affected her relationships with the children and her relationships with her peers in the university cohort and at the school. I had wondered during the semester how my White identity affected my relationships with my children who were not White and middle-class as well as my relationships with the African American teachers in the school. Lily and I were able to talk about
our worries about relationships, and her worries confirmed my ideas about the importance of acknowledging how our socio-cultural identities affected our relationships with children.

I had not come to Gilmer Park expecting to feel connected to my students because of a common racial or cultural background, so in this regard, my preconceptions and experience was different from Lily’s. However, I too, wondered about some of the stories that the children told me. This concern is also related to Faith’s Narrative Theme: Children’s Social Knowledge and Experiences. As teachers who generally come from a middle-class or upper-middle-class background, we bring patterns of behavior and family experiences from which we derive our expectations for a person’s home life or school behavior. Lily realized that her children’s home life was different from her own, and she was surprised about this disconnection since she was Black. I might have expected disconnections between my family experiences and the children at Gilmer Park because I knew that the children were culturally and socio-economically different from me. At the same time, I was still concerned when I heard Deandra say that she wanted to have “woo woo” with the boy in our class. Tison and I were quite worried when we found a pencil drawing of a naked man in her desk with special pencil lines to accentuate a particular private body part. When Ms. Jade asked her class who knew “something about drugs” (during our drug awareness week), and I saw thirteen hands go up, out of eighteen children in the room, I worried. Paul didn’t seem to mind telling the class that he had drunk beer with his older brother when he went over to his house and watched those “girl videos.” One girl told Tison that the police had come to her house and taken her dad away and explained that the police found some of that “white stuff – you know, the stuff you use to make cakes with.” These examples represent only some of the children’s stories that I heard during the year.

Some of the children were Black and some of the children were White. I did not attempt to make comparisons across racial lines. This was not my research topic. However, I worried about the children and realized that the values I brought into the classroom might have been different than some of the families’ values in the school community. I was not alone in my worries. Ms. Jade and Mr. Johnson (both Black teachers with whom I had numerous conversations) expressed their concern about the Black community in the city. Ms. Jade was about sixty years old and said she had seen the community change and she thought the Black community was much more influenced by drugs and differences in what was considered to be acceptable or appropriate behavior. Ms. Jade said that she could watch drug deals occurring in her own neighborhood. Mr. Johnson said that in his mother’s neighborhood, he was afraid to let his daughter play in the yard alone because of the social context (drug sales). Years before, he had lived in that house and the neighborhood was safe.

Just as Lily and I had experienced cultural disconnections between ourselves and the children, these experienced teachers experienced a cultural disconnection between themselves and the children because of differences in “values” or “patterns of behavior.” In many ways, I believe these three Black teachers used their racial connections with the children to help them connect with families who might actually be quite different from their own.

My Teacher Educator Connections

I had wonderful conversations with Lily. She told me that she liked to talk and that she connected with me, so our conversations were comfortable, at least from my vantage point. She had been in my Early Literacy class the previous year, and we had already had a conversation or two after class about issues related to diversity. I was pleased when she told me that she connected with me at some level, because I certainly enjoyed getting to know her and appreciated the cultural knowledge she shared with me.
I connected with some of Lily’s questions about “teaching differently.” To me, Lily’s concept of “teaching differently” was another way to express the complex educational proposition of “culturally responsive practice.” I was in the midst of this research because I believed that culture played a role in the teaching and learning process, and I wanted to learn more about how teacher candidates learn about “teaching differently.” I had read Delpit and Heath also and had thought that I should listen to their wisdom. Therefore, when I heard Lily say that she thought that teachers needed to “teach Black children differently,” I thought that I could learn from Lily’s experiences since she identified as Black and considered children’s racial and cultural identity a factor in learning. At the same time, I could not definitively describe “teaching differently” and had hoped that during the semester Lily and I could talk about what we were learning.

At the end of the semester, Lily said that she was doing the same thing in this school as she had done in other placements, so she guessed that maybe she didn’t need to teach Black children differently after all. Then she thought that if she had really been in an inner city, then she would have needed to “teach differently.” When Lily said she thought that “teaching differently” worked when all the children were more alike, rather than more diverse from each other, I had to stop and rethink. This notion about “teaching differently” because the group was “alike” reversed my whole idea about teaching differently because of diversity or “difference.” I was also curious about how Lily did not want to use stereotypes, but used assumptions about people based on her perceptions of cultural or racial perspectives, such as “responsibility” or “hitting back.” This made me think more about how we sometimes use positive stereotypes when we try to understand culture, as in thinking that all people belong to a cultural group because they have a certain characteristic. I had worried about my own possible stereotypical assumptions about “attitude.” When I heard Lily explain the “stereotypical” assumptions about Black boys and shoes, I again wondered how to make conversations about such stereotypes possible with other student teachers since this seemed to be a common problem. How can we understand culture, without understanding a culture stereotypically, became a question in my research.

As a student teacher, I worried about my cultural disconnections. I made attempts not to judge the families like I expect of my own student teachers. This was difficult. This difficulty caused me to think like a teacher educator. I could understand and appreciate families who were living in a different socio-economic group that would have different ways of expressing concern for their children. I could understand how a family might have different standards of literacy or material possessions. I could understand how parents were working long hours and their absence from school was not an indication of their commitment to their child. However, there were some knowledge or experiences that the children had (drugs, violence, and sex, for example) that I still judged, just as Ms. J. D., Tison, and Mr. Johnson did. I did not know how to make this difference in “social knowledge” a topic to deconstruct with my future teacher candidates.

Hearing Lily’s struggle with her own cultural identity as both racially alike and culturally different from her Black children helped me see once again how I had simplified race in my own mind. I had thought all along that Lily could “connect” with her students because of her skin color, and certainly she did in many ways. Her personal socio-cultural identity and ethnicity revealed the complexity of race and culture. Her cultural disconnections also demonstrated to me how I should not simplify a fact of skin color as an assumed factor in alikeness. She had connections with her children because of her color, but there were disconnections because of her color, her ethnic identity, and her socio-cultural values.
Lily’s stories raised many questions for me as a teacher educator and as someone who wants to promote culturally responsive pedagogy as a critical factor in being a “highly qualified teacher.” The changes in Lily’s beliefs about “culturally responsive pedagogy,” which were based on her perceptions of alikeness and differences between and among the children, made me wonder more about how student teachers translate the concept of “culturally responsive pedagogy” when they are in classrooms (or when they watch a popular movie.)

When Lily said that she was doing the same things at Gilmer Park that she had done in other places, did she mean that she acted the same, while still attempting to connect the academic content to the children’s experiences and prior knowledge? Lily’s questions became my questions and directed me to think about group and individual sameness and diversity.

**My Questions**

- What does it mean to “teach differently” or what does “culturally responsive pedagogy” mean? Sub-questions to this overarching question include: Does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to teach a child differently because he or she is different? Does it mean to teach a group differently than another group because the members of the group are alike? Does believing that only one of these options is “responsive teaching” negate the possibility of the other option? Does “teaching differently” refer to a “teaching strategy” or to a teaching “relationship?”
- How can university professors talk about the role of cultural-racial-socio-economic identities in our relationships with children, parents, and other professionals? How does our identity affect content, affect how other people see us, and what we can talk about and not talk about?

Whereas Lily was Black, her children were not that much like her, according to her account at the end of the semester when she looked past many of her racial connections. She began to see the cultural disconnections caused by her ethnicity and class values. What factors in her racial characteristics made her like her children, such as when she talked about hair with her children? White middle-class teachers will teach white lower-and upper-class children. Should White middle-class teachers articulate the connections and disconnections they experience with White lower-class children in particular?

- Should we talk explicitly about the cultural connections and disconnections we have with our children and examine the standards for expectations embedded in those connections and disconnections? How do we participate in such discussions without judging “others?”
- How can universities address more concretely the ways in which we make judgments about children and families based on “otherness?”
- Most teachers will teach “other people’s children” in the future. How can university courses consider the complexity of cultural identities when preparing student teachers?

**Case Study Analysis: Susan**

**Background and Preconceptions**

Susan told me that she was raised on a farm with an outhouse for the “first few years of my life,” and then her family moved to Oakland, and then to the city adjacent to Oakland (Summerville) where she attended public schools. She said that her school experience was “pretty normal,” except that during kindergarten and third grade she had missed a lot of school because of numerous illnesses, and so her mother “ended up holding me back” one year after her
“hard year” in third grade. After this experience, Susan claimed, “I started doing excellent in school and loved it. It was really, really good.” She thought it was a “developmental thing,” and that if she had moved ahead, she would have ended up “struggling” in school.

I asked Susan to describe her own school experiences in relation to “diversity” and she replied, “Oh, nothing,” and she explained:

Susan: All of the Summerville schools were all pretty much White…It was a shock coming here and seeing the visual difference. We had maybe five Black students in our entire school…But they came from the same area, and personality-wise they were very similar to all of the other students in Summerville.

Dana: And so when you say “personality-wise,” what do you mean?

Susan: Interest and attitudes, all of that….So I didn’t have a diverse background. Everybody really was kind of alike.

When I asked Susan if she could describe her own socio-cultural identity, she related the following story. Her father had remarried, lived in another city, and she would go visit him.

And he married somebody wealthier than he was, and he moved us to this upper-class White neighborhood. It was in the middle of nowhere; it was just this neighborhood, and the kids there - I didn’t have anything in common with. They were all you know “let’s go to the mall and buy things,” which is kind of how Summerville can be considered sometimes. I didn’t want to be around it. So I guess I consider myself more, I guess basic. I don’t like fluffy, frilly things. I like small groups; I am not comfortable with very large groups. I think that has a lot to do with where I am. My small family and my small group of friends. It’s close-knit families.

Susan did not use “class” words for herself, but I believe that she is implying by her negative response to her father’s “upper-middle class” neighborhood, and her description of herself as “basic,” that she does consider herself to be either “working” or “middle-class.” She acknowledged that her father’s neighborhood was White, that her school was mostly White, and that everyone was the “same” in Summerville High, even though some of the students in that community liked to “go to the mall and buy things” as people in the “upper-class” neighborhood do.

Susan said that she decided to become a teacher after participating in a child development lab at her high school and after her sister had become a teacher. She said, “It wasn’t like teaching was always what I wanted to do. It was kind of what I was left with. I didn’t really know what else I wanted to do…then through the program [university program].” She added that she hoped that she was “good at it and liked it.”

Prior Experiences with “Diversity” and “Multicultural Settings”

When I asked Susan about her experiences with diversity in school, and she said that everyone at her high school was almost alike, she added this story about her contact with international students during her years at National University.

Everybody really was kind of alike [at her public high school]. And National University was different. You know I lived in the dorms the first three years, and the third year I actually lived in the international dorm, and that was very interesting. It was a lot of Indian and Asian. It was kind of neat….Well, they leave their doors open, and you look into their rooms, and everybody’s stuff is decorated differently, and the smells, the smells
killed me because everybody would cook in their room, and it was all of these different food smells from different places coming together. It was interesting.

Later, I asked Susan if she had had any experiences with people of diverse cultures or backgrounds. I added another statement that may have altered Susan’s answer:

Dana: Have you had any experiences with people of diverse culture or backgrounds? You are just really talking about the internationals?

Susan: Yeah. A couple of friends from other places. When I was doing the Oakland City summer school thing [her internship], I helped with a couple of students who were part Hispanic, I think. And that was interesting because I wasn’t the classroom teacher, and I was able to tutor. I learned a lot about kids from different places from that and a lot of frustration also from trying to get through to them.

Therefore, it sounded as if Susan had had minimal personal and school experiences with people who were different from herself.

Preconceptions about the School

I asked Susan why she had selected the city school for her student teaching experience. She explained that she thought she had made the request primarily because of carpooling and because she had done a paid summer internship experience, or “basically student teaching,” with Oakland City schools. “That was a wonderful experience,” she declared. It sounded as if she had a certain comfort level in coming back to the city where she had already worked. She thought that since her students were “from the city” they would have different needs, which she thought she knew something about since she had lived “around here.” I asked Susan about her expectations regarding coming to Gilmer Park and teaching in a more diverse setting. Susan responded:

Susan: I knew because it was going to be city kids, I would have to be more strict, more structured, more fun, you know. I have to grab their attention and keep it.

Dana: Why did you know that?

Susan explained that she thought that since the children in the city were “more energetic,” that she would have to be more structured and strict and fun, and she said she was wondering how she was going to get the children’s attention.

From Susan’s narrative, I heard that she had grown up in a predominantly White school system. She shared only two examples of other experiences with “diversity:” she had lived in a dorm with some people from other countries and observed their dorm rooms and cooking habits; and she had worked with some children from “different places” during her summer internship. She had come to Gilmer Park, partially because she had had “wonderful” experiences with city children during the summer internship.

Beginning Perceptions

From the beginning of the semester, Susan expressed strong feelings and beliefs about the university’s plan for placing student teachers in the city school. This statement articulates her interpretation of the university’s choice in a city placement and her initial perceptions of the children at Gilmer Park.
Susan: They [university professors] want to put us here because it’s more Black students than we are used to. I look at my students, and I think there are what - 60-70% Black students?

Dana: Actually, I just looked at the numbers yesterday. It’s 62% African American, and 29% White, 6-8% Hispanic and 2% Asian.

Susan: It’s definitely not what I am used to, but I look at the students and they don’t seem different to me from each other. They are different from other students I have been with because of the area; I feel like that is their defining cultural background. I don’t feel like they are different because they are Black and White…

I needed Susan to clarify and said, “Are you saying you don’t see your classroom of students being different from your classroom last semester?” She replied, “No, I am saying the students in my classroom.” I answered, “[You] don’t see the Black students in your class being different from the White students in your class,” and she summarized, “Yes, I look at the way they act, and there are small differences. I think the Black students are more - I want to say almost energetic, but that is it.”

Susan mentioned several other early impressions and experiences. She told me that “it was a shock coming here and seeing the visual difference. We had maybe five Black students in my school.” Susan said that Gilmer Park was visually different from her own school because of the different ratio of racial groups that she was accustomed to at her mostly White school. In another overall statement about the population at the school, Susan said that the children at Gilmer Park were “different” because “they come from this area,” but “they are all kids and have all the same basic needs. I don’t think it’s much more.”

After we talked about how she would describe the population at the school, I asked her if she had any stories to share. Susan replied:

Susan: I am shocked by their maturity with, not actual maturity, but their maturity with love.

Dana: Okay. Are you talking about sex or something else?

Susan: Well, about relationships….I remember third grade, and I actually had my first little boy friend in third grade …. It wasn’t that big of a deal, but I see these kids, and you wouldn’t believe how many notes I have already taken away from boy friends and girl friends while they are doing work.

Susan described one boy who was being followed by three girls in the hallway and who were “giving him a hard time.” Susan tried to make suggestions to him.

I was like, “Just leave and ignore them.” And he said, “I can’t ignore them because I am a lady’s man.” And he goes on and on about how much he loves the women, and how much he has to get in good with the ladies and everything … and how big a responsibility it is to have a girl friend, and how good he is to her and all of this stuff….It surprised me that it was so prevalent. They are all about - they are all into each other.”

At the beginning of the semester, Susan acknowledged that the visual difference of seeing a predominantly Black enrollment at the school was a shock to her. However, she did not see any difference in the children based on “Black or White” except for her statement about the visual
difference from what she was accustomed to and her perception that the children were “a little more energetic.”

**Narrative Themes:**

Diversity: Resistance to University Emphasis; Diversity; Difference in Interactions; Culture
Despite Race - Culture as Area; Race Doesn’t Matter; Choice; Susan’s Interests; Susan’s Insights; My Student Teacher Connections; My Teacher Educator Connections; My Questions

Member Check: I received this e-mail from Susan (8-13-05).

Well, I was able to access the paper and I finished reading it. Boy, was that a trip down memory lane. It was just a few months ago but it feels like it was years ago. I hope that I remember all of the things that I learned from that experience, so that I don’t have to relive the same mistakes this year. I think that you did very well at a very difficult job. I don’t know how you made sense out of all of your information. I think that you appropriately portrayed my opinions and experiences. Good luck with finishing it all!

(Real Name) (aka Susan)

When I asked Susan questions about her perceptions about diversity, she seemed willing to talk with me about her ideas and beliefs, even though I think she knew my ideas were different from hers. She told me at the end of the semester, “You’re very non-judgmental, and so you make it so I can tell you these things, even though I know you feel different - and not make me feel awkward.” She explained to me throughout the semester that she did not agree with the university’s emphasis on diversity; she thought that university professors were mainly talking about race, and she seemed to want to explain to me why she felt the way she did. Since she was willing to talk to me, I believe I was able to develop a more detailed analysis of her complex notions about diversity and difference.

**Diversity: Resistance to University Emphasis**

Although Susan’s discussion about the university’s emphasis on diversity is not directly related to her experiences at Gilmer Park, I preface all of my analysis of her conversations about diversity with this discussion about her negative feelings towards the university’s teachings about diversity. As I noted in Chapter 2, teacher candidates resist ideas about multicultural education; however, I thought that Susan’s resistance was worthy of analysis.

During our first interview, I asked Susan a question about her own socio-cultural identity. She answered me immediately with her negative feelings about the university emphasis on diversity. “I have a very hard time when all of the professors are talking about culture.” I felt as if this particular perspective of hers was of primary importance and that her negative viewpoint gave me some insight into her outlook on many of her subsequent conversations about diversity and her experiences at school. She summarized much of her position on “diversity” in this statement when she talked about her first impressions of the school.

It’s definitely not what I am used to, but I look at the students, and they don’t seem different to me from each other. They are different from other students I have been with because of the area; I feel like that is their defining cultural background. I don’t feel like
they are different because they are Black and White, and I have never been able to understand what the professors talk about when they said, “Oh, you need to make all of these modifications for diversity because your students are Black or culturally Asian.” I would be like, “That doesn’t make any sense to me because that is not who they are.” Their skin color doesn’t tell me anything about their personality and what they need.

This statement summarizes much of Susan’s resistance to the tenets of “culturally responsive practice.” She did not agree with the idea of teaching a child or group of children differently based on culture and this opinion would have conflicted with what university professors promoted as “culturally responsive practice” (Irvine, 2003).

Susan thought that her university professors believed that culture meant “race” and that they espoused these ideas about diversity and “culturally responsive practice” during coursework and seminars. She added later in her first interview that although she thought that professors wanted her to change her lesson plans based on “Black and White,” she didn’t think it was necessary to change the way she taught her students based on race. She thought she could change her lesson plans based on what she understood about the children’s experiences in the city and its economics, since she had lived close by in a nearby city and was familiar with the area or particular city setting. In many instances, she referred to the “area” as the primary factor in her children’s cultural identity.

Since I realized from the beginning of Susan’s interviews that she did not like to talk about diversity and disagreed with the university emphasis on diversity, I asked her in our second interview how it made her feel for me to ask her questions about that topic. As a researcher, I was concerned that she had agreed to be a participant, but might not want to continue in my study if she was beginning to realize that we would be talking about “diversity.” This is her reply when I asked her about her feelings regarding talking about diversity with me.

It’s more in our classes and stuff because this is their big thing…diversity and racial diversity. It’s all they ever want to talk about, and instead of discussing it, they try to say these are the things you are supposed to be doing. I feel like raising my hand and saying, “No, I don’t feel like I’m supposed to be doing this.”

I asked Susan if she remembered in which classes they had talked about diversity this much. She remembered one particular class (Social Studies); she said that in the social studies class there were “a whole two days that was dedicated to that.” She added that in recent seminars, “They always brought that up” [diversity]. She continued, “I feel like every time they bring it up, it makes me more resistant….which probably isn’t a good thing. I feel like I should be open to anything, and I feel like the more they keep trying to drill this into me, the more I’m saying, ‘No, I don’t want to do it. I don’t agree with it.’” Susan added that she thought they [the university professors] should “lighten up to prove their point more.” Susan told me about what she thought would be an appropriate approach to teaching in a diverse classroom. She said that she had “tried to think about it in terms of race….But all of it comes down to is that each kid is different, so I treat them according to who they are and what they need.” Susan has tried to consider race, as she believes her university professors would want her to, but this doesn’t make sense to her. In Susan’s third interview, she said that in her own future classroom, she does want to teach in a multicultural way. She explains what she means.

I feel I need to incorporate it [multicultural teaching or topics] on a daily basis just in little ways with books and examples. … I don’t think it needs to be done in these big grand extensive lessons…. just on a constant basis…. not to drown the kids in it…cause I feel like we have been - the program just bombarded us with it.
In this interview, Susan also stated that she did not like the fact that she thought that her professors expected her to aspire to reach the highest level, Level 4, of “Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum” (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1989). She perceived that her university professors thought that teachers should make “grand gestures” with multicultural education lessons, and Susan disagreed with this multicultural education approach. Susan preferred “embedding it in our daily practice.” It seemed that Susan has used her resistance to the university’s emphasis on diversity to influence how she will teach in a “multicultural way” in her own future classroom. She has translated “culturally responsive practice” in response to her negative beliefs about “grand gestures” in multicultural education and in response to her presumption that her professors had emphasized race.

In the same interview, Susan shared another important outlook that I had never heard before on why she thought that university professors emphasized diversity. She said that another student teacher (her roommate) had talked to her own university mentor and told him that she also felt like “the multicultural thing was an overkill” [in the university program]. Her roommate told the university mentor, David, that with diversity, “it just seems so obvious to all of us” [meaning that it should be obvious that teachers shouldn’t just use White people as the only example in class and that teachers should think that children are equal]. According to Susan, David told her roommate that the university students were “being taught by people from a different generation” [university professors who grew up in the 60’s and 70’s]. These teacher educators had grown up during a time when this way of thinking “was not the norm.” Susan continued and told me more about what she thought that David had said to her roommate.

It was such a large change, and everybody had to get used to it….It was a big deal in education, and our professors had to deal with it, and it’s still kind of a new thing for them because it’s happened within their lifetime. So, for us growing up, and it not being such a big deal, maybe they’re not quite so understanding of that…cause they’re still thinking, “Oh, we need to learn about this,” and we’re just thinking, “We just grew up with it.”

Susan, and at least one other student teacher in the cohort, thought that the university professors had emphasized diversity because they had grown up during the 60’s and 70’s when the Civil Rights Movement was a “big deal.” The university professors didn’t understand that their teacher candidates had grown up understanding that people are equal and so there was no need to discuss issues related to equality and race.

Susan proceeded to explain that she had been wondering if the same phenomenon would happen to her in the future. She said that during her young adult life our nation had been debating other controversial social issues. “What’s the issue right now – sexuality and religion and other things like that?” She wondered if she would want to teach her school children to be accepting about those issues twenty years from now. She added, “When we’re still trying to teach this, these kids will be like, ‘We know this already.’” She thought that perhaps her children would think that those social issues were just “a given” just as her generation now thought that racial equality was a “given.”

Diversity

When Susan discussed her experiences in the school, I also knew about this resistance to the university’s focus on diversity. I believed that these resistant views were related in some way to her resistance to acknowledge that diversity existed at Gilmer Park. In her first statement about diversity, Susan stated, “It’s definitely not what I am used to [Gilmer Park], but I look at the students, and they don’t seem different to me from each other.” First, Susan acknowledged
that the children were different from her. However, she stated the idea that the children were not
different from each other, and I became intrigued with her notions about “same” and “different.”
She repeated this theme, and variations on this theme of “same” and different,” in many
interview statements. For example:

- “I see them all the same, as in terms of the class or group of kids, but then of course,
  they’re all individually as different as the next one.”
- “You treat them all grandly the same, but then they’re all individually different.”

Once, she rejected the significance of and differences in racial group history in her use of same
and different.

I feel like in order for us all to be equal, we need to stop talking about all the differences ...
and all the ways that we are mistreated a hundred years ago and just say right from
this point on - we’re going to start saying we’re all the same. You know, we’re all as
different as the next person, but as a group, we’re the same.

Some of these statements or explanations were responses to questions that I had asked her
about her ideas of “same” and “different” because of my curiosity. Sometimes she raised the
issue of “sameness” and “difference” herself as she explained her thinking about the children.
Susan said that she based her perception of the children’s “sameness” on the fact that they grew
up in the same area. I will address more about her concept of the “culture of the area” in a later
section in this analysis. “Sameness” and “difference” is a theme in her narratives in many forms.

Diversity and difference: personality and personality-wise.

Susan said that she based her assumptions about the children’s “differences” on her belief
that personality was the most important factor in diversity. She thought children were very
different from one another, based on personality. For example, in the first interview, I asked
Susan how she would define the terms “diverse” and “multicultural,” and she replied, “By
personality more than anything else.” She saw children as “individually different,” based on their
individual personalities, and she said, “Their skin color doesn’t tell me anything about what they
need.” I wondered what she meant by “personality.” When I asked her what she meant by
“personality,” she said, “It’s just their individual needs. It’s the kids who need different things
with their academics.” She agreed that “family life” had a “great influence over the kids,” but she
knew from “personal experience” that children could make a “choice” about whether they would
follow a family’s patterns and family behavior (or not follow a family’s patterns and behaviors).
“I think it has more to do with the actual person than anything,” she explained.

Susan thought that each child was very different from any other based on their particular
individual personalities and “needs.” They can make “choices” rather than be determined by
factors such as race or community patterns. At times, Susan described examples from her
classroom experiences when she had noticed a child’s individual personality and how she had
responded to the child based on “personality” and not a racial or cultural factor.

When Susan talked about her own schooling experience, she stated that her school was
not diverse because the students at her school were similar “personality-wise.” I asked her then
what she meant by “personality-wise,” and she replied, “Interests and attitudes. All of that….So,
I didn’t have a diverse background. Everybody really was kind of alike.” She explained that
since the students at her school were all from the same area and much alike in terms of socio-
economic class and interests, they were all very alike or the same. In these two cases, it seemed
as if Susan used “personality” in two ways. In the first case, she used “personality” to explain
“individual needs” in the classroom and in the second case, when she said her school was alike
“personality-wise,” she meant that the group of students at her school had a kind of group
personality based on the community which included people who had similar surroundings, interests, and socio-economic influences. These tenets of Susan’s about her students being different as individuals based on personality, but alike as a group, appeared in all of her interviews.

Diversity: Sameness as a Group.

Some of Susan’s ideas about the children’s “sameness” and lack of diversity was connected to her notion of the “sameness” of the area or where the children lived, just as she had talked about the sameness of the students at her own high school, based on the area. She talked about the children’s or group’s “sameness” in several ways. In the first interview, she said the following:

They all have differences because they come from this area [compared to another area], so when I go somewhere else, it’s going to be different [from here], but they are all kids and have all the same basic needs.

The statements below are other examples of the way in which she used the concept of “sameness” to talk about the children.

• “The kids are all the same as each other.”
• “They’re not what I’m used to, and they’re not the same as me, but they all come from the same area.”
• “They’ve had most of the same experiences.”
• “You know they have the same basic things in their life.”

A second way that Susan considered the children to be the same was in the concept of the universality of human experience. She mentioned that “all kids…have all the same basic needs.” She referred to the concept of “universal” in another conversation when she told me that she did agree with the idea of having “more children’s books that have Black children” [Black characters] … “purely so that it’s more equal.” She knew that most books typically have “White people” in them, but she said that “if you can look past the pictures…what they’re talking about is pretty universal.” It was during this interview that she said, “We’re all the same, and I don’t feel that there needs to be all this distinguished stuff.” Even when she said, “We’re all as different as the next person, but as a group, you know, we’re the same,” she was affirming the concept of common human experiences (sameness) rather than differences.

In the third interview, Susan explained that she had not come into the city school experience with bad preconceptions about differences in children’s abilities based on race. She said, “I felt like I viewed them on even ground.” This belief that the children had that same ability was another factor in the children’s “sameness.” However, she added that she knew that there might be teachers who thought that there were differences between groups based on factors like race and gender.

Sometimes Susan would acknowledge that some Black children were alike in specific ways. She said that she noticed that some Black children responded differently verbally to her than other children had responded. I will address the idea of “diversity” or “sameness” in interaction styles in the section titled, “Differences in Interactions.”

Diversity: Acknowledgment of racial sameness and difference.

Susan had said that she did not see differences between her students based on race. I asked her again, “so you don’t see the Black students in your class being different from the White students?” She responded first by saying, “Yes.” She thought they were the same. When she elaborated on this answer, she talked about differences. “I look at the way they act, and there
are small differences. I think the Black students are more - I want to say - energetic, but that is it.” In this way, she acknowledged a “small difference” in how she viewed the children, based on “Black and White.” If we think of Becker’s (1998) assertion that we use words in relation to other words, then we could assume that she might use “more energetic” in relation to what not-Black students might be, “less-energetic” or “somewhat energetic” perhaps.

Visual difference was another racial group difference that Susan acknowledged in the first and third interviews. She said that at Gilmer Park, “Looking around, you notice the Black and White much more…when you’re not used to seeing it.” She said that she noticed the visual difference less, now that “I know them,” but she thought that when she goes into a new setting in the future, she thinks she will notice it less because of her experiences at Gilmer Park. These statements demonstrate that she saw the group differences (Black and White) in appearance. These were two ways that she acknowledged differences in two racial groups; she revealed some broader assumptions about racial group differences in interaction style and behavior.

**Differences in Interactions**

Susan talked about differences in interaction style in these two ways: the teachers’ interactions and the children’s interactions and behaviors. I discuss these separately.

**Differences in teachers’ verbal interactions.**

Susan first mentioned differences in teacher interactions when she said, “I knew because I was going to be in the city, that I would have to be more strict, more structured, more fun, you know; I have to grab their attention and keep it.” She anticipated that she might need to change both her teaching style and the way in which she communicated with the students because they lived in the city. At the end of the semester, she talked about how she was “getting used to interacting with these kids differently than what I grew up with or was used to.” Therefore, I heard her saying that she was aware that she was altering how she talked and responded to the children.

In her third interview, she told me that she had really enjoyed watching Tison’s interaction style with the children. She thought that Tison’s interaction style reflected her Black identity. She also compared the difference between Black and White teachers’ reactions to their children and the children’s responses.

Seeing Tison…and just being around so many Black teachers, cause I didn’t have very many in school. …It’s interesting to see the different way that Black teachers and White teachers react towards their students, and how the students act towards the teachers….But even Ms. J. D…[Black female] She’s very soft spoken and everything, yet she has a certain air about her.

In another example, Susan continues this observation about differences in teacher interaction style and children’s responses.

But Ms. Butler [Tison] especially - the innovation and the attitude and all of that - I couldn’t talk like that if I tried. [Susan is smiling while she talks here on the tape]. It’s really interesting to see how that happens in the classroom and how the kids respond to her, and there were times yesterday [Susan had observed in Tison’s classroom yesterday] where I was kind of shocked by her level of - the tone of voice she used - just the intensity of it, but it really helps in the classroom …. It shows me some things about myself, my own personality. I don’t really have that. I should probably try to get [it].

I asked Susan for an example of what she wanted to “try to get,” and she told me she was interested in the sarcasm that a specific White female teacher used with the children, and that “sarcasm really works well on the kids.” Susan said that the White female’s style reminded her
of Tison’s style, except for their “level” or “volume.” She said, “You can be sweet and kind and calm with the kids, or you can yell at ‘em and be mean, but there’s this middle ground. You can show that you’re frustrated, but not scare them.” She thought that at this age, the children could “get the jokes and the sarcasm,” and this style was definitely something she wanted to try. Since Susan perceived this interaction style (“jokes and sarcasm”) as being successful, she wanted to incorporate this style into her teaching repertoire.

*Differences in children’s verbal interactions.*

Susan noticed how the children interacted differently between each other and the teachers. She also noticed differences between how the children interacted differently based on “Black and White.” I had asked her to “Tell me a story about something that’s happened in the classroom” that she didn’t think “would have happened in a school that was not multicultural.”

Susan: I think about some of the interactions I’ve had with some of the kids, like Lamarr…. These kids - Black kids and White kids - there are going to be some obvious differences - and White kids will never act a certain way or speak a certain way, and it’s definitely interesting…. So, like some of the responses that you get from these kids - the outrageous shocks and the way that they speak to you.

Dana: When you say “outrageous,” give me an example.

Susan: Oh, my gosh, like telling Lamarr to stop talking, and he yells back at you in this shocked and offended voice, “I wasn’t talking!” [loud voice] - I’ve never in my life known a White boy to speak that way - in that kind of - and argue back with you - not like that - not in the offended kind of - “You’ve just accused me of doing something that’s just horrible”… and

Dana: In other words he’s defending himself?

Susan: He’s defending himself at a level that I would not expect - the accusation of just talking out in class…You know he was like, “You stole my car” kind of thing. [Susan thought that his response was at a level as if Susan had wrongly accused him of stealing a car] …which is something I feel like he needs to work on (chuckle)…cause most of the time he is doing what he’s been accused of doing. He just has a problem with automatically saying, “I didn’t do it”…. So just getting used to interacting with these kids in a different way other than what I grew up with and was used to.

Dana: Okay, so interacting differently.

Susan: And I can’t respond to their personalities in the same way I would respond to someone like Charlene (White girl).

Dana: Yeah. How do you think you learned how to respond differently?

Susan: Well, I think it’s one of those - I’m not responding based on Black or White or boy or girl, but just on an individual child level, but - so you have to think of that first…. you know, because I made so many mistakes in the beginning with responding to them incorrectly cause I didn’t know their personalities.

Susan first described Lamarr’s interaction style as related to being Black, but then she correlated a difference in interaction style to personality; personality had been her original premise for individual difference, which she thought had nothing to do with race.
Susan continued and said that the children were “grandly the same, but then they’re all individually different.” She and I talked about how she wanted to get to know her children’s personalities more quickly in her future classroom than she had this semester. I wanted to return to her ideas about how Lamarr spoke differently than a White child (Charlene, for example) so as to find out more about how she explained that racial groups were different in their interaction styles from other racial groups, and how she thought they were possibly the same in interaction style within a racial group. At first, I acknowledged to her that I realized that she did not see the children’s interactions as being “different” based on race or “Black” and White.” Then I told Susan that I had noticed that Lamarr did respond “differently” because of his cultural way of expressing himself. Susan responded:

Susan: Yes, there is that.
Dana: So there’s that piece - all those differences at least I think -
Susan: Yes, oh yes. I don’t feel like it makes them - makes who they are different necessarily… but yeah, there’s definitely the whole way of speaking and the way of carrying themselves …

Susan has said that Lamarr interacts with her in a particular way, and has said that the way he interacted was different than how a White child would talk to her; however, Susan insists that “the whole way of speaking and the way of carrying themselves” does not makes a child “different.” After she discusses how this “different” interaction style does not make Lamarr “different” she expresses curiosity about what might cause Lamarr’s interaction style.

But I really wonder what that comes from since … kids who kind of act that way - Black kids who act a lot more suburban should I say [Here Susan is referring to her experiences with Black people at her high school who do not use a Black interaction style and talk more “suburban” or “White”] … I refuse to believe that it’s solely based on race. But I wonder; it seems like a family thing. It’s just the way you grow with your family and what you’re used to. So I don’t think it’s solely race, and I don’t think it’s solely economic status. I think both of those have a lot to do with it. It has to be something else. It can’t just be those two.

Susan thinks that since some Black “kids” do not use a Black interaction style, then a Black interaction style is not based on or caused by race (or what I presume she means: “skin color”). Susan did not think that a Black interaction style made Black children different from other children. Black people’s interaction style must be based on other things. Again, Susan has proven to herself that if race or skin color did not cause interaction style, then race was not significant in understanding interactions; and since the way that Lamarr speaks isn’t caused by race, race can’t be a factor in cultural differences. I thought that Susan believed that some people did think that a Black interaction style was based on race or skin color, since she said, “I refuse to believe it’s based solely on race.” In other words she was refusing to believe a tenet that other people believed. I began to consider if her resistance to fully acknowledge a Black interaction style (as an expression of a “Black” identity and “different”) was connected to what I call her “resistance to the significance of racial identity.” I will discuss this resistance in a later section.

At the end of the semester, Susan had an epiphany when she observed other third grade teachers’ classrooms. This observation experience provided Susan with another insight about another factor that influenced children’s interactions in the classroom. She believed that this observation experience had changed her entire perspective about teaching. Susan had been
worried because during the semester she had gone home at night and thought that she “wasn’t having any fun” at school. She had not told me about these feelings, and so I was surprised. Susan said that she realized when she observed these other teachers that she had a “problem.” Susan’s answer to fixing this “problem” was to be more responsive to the children, as these other teachers had demonstrated for her. Susan thought that she had spent the semester worrying about the academic content, monitoring the children’s behavior, and worrying about her cooperating teacher’s and university professor’s judgment of her.

For example, Susan had thought that she couldn’t have “discussions” with her children because “they don’t behave well enough for that.” However, when Susan saw the children in other classrooms, she realized that they could have discussions, “just in the right environment.” Susan saw that the children’s behavior changed based on the classroom environment that was established by the individual teacher. Susan said that she thought that she needed “really good examples — I need continuous examples” of good teaching. She said that she hoped to be able to “take time on a regular basis” during her first year of teaching to “watch people that I know are good just to get constantly inspired and not in my own routine.” Susan said that she was so excited by this epiphany that she didn’t “want the summer;” she wanted “to start” her first year of teaching right away so that she wouldn’t “lose [her] ideas.” At the end of the semester, Susan was continuing to learn about how teachers’ and children’s interactions influenced one another.

Differences in children’s behavior.

Susan described her view of the differences between some Black children’s behavior and some White children’s behavior during our discussion about Lamarr’s interaction style. I think it is unlikely that a person could or should entirely separate “interactions” from “behavior,” but I have separated these two ideas and used “interactions” mostly as talk, verbal responses, and non-verbal interactions. I use “behavior” to represent mostly actions and non-verbal interactions. The line between the two concepts is not drawn clearly because the two constructs are closely related.

As noted, Susan had described Lamarr’s interaction style to be different from a White child’s style of interaction. I responded to Susan’s description by talking about how, although we may see that some Black children speak in one way and some White children speak in a different way, I agreed with some of her perceptions. It “doesn’t mean that all African American families speak like that, or White families speak in other ways…” I told her about an encounter that I had had with a White mother who had spoken to her daughter in what I considered to be a non-stereotypical fashion, not White and middle-class. The mother had talked in front of the nine year-old about whether she would be getting pregnant while she was in high school. Her tone of voice, volume, phrasing, word choice, and sarcastic tone were manners of speech I would not have heard from any of my White middle-class friends. (The third grader stood there grinning.) Susan and I continued our dialogue about stereotypical and cultural assumptions about people’s interactions and behavior.

Susan: It’s funny though, ‘cause I think if you define you know – White actions as calm and Black actions as being - you know the more heated, then you look at these kids, and you know there are the two groups. But I think there are more of the Black kids who act White, than the White kids who act Black…which is interesting.

Dana: What makes you notice that, or what did you notice that makes you think that?

Susan: I’m actually thinking of - when I say that - there’s a spectrum of reactions….It seems stereotypically that there’s the White on the calm side and the Black on the
other side, and that in between there’s more Black children over towards the calmer side - knows how to act appropriate - than White children over on the acts outrageously [side]. I don’t think that’s race though. I think that - in this kind of situation, I think that’s more socio-economic issues. I hate to think of it this way, but it’s the suburban thing. It’s the - you go to college - this is the way you act appropriately - it’s all of that you know - you work hard - you go up the ladder - things you’re supposed to do in life - you’re not accepting minimum wage kind of a thing. I think that almost goes along with the actions and the way that you - . The social appropriateness, I guess is most of it - to be more calm and socially appropriate. But there are more in this school from what I’ve seen - more Black children with socially inappropriate than White children….and of course I find more boys than girls.

When I came home from school the day of this interview, I received this e-mail from Susan. She had sent it to me when she had arrived home that same day. The participants were not all carpooling, and Susan had been alone in her car.

As I was driving home, I realized something about one of the things that I said during our talk. I realized that when I was talking about the kids acting or not acting socially appropriately, that I was basing that definition of social appropriateness on my experiences and expectations as a middle-class member of the professional world. It really shocked me that I was so completely oblivious to the fact that other groups have other definitions and boundaries to social appropriateness when I was making that comment. Oh well, I just wanted to let you know that I did realize that if you had recognized it while I was talking. It was one of those “smack myself in the head” kind of realizations (email 4-20-05).

I assume from this e-mail that Susan was continuing to wrestle with her ideas about “same” and “different” in the context of understanding “socially appropriate” behavior and the cultural assumptions we can make about people based on their group or individual identities. It appeared that she had re-heard herself talking about “socially appropriate” while she reflected on our conversation during her car ride home. During this reflective time, she considered how her ideas for “socially appropriate” might not be the only models for appropriate. This e-mail and insight surprised me, especially since Susan had discussed at length her feelings about some of her children’s behavior in school during one of the group interviews and had made judgments about the children’s values based on their behaviors, as described in “Homework and Behavior.” The contents of her e-mail made me wonder about the power of talk in helping us hear and “see” what we are saying.

A second theme in Susan’s concerns about the children’s behavior was related to their behavior towards and participation in schoolwork or interest in education. Susan described “Green Group” as she talked about her frustrations with them. The third grade teachers had grouped their eighty students into five “ability” group homerooms, according to their score on a developmental word study assessment (Ganske, 2000). Each group would move from teacher to teacher five times a day for Reading, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Purple Group had the highest average score, Red Group had the second highest average, Yellow Group’s average score was in the “middle,” Green Group was next to last, and Blue Group had the lowest average word study assessment score. (Blue Group also included all of the children who were ELL students.) All of the teachers worried about Green Group because of the group’s
interactions and behaviors. Some of their personalities were often in conflict with one another; friends would become enemies at a mere glance in the hallway. Many of the children had difficulty giving attention to lessons and bringing back the homework papers. Some of them would get “attitudes” and not obey their teachers’ instructions. The teachers would sometimes express that they “dreaded” when Green Group would come into their rooms for their period of instruction.

Therefore, Susan was not alone in her remarks about Green Group. She said that they were “just disrespectful and disruptive…They make it hard for each other to learn…. How do we make this group more attentive and better learners?” She thought that this behavior was another indication that education didn’t matter to the children in this group. In this case, she is not noticing differences in behavior based on “Black” or “White,” but I suggest that she is describing this behavior as being different from her own school behavior or different from what she and others think is appropriate school behavior.

Since Susan had expressed strong feelings about her perceptions regarding the family’s value of education in the first group interview (as discussed in “Homework and Behavior”). I raised this issue during our individual conversation to see if Susan could tell me more about this concern of hers. I said to her, “I thought what you said last week, too, was so good - that one of the things you were struggling with was your ideas about education and struggling with that here at Gilmer Park. I don’t know if that’s because this is a multicultural school or what but –

Susan: I’m not sure if it’s the age of – how things have gotten in society, or if it’s this particular area.
Dana: Well, did you find it to be true last semester where you were?
Susan: Last semester … the kids were much more willing to do the work. They didn’t complain. It was okay to [Unclear word on the tape], but they didn’t care about education any more - than these kids I think, but I think they came from houses where you do what you’re told. You do your work. This is your responsibility. A lot of them actually lived on farms. A lot of them came in late because they had to go milk the cows.

She added that the children at the rural school “didn’t care about education any more” than the students at Gilmer Park, but she thought that families encouraged the rural students to “do your best because it will be helpful to you later on.” Since Susan thought that these parents told the children at the rural school to “do your best,” it sounded as if Susan thought these children had a more similar attitude towards school to her own attitude towards school.

Culture Despite Race; Culture as Area

Susan expressed her belief that a person’s “culture” was not affected by race. Correlated to this belief was her idea that a person’s “culture” was defined by the area in which one lived.

Culture despite race.

I realized from Susan’s talk that she considered race to mean primarily skin color. because she said that “skin color doesn’t tell me anything about personality; it is not who they are,” for example. However, we had one discussion that gave me a clearer picture of what she meant. From this conversation, I realized that Susan did not think that race or skin color determined or caused “culture.” Susan and I were waiting for Cameron, Faith, and Lily to come to our second group interview. Susan had brought three examples of children’s work to show me. She pulled out three children’s worksheets on the topic of “Home Culture” that Susan had
designed for a lesson on culture for her third grade social studies lesson. The worksheets belonged to Isom (Black male), Jared (Black male), and Sina (Black female). Isom and Jared had grown up in the United States; Sina had recently immigrated to the city from Africa. Susan wanted to show me how the differences in their work samples were “perfect little examples of culture despite race.” Susan said that the work samples “showed incredibly different cultures - they showed distinct culture, but they’re all Black kids.” The children’s responses about their “home culture” was a way for Susan to show me that race didn’t determine a child’s culture.

I looked at the work samples. (see Appendices N, O, and P for the children’s work samples.) Sina had written examples of her home culture from Africa. She listed a family wedding as an example of a holiday or festival and wrote, “My dad paid two cows for my uncle’s wife.” Sina had explained to Susan that cows at a wedding were related to their cultural traditions for weddings. Susan said, “I think it’s a wonderful example of diversity right there from what we are used to.” In contrast, Isom and Jared had given “typical responses”… “You know - I go to church; we eat - it’s holidays - it’s all of that.” Susan said that she “got a kick out of Jared’s response because it was so “Americanized.” “It is ‘we go to Walmart.’ ‘Education is important.’ … If you think about American culture – this is what you think about.”

All three of the children were Black, but they did not describe the same culture for “Home Culture” on their worksheets. Susan was showing me that she could not assume that all Black people would have the same culture or traditions, and therefore she could not use race or skin color as a way to understand a child’s culture. But in rejecting the idea that all people, or some people, who have the same “skin color” have a similar cultural factor, she rejects the significance of skin color or race altogether. This is what she means by “culture despite race.” These children have a culture, but it is not determined by race, so race doesn’t matter.

Culture as area.

Susan’s correlated assumption was her understanding that one’s culture is defined by the “area” or the places in which people have common community experiences. She claimed that the children at Gilmer Park were alike as a group because of the area, and that this area made the children different from other children. “They all have differences because they come from this area [this city area], so when I go somewhere else it’s going to be different [from here].” Susan also compared the children at Gilmer Park to her children in her rural school fall placement.

And here the kids come from a different area, which really is different. I mean you notice in the county, the kids come in late because they had to milk the cows. And here you know they come in late because they can’t get a ride to school. Since area does determine culture, then this is another of Susan’s proofs that race is not a factor for her in considering matters of “diversity.”

Susan had also considered the area or place of the city as she developed preconceptions about the community’s culture, as each of my participants had done. “I knew because it was going to be city kids, I would have to be more strict, more structured, more fun, you know. I’d have to grab their attention and keep it.” She had expected the children in the city to be more “energetic” than “kids from a non-city setting.” Therefore, area also affected her ideas of “teaching differently” or culturally responsive practice.

In Susan’s third interview, she elaborated on her belief that the area defined the children’s culture.

They’re not what I’m used to, and they’re not the same as me, but they all come from the same area – regardless of Black and White – I think they’ve had most of the same experiences with the small city. Their parents probably have similar jobs or at least in a
similar range as each other. They’re used to the same surroundings. They have the same basic things in their life.

Then she explained that she thought race was only one “level of diversity,” and that having “more than just one kind” or “four or five different kinds of diversity” in a group of people or classroom would be “truly diverse.” “What do you mean, ‘more than one kind?’” I asked her. She replied:

Oh, economic, racial, city, and rural together in a place, lots of different family structures. I feel like a lot of these [families] are either working parents, two working parents or single mothers. It seems to be one or the other, but ones with lots of different kinds – whatever else you can think of – also mixed with people from … different countries.

It surprised me that she did not consider Gilmer Park to be “truly diverse” because I thought that her description of “truly diverse” fit the population of Gilmer Park in many ways. Gilmer Park had many different family structures, different “races.” There are children from different countries and who speak different languages, and although there is not a great range in the families’ socio-economic class, there were families who belonged to a range of “class” from lower - to middle-class, and some parents had professional jobs. The biggest difference between Susan’s concept of “truly diverse” and Gilmer Park seemed to be the “rural - urban” contrast and the fact that there were few or no “upper-class” families in the school, to my knowledge. There was no real “rural” influence at Gilmer Park; the school and its children were in the “city” and had common “city” experiences. So, from Susan’s vantage point, Gilmer Park couldn’t be “truly diverse” because everyone was from the city.

Susan said that she wasn’t sure that “truly diverse” “even exists out there; typically people are grouped according to at least some kind of similarity.” It sounded as if, according to Susan’s perception of diverse, a “truly diverse” setting might not even exist in the first place.

Susan finally added that perhaps her university town might be the most diverse of all because in that school system, the population included “rural, town kids, and professor’s kids,” and then “you have a little bit of race thrown in there, and not a whole lot.” There were people “coming to study who might come from other countries.” She explained that in the university town, “it’s not as obvious as this [meaning racial or visual difference as in Gilmer Park], but I think it [university town] has more kinds of diversity.” Subsequently, it seemed here that once again, in order for a school to be “truly diverse,” the children would need to come from at least two different areas, city (urban or town) and rural.

Race Doesn’t Matter: Resistance to Racial-Group Identity and Significance

Susan was resistant to acknowledging that people were different based on racial identity, as her stories have already demonstrated. She said this about her own White identity, and she said this about people different from her. If people were not different based on race, then racial identity did not have significance. Although this analytical idea is inferred in previous sections, I need to analyze her resistance to racial identity further.

Resistence to racial identity: Susan’s White identity doesn’t matter.

With regard to her own identity, Susan said that she did not identify herself as White. She made this claim in several conversations. She told me about reading a commonly assigned article on White privilege (McIntosh, 1992), in her university class.

And I read through that and a lot of the girls in there [in the university class] - it made them feel guilty - and they made me mad [the other girls who felt guilty]. I’m thinking, “Yeah, I have these things, but I don’t feel guilty that I have them. I feel pissed off that other people don’t, or that they have these assumptions made about them and that things
are just easier.” It definitely made me more aware, but it made me more angry about other people than guilty about myself, which I think was kind of the point.

She did not want to assume that her Whiteness was related to having “these things.” Susan knew that the author had compared the issue of White privilege to the “whole male-female thing,” but she said that she didn’t “understand why that’s an issue…. Why is that even an issue? Why are people even talking about it?… It should be a standard. Why is the world like this? Why do we still have these issues?” Susan said that it should be “standard” that people get paid equally. She repeatedly told me that she thought issues like this (racial and gender equality) should be settled by now.

When I asked Susan in her third interview what she had learned about her own socio-cultural identity while working at Gilmer Park, she responded with comments like, “I still don’t feel like I have one.” “I just don’t feel like I identify with many of these groups.” “I see myself more as an individual.” “I see myself as just a person walking around like everybody else, and although I’m White and a number of other things, I don’t feel a pull.” “I don’t feel a social responsibility to any of it.” “I don’t feel like it defines my life or me.” She went on to say that while she identified as female, she didn’t feel like she identified female because of “pride,” and she said she thought that “social identity” was connected to “feeling proud” of or belonging to a group.

Susan’s ideas about the power of socio-economic class also negated any feelings of racial-group identity. She thought that “more than anything else,” her socio-economic identity as a professional, middle-class person would define her life. She believed that a person’s life “kind of revolves around that [socio-economic level].” She compared socio-economic class to race and said that with race, “people can treat you differently here and there. It might be an issue; it might not.” She added that one’s socio-economic standing affects “where you buy a house - it’s the job you have - it’s the family, so it’s, I think more a part of your life than most things.”

Susan expressed her resistance to racial-group identity again when she responded in anger to Cameron’s worries about teaching her African American children about segregation, as described in my analysis of Cameron’s talk about diversity. Cameron said that when she “looked into [her] children’s faces,” she felt differently about teaching the content and felt differently about herself as a White person. Cameron felt guilty that some of her ancestors “did this” to her children’s ancestors. Susan felt differently than Cameron; she told the three others in the car that she did not understand or agree at all with why White people today should feel guilty about something that had happened so long ago. She said that it made her angry. (Again, she thought this should be settled already.) In Susan’s second individual interview, I asked her if she could tell me more about their “Car Talk.” She said, “It really made me mad,” and I asked her if she was willing to talk about the conversation. Susan replied:

Yeah, it’s fine. It’s just you know, I’m sure you heard my part of it [meaning her talk on the tape of the “Car Talk”]. It’s just - I don’t understand why people associate those issues with people today. It’s the whole guilt thing transferring, and I don’t feel that that’s necessary on either side. It’s the people that do act like that today. It’s not about being White or Black. There are racist Black people, too, and it’s just a large group of stupid people in general [she meant all racists are stupid]… and I see people being overly sensitive just because of being ashamed or guilty or just because they’re a certain color, and other people did things. I feel like there’s no reason for you to feel bad about that…you didn’t do it. You’re not doing it now. You’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing.
We talked about Susan’s feelings (anger) and Cameron’s feelings (guilt) and I tried to point out that both of their feelings must be authentic responses. I wondered why Susan felt angry. She told me that she didn’t think that this “guilt” seemed to “happen with any other [group].” She referenced people from Germany whom she knew who didn’t feel guilty. I asked her why she thought some White people felt guilty about slavery. Susan answered:

I guess because race is more obvious?...It’s the thing that stands out, and I feel like there’s way too much tension with that. I wish everybody would stop talking about race. I wish it would just come down to everybody’s a person. We’re all the same, and I don’t feel that there needs to be all this distinguished stuff...I feel like in order for us to be equal, we need to stop talking about all the differences....all the ways that we are mistreated a hundred years ago, and just say right from this point on we’re going to start... saying we’re all the same. You know we’re all as different as the next person, but as a group you know we’re the same.

In one of these sentences, Susan seems to be saying that Black people may be emphasizing something that happened a hundred years ago, and she doesn’t understand why Black people would think an historical event would be significant still today.

**Resistance to racial identity based on her equal treatment of others.**

Susan also resisted the significance of racial identity when she discussed how she treated her children differently based on race as discussed earlier.

But I look at each one of them in terms of who they are [her students]. I think about, and I have tried to think about it in terms of race. Do I treat these kids differently? But all of it comes down to is that each kid is different, so I treat them according to who they are and what they need. When it comes down to it, race never - never is a part of it.

In this example, if Susan didn’t treat the children differently or didn’t need to treat the children differently based on race, then racial identity didn’t matter.

**Resistance to racial identity: race doesn’t matter to the children.**

Just as Susan had shown me the three Black students’ work as proof of her ideas that race didn’t matter, she told me in her final interview that she had further proof. She said that her experiences at Gilmer Park had totally confirmed her ideas that race didn’t matter because it didn’t matter to her children.

I think the kids have definitely solidified my view that in an environment like this, where there’s almost an even population of Black and White, even more - so Black than White, kids just don’t care. They don’t see each other as different, and they definitely don’t respond to each other differently because of that fact.

Susan thought that since the children didn’t “care” about race, since the children did not see “each other as different,” and since they didn’t “respond to each other differently,” then racial identity did not matter. According to Susan, the children’s reaction to each other seemed to be somewhat related to the close to equal proportion of children by Black and White in the school.

Since Susan was describing “empirical evidence” for her conclusions, I tried in this interview to say to her that I had come to different conclusions based on my own experiences that year. My observations supported my preconceptions that racial identity did matter, or I believed that my experiences had confirmed what I had believed. I used the example of how I had heard children calling each other racial names. I explained:

It’s funny. I’ve had experiences where the kids have called each other bad names based on their race, so I’ve seen them maybe confirm more about what I thought - that there
was some conflict...cause maybe they did see each other differently - not always
certainly - you don’t think that race is always a factor, but you know some of the stories I
told about the children calling each other “White this” or “Black this” or whatever, made
me think that it did [race did matter] ... that they did notice, and that it did matter.
Susan replied with more evidence to support her theory that the children didn’t care about
race and that she thought that teachers misinterpreted children’s talk. She told me that another
teacher (White female) had told her about an incident earlier in the year when a White boy had
told a Black girl, when he was angry with her, that he was going to “slap the Black off” of her. (I
was familiar with this story because this conflict had occurred in my classroom when I was
assisting these two students. I had thought this was a racial slur at the time. Tison had intervened
and helped me resolve the conflict.)

Susan went on to say that she had heard from the White teacher that a teacher (who
happened to be me) had misinterpreted this statement. The White teacher told Susan that the
White boy had only said this because he had heard the phrase “slap the Black off” of someone
from a comedian on TV. Susan also thought that when children made statements like this it was
“very, very childlike,” and “a very innocent kind of thing.” It was her belief that teachers used an
“adult-world” perception and thus misconstrued children’s talk.

Susan’s version of the story matched my actual experience with the event. Tison had
spoken to the White boy about being overly angry and unfair, but she did not chastise him about
the “slap the Black off” of you comment because she thought the child was copying a
comedian’s well-known sound byte. However, I disagreed with Susan’s interpretation of the
story. Even if the White boy’s comment was a repetition of a comedian’s sound-byte and a very
“innocent” remark, I still couldn’t use this example to say that race didn’t matter. Susan did. I
thought that even if the children simply named each other by race (Black or White), hurtful or
not, it meant that children noticed.

Susan was telling me that she thought that teachers or people in general (or I) might
misinterpret what children do to fit what they believe (that race matters), when she was using her
observation of children’s innocence to demonstrate that race didn’t matter to them, and thus
didn’t matter at all. I continued to believe that the simple fact that the children named each other
by their “color” meant that race mattered to them in some way.

Since Susan did not perceive any racial conflict between the children at Gilmer Park, then
this was another proof to her that racial identity didn’t matter. She said that she had expected that
teaching in the city “might come with a few challenges like people not being so nice to each
other” and “in the outside world there seem to be so many problems with race, and people
feeling certain ways.” She claimed, “And here [Gilmer Park] it feels to me they’re so much more
accepting of each other...and I think they’ll grow up to be better because of it.” Susan said that
in her own high school, where there were possibly only four Black students, race was an issue
sometimes, and race was obvious there because of the difference in numbers. She said that at
Gilmer Park, race is “such a normal part of their lives”...“it’s perfectly normal to them, and I
thought that before hand, but they definitely showed that to be true.” Susan’s assertion is that
race is not significant if it is normal and we get along.

Resistance to racial identity: resistance to group reactions and pride.

At one point in our third interview, I attempted to explain my understanding of the
significance of racial identity, based on my experiences in the school and what I had learned
from Tison. I told Susan that I had realized that we are all seen as racial people, whether we are
seen positively or negatively in that way. I told her that Tison and Lamarr are both seen as Black
people, and that fact alone is a significant piece of their individual identity. I explained that I knew that racial identity or “skin color” was not the only factor in who a person was, that we all have multiple cultural influences, but that “racial identity does affect who we are.” Susan replied:

Well, when people talk about that in some of the classes that we’ve had … these are only Black people that are like this – White people don’t really talk about that, and they don’t really talk about it so much as Black people do. But the Black people talking about the racial identity is so much based just on that. I can’t understand it…I cannot relate to that just because – not only that I haven’t had it, but I look at that, and I think - I don’t understand it. I don’t see why it is the way it is. Yeah, I see that you know they’re looked at as a Black person. I see that some people are stupid and make decisions based on that, but the reaction of the racial identity…I don’t get it.

Our conversation evolved into a discussion about how Susan did not think she would want to have “such an identity with my race.” She said that she noticed that “Black people and people from other groups” segregate themselves and say that they’re part of “this group” and are proud of that. She said that she wondered if it wouldn’t be “more beneficial to not have that,” and she explained that she thought it might be better to have a world where people didn’t think they had to belong to a group.

What’s wrong, I’m wondering. What’s wrong with being the large pot - not the melting pot even - acknowledging the fact that every single person is completely different from every other person. It’s like that’s not good enough…. I guess it comes from - you want to be different, but you want to be the same [both italics added]. You want to feel like you have connections with other people and similarities. And so maybe … why we group ourselves is because we want to be different from the majority, but not so different that we’re all alone in the world.

Once again, Susan returned to the constructs of “same” and “different” in explaining how people were related to others.

Susan’s Interests

Despite the fact that Susan was certain that the children at Gilmer Park were the same, that she didn’t think teachers should treat children differently, and that racial identity didn’t matter, I heard questions in her comments.

Questions about the significance of racial identity.

Once, Susan was talking about Christopher (immigrant from Liberia) and was describing how he was developing behaviors that weren’t appropriate for school. She said that she realized, “I actually have no idea what their home lives are like and what they experience out in the world. So, it’s very possible that even though I don’t consider that a factor [race], it’s a big influence in their life.” She even remembered that “the girls in our program that are Black [the three students in the university cohort] feel very strongly about that - that it has made a big impact on their lives, and so they feel like it should be more a part in the classroom.” Finally she added, “And I do wish I could know more about that.”

This was the one time that Susan said that she needed to know more before she made a final judgment about how one’s cultural identity affected one’s experiences and perspective. She also realized that she needed to know more from Christopher’s and her Black friends’ perspectives. I believe the personal connection she had made with Christopher’s life and the Black girls’ stories helped her “see” that she had not developed her beliefs based on the “other” people’s lives. I had continually heard her say that race didn’t matter, according to her
experiences. But in this statement, I heard her admit that if she “could know more,” she might have another viewpoint.

*Questions about and interest in children from other countries.*

When I asked Susan if she could describe what she now understood about “the population of the community … here at Gilmer Park…. I think you have different things that you’ve learned about the community and the children and families,” she answered:

About sixty percent African Americans, amongst other things. There’s a lot - I realize there’s a lot more immigrants. It’s confusing me because I’m not quite sure who’s staying and who’s just here for a short period of time. [Susan is talking about whether the immigrant child was planning to return to his or her homeland or not.] I’ve heard different stories from several of the kids … That’s about the only big surprise. I was actually out on the playground today, and I was looking around, and I started counting the kids that were from other places…. Like the Sinas [girl from Africa] of the group who have been here for a couple of years and can really blend in so well, but you really wouldn’t think about it, but it does make a big difference with her experiences. Santos and Ramon - it’s interesting. I really like that part of it. I find that very fascinating.

I connected this with her conversations about Christopher and the children who were learning English (ELL) in previous interviews and realized that Susan was interested in the language and ethnic issues in teaching “other people’s children.” When I heard Susan say that she really “liked that part” of the school setting, I asked her if there was anything that she hadn’t “liked,” and she referred to a story she had told us in a group interview about Sotha, a girl from Cambodia. Sotha had told Susan about how afraid she was at night because she had heard gunshots in her neighborhood in the city. During this final interview, Susan explained that Sotha’s story was something that Susan didn’t “like.”

The pulling on the heart strings - when I hear the stories from Sotha about the areas that some of these kids live in [in this city]. I know it’s there, so I don’t like it, and - maybe it’s a selfish thing. I don’t like it in terms of the fact that I have to know about it …. I don’t want to think of these kids that I’ve come to love and bond with in these areas that are not good for them. I don’t think I would not be in this area because of that - cause most of them would be here regardless. They need all the people they can get.

During the semester, Susan had become aware that some of the areas in the school district may have gun incidents, and this frightened one of her children. Susan didn’t like this or like having to know about it, and was interested in these children’s well-being.

*Choice*

When I asked Susan early in the interviews about her concepts concerning “personality,” she explained “personality” as “individual needs.” In this comment, I also heard her highlighting how personal choice was a powerful tool in determining one’s own identity and future. She claimed, “Although family life has a great influence over the kids… I know from personal experience, they can make that choice to not go that way. And so I think it has more to do with the actual person than anything…whether they choose to accept it or go away from it.”

As a follow-up question in her second interview, I asked Susan what she meant about her own “personal experience” with “choice” and how she thought that people could make choices in their life to change a family pattern. She told me that her issue with personal choice was a larger social or community issue, not just a “family thing.” She told me that when she was a child, her parents had religious views that were not in keeping with the religious views of the region. “Everybody is pretty much one kind of Christian or another.” Her father was atheist and her
mother was “mixed Christianity slash Buddhist slash a lot of things.” Susan said her mother let Susan make her own religious choices. However, at school she was asked, “Aren’t you Christian?”

I asked Susan who asked her that question in school. She replied, “The kids.” And she continued. She said that she could remember going through a time during her childhood when she made her decision about religion, and she “ended up with none of it.” She thought that other people were not very “Christian” in their judgment of her religious choice. Susan and I laughed. I knew that here she had made the point that she had gone against a cultural pattern or assumption of Christianity in her community, despite great pressure from peers to be like them. It seemed like she was glad that she hadn’t made a choice for Christianity, since the Christians she knew had proved to be not very “Christian” in their judgment of Susan. She used this story to reveal how she had, and a person could, go against “cultural patterns” and be or believe what they wanted to be or believe.

In the other example of how she thought that people could choose a belief system or pattern, Susan said that she had a friend in high school who was Asian, “her parents were Chinese… and so her parents barely knew English and really didn’t have anything to do with American culture.” Susan explained that her friend “made that choice to be completely immersed” in American culture and didn’t “identify with the Chinese culture at all.” She wasn’t “Chinese just because she looked it.” Thus, Susan assumed that her friend had chosen to not embrace a Chinese identity.

I believe that Susan was saying that racial attributes did not predict or control a person’s destiny or cultural affiliation. People had choices and were not predestined by race. This idea of making a “choice” against a cultural norm was another example of Susan’s rejection of the concept that one could understand a person based on race or culture. This belief in the possibility and power of choice also acts to reject race as significant to individuals. Once again, race didn’t matter if one could “choose” a different cultural affiliation.

Susan’s Insights through Self-Critique and Talk

I asked Susan how her thinking had changed about teaching in a multicultural setting, and Susan said that she thought she would now be “more happy to do it.” She had thought that teaching here “might come with a few challenges” and “people not being so nice to each other.” However, she said it was a good experience to find that people were much “more accepting of each other” than in the outside world and that she had learned “a lot from it too - just having that experience and being around different kinds of people. It makes you more worldly.”

However, Susan was steadfast and persistent about her ideas that she should not focus on diversity, aside from personality differences, that race was not a factor in how the children were “individually different,” and the children were the same because of the area, even though she had observed differences in visual appearance, interactions, and behaviors. As I reread her transcripts, I looked for other insights in her words.

First, I recognized that she was able to engage in some self-critique. In the second interview, she told me about how she was trying some new teaching approaches rather than the same “boring paperwork stuff.” She said that she was worried about how successful the lessons would be, especially in light of the ongoing benchmark testing and end of year test. She said, “I think about how I speak to them and whether I’m doing the right thing, so it’s constant analyzing yourself.” She does not mention any issues of diversity here, but I include this statement as a window on her notions and practice of “reflective practice” and the university’s emphasis on “reflective practice” (Schon, 1983). Her email, in which she realizes that she has made
assumptions about what is “socially appropriate” also demonstrates that she is continuing to
critique her own thinking about the issue of how she makes judgments of “others.”

Susan’s e-mail also revealed that she had re-heard her own narrative from the interview-
conversation on the ride home. In re-listening to how she had explained “socially appropriate” to
me, she saw her wrongly held assumptions and was able to self-critique. Susan also used an
example of “talk” or “stories” when she told me that when she heard her Black friends’ (from the
university cohort) ideas about how race had affected their lives, Susan thought she would like to
know more about their life stories.

The following is another example of how “talk” influenced Susan’s ideas. We had a
conversation about how we might make choices of who to sit by at a meeting, a White woman or
a Black woman. I had tried to make the point that if she or I sat by a White woman, this would
not be noticed, but if Tison sat by a Black woman, someone might think that Tison always
identified as Black. Susan said, “She’s more obvious about it I guess.” I said, “Maybe because
it’s the “different. It’s different than White.” Susan responded, “It’s the assuming that we do.
We (White people) don’t really have to talk about it.” Then she made this statement:

It definitely… just sitting here talking. I’m realizing things about myself that you don’t
think about on your own - at least I don’t think about it on my own. It’s just one of those
things that kind of comes out as you’re talking.

My point here is not to say that our talk (or my “wise words”) caused a great change in
Susan’s thinking. I do not truly know. However, I do think that this statement says something
about the power of talk to cause instances or settings when we hear ourselves reveal our
thinking. These conversations set up the possibility for moments of powerful “self-critique.”

I asked Susan in her last interview how she felt with regards to talking about diversity
with me during our interview-conversations. She said, “Honestly, I feel much more comfortable
with you and me than with a Black student in our cohort.” She said that in class she felt awkward
because she felt like people thought she was “attacking” people who had different opinions. She
said that the university students either agreed or disagreed, which I thought sounded like the
students were attempting to fit very complex ideas into binary opposites of agreement versus
disagreement. “I was perfectly willing to say my side of it, but I was cautious not to go too far
with explaining or defending,” she admitted.

When I asked Susan in her last interview what was one of the most “significant” issues
for her about “being in a multicultural setting,” she said that she thought that being here gave her
“that many more life experiences,” and that it made her a “more intelligent person.” I wondered
how she thought the experience made her more “intelligent,” and I asked her. This statement
says something about what I interpret as some of my “insights” about her “insights” about her
experiences at Gilmer Park.

Just learning every little thing about these kids. You know what I mean? What kinds of
experiences they’ve come from. What kinds of feelings they have about it….learning
how to interact with people - all people; and learning I guess to be
empathetic…compassionate; life skills and social skills; and learning about people in
general….You know you’re here around all these people in your life, and you should do
as much as you can to learn about them. (My underlining)

My “insight” on her “insight” is that when I read through this statement about how her
experiences had made her “intelligent,” I saw phrases and statements that were mostly about
building relationships with people. I did not hear anything about teaching differently as in
strategies, language differences, grouping, or direct or individual instruction. All of the
underlined words connote relation and the way she interacted with the people at this “non-diverse school.” Learning how to relate is what I believe she considered to be most central in what she had learned from her experiences in this diverse school.

My Student Teacher Connections

My classroom and Susan’s classroom were next door to each other. They were both third grade classrooms; therefore, we taught the same children and we had many conversations about their academic and behavioral needs. We both taught the “Green Group” and struggled with the best way to help the children focus on their schoolwork and to become successful at completing assignments or walking down the hall together, for example. I had had particular trouble with the “walking down the hall” problem. Susan and I also “struggled” with one child who had immigrated to Oakland from Liberia who had assumed many anti-school behaviors which were difficult for us to understand (Running away and hiding, kissing in the air towards the girls, refusing to complete or attempt assignments, saying inappropriate comments or responding loudly in silly ways, mimicking his teachers – he was an excellent mimic.) We were curious about what he had experienced in the refugee camp in Liberia before he came to our Southern city. Christopher had told me about how he had managed to run away from the “men who cut your heads off and put you in a bag.” (Susan and I had some common experiences because of our third grade hall relationship.)

I was constantly amazed at how we interpreted our experiences differently as “student teachers.” She saw the children at the school as being the same, and I saw them as being a group of very different and diverse people. She thought that the three Black children’s Home Culture worksheet proved that the children had different cultures and therefore race hadn’t caused their culture. I thought the content on the worksheet was about cultural practices from two different “areas” or nations. I did not say this to her, because I wanted her to continue to share with me her thoughts without editing her thoughts. Susan thought the children’s White and Black interaction styles didn’t make the children “different.” Yet, she was curious about and noticed how differently the teachers and children interacted with one another in different ways. I believed that our home literacies, oral and textual, made us different people. My children in my classroom had taught me about how our oral language makes us different in February when I had attempted to teach a Word Study lesson by incorporating a “rap.” The ensuing laughter, rolling on the floor, and the mimicking of my White middle-aged woman’s soprano voice rap style became a joke for weeks to come, and I learned that even after Beonce and Clarice gave me a “rap lesson,” I would do better not to try “rapping” ever again. In one of the goodbye poems they wrote for me, one piece of advice they gave me was, “Don’t Rap” (and this portion of the line poem was written by a White girl.)

Whenever Susan was explaining her belief system, I kept trying to develop responses to her that would counter what she believed. I would identify an experience that I had had in school with which I could counter her interpretation. At the same time, I tried to consider what experiences I (as a teacher educator) could provide for student teachers so that they would understand how racial identity matters despite the fact that I would assume that student teachers should treat children the same, as in equally, but different according to their individual and cultural identities.

My Teacher Educator Connections

I had extraordinary appreciation for Susan. She knew that I was studying diversity, she was tired of talking about it, but she was willing to spend hours with me to explain her perspective and talk about her experiences in a school where she didn’t think the children were
different at all, except for their personalities. I thought “diversity” was a topic worthy of a dissertation; she didn’t think diversity was a significant topic of study. This was a real gift for a researcher, much different for me than conducting a quantitative survey for “multicultural attitudes” or “diversity perspectives” and then comparing pre- and post-experience scores. I did not have the same personal connections with Susan’s ideas and questions as I had with Cameron, Faith, and Lily, but Susan’s responses helped me as a teacher educator. How?

Susan’s notions that race didn’t matter are examples of a “colorblind” perspective. Confronting or changing a teacher candidate’s colorblind perspective is a commonly acknowledged challenge in multicultural teacher education. Perhaps Susan’s words give us some insights into the multiple factors that make Susan think that race doesn’t matter. In summary, Susan said that we should be over the problems of equality with regard to race and that such historical issues don’t matter today. I call this issue “History as Color blinding.” Second, she didn’t believe that her White identity had influenced her own life. Race didn’t make a difference in people’s lives since people can make choices. Her children demonstrated over and over again that race didn’t matter to them. I label this overarching issue, “Race Doesn’t Matter.” Susan also suggested that a person’s culture is not defined by race, but is defined by where one lives. I assert that this issue infers the negation of the “Complexity of Culture.” Fourth, Susan doesn’t think that a racial identity makes people the “same” as a group or “different” from other racial groups for many reasons. I label this query and paradox, “Same and Different.”

I believe that Susan used the history of racial inequality and the Civil Rights movement as a color-blinding force in her understanding of others. Simplistically, Susan thought that since our social systems had changed since the days of segregation, then she could separate herself from the enduring legacy of history. Susan could not see how history continued to influence today’s social systems and how those systems continued to support unequal consequences for people based on race, ethnicity, class, language, and privilege. Instead of seeing that historical events related to racial inequality had produced such social systems, Susan thought it was important to “get over” those events of the past. She believed that her professors continued to inappropriately emphasize diversity because they could not forget this history. Particularly troubling to her was her belief that her generation did not need for people of an older generation to remind them that all people should be treated equally. She considered the Civil Rights movement to be passé.

Susan had many supporting theories for her ideas that race didn’t matter. (Race Doesn’t Matter). She knew that she had made choices and so she knew that anyone could. She resisted the ideas associated with “White privilege” that I outlined in Chapter 2. She also used her observations of the children’s responses to each other as examples that supported this belief. Even though she gave me example after example for her assumptions that race didn’t affect a person’s identity, I could not understand how she could say that a racial identity had nothing to do with who a person was, especially since she did describe the children’s interactions and behaviors as examples of “Black” and “White” interactions and behaviors. This was one of the paradoxes for me in her narratives that I could not resolve in my analysis. At one point, I think I simply wanted her to realize that if Tison told me that her racial identity mattered to her, then it must matter. I don’t think that this idea was one that Susan understood. Did Susan ever consider that some of her children might see her differently since she said that there are Black racists? Identity matters and identity is partially created by skin color even though it is not a determinant of who we are.
I was surprised at how Susan simplified the “Complexity of Culture.” She thought that her professors emphasized race as the primary factor in diversity. More importantly, she defined the children’s cultural influence as being singularly “area.” Culture is fluid and includes many complex factors. There is the culture of being female, of an ethnicity, of a community, of a language, of a nationality, and of a family, for example. Culture of an “area” does exist, but “area” is not the sole determinant of a person’s identity. “Area” does not create sameness in all factors of a person’s life. Why couldn’t Susan look beyond the sameness of the area to see the differences between the children based on race, ethnicity, language, socio-economic class, and family structures, all factors that were evident in the school? This assertion totally negated the differences that the immigrant children brought to the school who had all lived in different “areas.” Do children become the same once they shop at Walmart in America and their parents have similar jobs?

In her discussions, culture is one-dimensional. I find a paradox when I compare her explanation for culture with her explanation for diversity. As I stated, Susan thought that the children’s culture was defined by the area, a one-dimensional view of culture. Yes, I did think that “area” is a cultural factor and can cause similarities in our experiences, but it does not make us the same. Susan’s concept of “truly diverse” seemed multi-dimensional. She said that to be “truly diverse” a school must have “4 to 5” factors like race, nationality, socio-economics, gender, language and area. “Culture” could be explained by one factor which then caused group sameness, but “diversity” in a school must be represented by multiple factors. I am not sure how to make sense of this conflict or paradox. I wondered how to teach student teachers to look beyond alikeness to see differences, even in an area where people have similar socio-economic standings and experiences.

Susan mentioned that she thought her professors wanted her to see her children racially. She resisted this viewpoint. She essentially thought that her professors had simplified diversity into one factor. How do we demonstrate that by naming race or ethnicity as a factor in culture, teacher educators do not believe that one factor is a sole cause of any person’s identity? Susan also seemed to believe that naming race as a factor would act to stereotype a racial group. By saying the children weren’t different based on race and were different only because of personality, she was avoiding or not identifying stereotypes.

A last summary theme in Susan’s narratives is the relationship between “Same and Different.” What do we mean by different? What makes people the same? The children were and weren’t different. (Different: personality, visual difference of skin color, interactions, behavior; Same: area, culture, basic needs and wants, same interests and activities). From Susan’s explanations about who were the “same” and how the children were “different,” I became intrigued by a small study of opposites or binaries that were embedded in Susan’s talk about “same” and “different.” The complex construct of “diversity” automatically infers the binary of “sameness.” Is “sameness” the same thing as a “culture?” If people can be the “same” within a group, does it mean that we cannot also be “different” within the group? If we name people as “diverse,” do we intend to overlook or dismiss “sameness.” I discuss more fully these notions about the binaries of “sameness” and “difference” in Chapter 5.

I have two final connections with Susan’s narratives that do not need more analysis. I mention them here because I will include them in “Questions.” First, Susan surprised me when I realized that she thought that the most important things she had learned were all about learning to create and support relationships with children and families. Finally, when I heard Susan say that when she talked about these issues with me, she understood that she was “realizing things” about
herself that she didn’t “think about” on her own. I knew that she had “talked” about diversity before in her university classes (and resisted the talk). I wondered what made our talk different. I do not have data from this study to make any kind of comparison between our interview-conversations and her discussions during coursework. I only know something about what kind of conversations she and I had. We had one-on-one conversations in which I attempted to portray a non-judgmental demeanor, she seemed to appreciate being able to share her perspective without being judged, and she thought the interview-conversations helped her think either when she re-listened to herself or when I gently tried to push her thinking in a new direction.

Questions

• How can teacher educators demonstrate how history continues to influence present day social systems?
• How can teacher educators help teacher candidates see the significance of racial identity to all people and realize that race matters even today? What resources are there to help student teachers hear about “others’” experiences.
• How can teacher educators lead teacher candidates to construct a complex understanding of culture with a fuller knowledge of the multiple factors that influence one’s cultural identity?
• How can I create contexts in my coursework during which we can focus on the importance of creating positive relationships with children and faculty in schools? Or how do we make “relationships” central to our work towards “culturally responsive pedagogy”?
• How can teacher educators set up a context for talking about diversity issues that engenders “self-critique” of one’s socio-cultural understandings?
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction to Cross-Case Analysis and Multicase Study

The collective story displays an individual’s story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs, rather than by telling the particular individual’s story or by simply retelling the cultural story. Richardson, 1997, p. 32

I was faced with an interesting dilemma. I had written about these four case studies as being “individually as different as the next one,” but needed to find how they were the “same as a group” (Susan’s words). I heard differences in their simple responses to my interview questions, and through my analysis process in finding narrative themes, I found different questions, concerns, and understandings about their “knowledge” and “practice.” The student teachers’ narratives were sometimes conflicting, and the conflicting nature of their interpretations made them seem at times too fragmented for my purposes. However, I knew that while I was interviewing and then analyzing the transcripts, I had found common concerns for me as a teacher educator, and some of their stories represented a sort of “plurality of awareness” (Moss, 2003, p. 111) in their “knowledge.” I could also see that a particular theme was voiced by more than one participant. Through their narratives, I wanted to develop a holistic vision or multicase study of the participants’ “knowledge” and “practice” so as to inform my “teacher learning question.”

Researchers look for sameness to create some kind of cohesive approach to the “teacher learning question” as they strive to influence teacher candidates’ “knowledge” and “practice.” Student teachers are the same in that they are learning to be teachers, they follow a similar course of study, and they participate in field experiences at a specified sequence. The other aspect of sameness for these student teachers was their university program’s intent to prepare them to work in diverse contexts. These similar experiences may be the end of the teacher candidates’ sameness as students and future teachers, for teacher candidates construct their own understandings about teaching from their life experiences, course topics, and field experiences. It would be true to say that any student teacher would have a “different” story to tell. When we consider the number of teacher candidates that enroll in university programs, the number of individual interpretations becomes a tremendous body of interpreted experiences to which teacher educators must respond. Since a university cannot control what student teachers learn through a program that emphasizes diversity, teacher educators should learn from what student teachers do interpret from their lives, from their education, and from their experiences in fieldwork.

There are well-known texts that make broad suggestions for university program policies and coursework regarding diversity studies. I believed that in hearing student teachers’ talk, even if it was contradictory, I could add to this body of knowledge. My analysis for my multicase conclusions became an act of finding a group story and “abstractions across cases” (Merriam, 1998, p. 195) through the participants’ similarities, differences, and contradictions. As Moss (2003) stated in his “deconstructive ethnography,” “The goal of theory must be to delve more
deeply into complexity as a way to discover similarities. In seeking difference, we stumble upon sameness” (p. 122).

In this chapter, I make overall recommendations for teacher educators based on the “difference” and “sameness” that I found in the participants’ stories. Finding a “revolution” in teacher education was not my personal mandate. Small changes in teacher educators’ awareness (including my own) can influence the effectiveness of a university program’s coursework and field work. Small changes can better prepare future teachers to teach “other people’s children.”

As an organizational structure for this cross-case and multicase analysis, I have chosen to explain the “sameness” that I found in their different stories by using the questions that I raised at the end of each analysis section: Homework and Behavior, Cameron, Faith, Lily, and Susan. In addition to this cross-case analysis, I add selected pertinent “student teacher” experiences and “teacher educator” insights of my own as a supplement to an argument or a support of a theme or a recommendation.

A Study of the Analytical Questions

In each of the preceding sections, I summarized and discussed the salient issues that I found in each case, then I developed questions based on that case analysis. I studied the questions as a whole body of data, looked at the common concepts, and combined and compressed those concepts into the following summarized themes. Through these summarized themes, I knew that I could discuss each concept and make recommendations for university programs and teacher educators. Although I acknowledge that some of these questions are addressed in teacher education programs that promote culturally responsive pedagogy, I believed that my qualitative data and analysis would add to this greater body of knowledge by examining directly student teacher experiences as outlined in Chapter 2 and 3. A compilation of all of the questions that I raised in the preceding sections are found in Appendix Q. Below is the summary of these questions by theme.

**Summarized Questions by Themes**

**Theme 1: Complex and Simple Understandings of Culture and Diversity**
What is culture? What are the many and complex factors of culture that affect our identities? What happens when we use a less complex understanding of culture?

**Theme 2: The Paradox of Culture: “Same” and “Different”**
What does “diversity” mean? When we say that we are the “same” or “different,” what are our assumptions about those words? How does our understanding of “sameness” and “difference” affect our understanding of others? Of the teaching - learning process?

**Theme 3: Cultural Identities as Significant-Gaining Knowledge about “Within Group” and “Between Group” Cultural Factors: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Language, Religion, Family, Area and Community, Nationality, and Social-economic Class**
How can teacher educators help future teachers gain knowledge about and understanding of the significance of each cultural factor in personal and cultural identity? How can universities create contexts for student teachers to see and believe that race, ethnicity, gender, language, religion, family, area and community, nationality, and socio-economic class matter?

**Theme 4: Cultural Identities: Tension between Stereotypes and Cultural Patterns**
When we attempt to understand people that are different from or alike ourselves, how can we know if our understandings about “others” are accurate or inaccurate understandings of a cultural group? How do we discuss the tensions between the assumptions we might make about stereotypes and cultural patterns of behavior and values?

**Theme 5: Cultural Identities: Effects on the Social Construction of Multiple Realities and Norms**
How can we assist student teachers in understanding that people develop or live within alternate realities and other “normal” life styles based on multiple socio-cultural identities?

**Theme 6: Cultural Identities: Effects of Cultural Identity on Relationships**

How can university programs address the issue that our socio-cultural identities affect our relationships with families, with children, with colleagues, and with the curriculum content?

**Theme 7: Teaching Differently. What is Culturally Responsive Practice and Pedagogy?**

What does it mean to “teach differently?” How do student teachers translate the notion of “teaching differently” or “culturally responsive practice” in the field? How does our teaching change, based on culture? What overall recommendations can I make to teacher educators about coursework and fieldwork approaches based on these conclusions?

**Discussion of Themes: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

In this section, I discuss, summarize, and develop conclusions about each of the identified “Themes.” Then, for each summarized Theme, I will make specific recommendations for university teacher education programs.

**Theme 1: Complex and Simple Understandings of Culture and Diversity**

To understand culture we must understand its complexity. I cannot assume that because a person is from Honduras, she thinks a certain way, but I may be better able to understand her, if I know something about her country, language, and family. As Susan and Lily were trying to understand, if a person is African American, I cannot assume that he uses African American English, or behaves a certain way. Susan explained that she couldn’t determine how to respond to or teach a child “solely based on race.” Lily thought that Black children, “respond to things differently,” but “I will not stereotype them and say all children…because I don’t think they do.” A cultural factor like race or ethnicity can and cannot be used to discuss a person’s beliefs and actions. This “truism” seemed to confuse some of the participants when they attempted to think about being “culturally responsive.”

Over and over again, I heard these teacher candidates simplifying culture. For some reason, Susan thought that the university wanted her to look at race as a “cause” for children’s learning and behavior, and for teachers to change the way they taught or created lesson plans. She did not think this single cultural factor could cause “difference.” Instead, she held onto the single cultural factor of “area” as a defining cultural influence. Faith thought that the children behaved a certain way because of “home life.” Lily had experienced and understood the complexity of culture, but considered the “inner city” to be the single factor that would cause her to need to “teach differently.” Many of the student teachers’ perceptions about the school were based on their preconceived ideas about a city or about working with African Americans, since they assumed that racial diversity was what they would experience in the city. They did not seem to have many preconceptions about the other diverse cultures. Cameron did seem to have a perspective that “culture” was complex because she discussed race, ethnicity, language, and the area as factors in the children’s lives that made them who they were. However, her preconceptions about her student teaching experiences were framed by the single factor of her “fear” of the city.

I wondered if the participants needed to simplify culture in order to talk about it or understand it. I also believe that most of us attend to those obvious visual images of culture such as dress, art, music, and food that are much easier to comprehend. Yet by simplifying culture, the participants negated the power of the complexity of culture in people’s lives. We are each members of many groups or “cultures” that influence us to do things in a certain manner, think a certain way, or value certain “truths.” Although the term “multicultural” education sometimes
implies that diversity means “ethnicity” or “race,” a broader understanding of “diversity” includes multiple cultural factors that are fluid and inter-related: family culture, racial culture, ethnic culture, language culture, gender culture, religious culture, area or community culture, national culture, and socio-economic culture. The effects of all of these group or cultural affiliations are found in each person. Each cultural factor is significant, but not a sole determinant to any person’s identity. In addition, a person does not stand alone as “individually different,” as Susan asserted, without these factors. Susan also thought that the children were different based only on their personalities. I did not understand how she resisted the idea that personality could also be affected by our individual and diverse cultural influences.

The student teachers simplified “diversity” or “culture” often as a single factor, and I did not hear them mention any “deep meaning” (Hollins, 1996) of culture which means we look beyond those visual aspects of culture such as food, holidays or dress. Lily discussed “hair.” Susan created her worksheet on “Home Culture” and included terms like “holidays” and “foods.” Hair, holidays, and foods are constructs that are more easily described or visualized than a “deeper meaning” of culture. The few issues that the participants discussed that were related to “deeper meanings” of culture were the families’ “value of education,” “home life,” “importance of family,” “interactions,” and “behavior” which can be complicated evidence of cultural factors such as “beliefs about child-rearing” or “home literacies.” Whereas the participants talked about these deeper meanings of culture, I was concerned about the accuracy of their knowledge and judgments about these features of the culture. They had such a small amount of evidence from which they could infer cultural values. The student teachers only saw these interactions and behaviors as symptoms of a problem, not as visible evidence of a different cultural system or a “way of being.”

This idea that culture is complex seems obvious to me. Moss (2003) asserts that few people have the “capacity to fully capture the complexity that makes up many of the categories we rely on so heavily to make sense of our worlds” (p. 122). I agree, but also suggest that perhaps these participants needed to simplify the construct of culture into one or two factors (race and city/area) as a means of being able to “identify” and “comprehend” how culture was an influence in the school. These acts of simplification were their attempts to “control” the influence of culture in their everyday lives. I use the term “control” to mean that they wanted or needed to “make sense of” culture and demonstrate that they had the knowledge to explain the effects of culture (as in racial differences or city differences).

By explaining culture as “city” or “home life,” the participants would know how to make judgments about and respond to the effects of “cultural diversity” in their classrooms. For example, Lily, Faith, Cameron, and Susan talked about the tenet that teachers should be “stern and strict” in city schools so as to “control” (identify and understand) the interactions in the school. Faith discussed how she wanted to communicate with homes and families as a means of “controlling” or “making sense of” her observations of the children’s behavior or social knowledge.

Simple Understandings of Cultural Factors

The primary cultural factors that all the participants continually acknowledged were “city,” “family,” and “race.” As we read in the case studies, the culture of the area, or “city,” had a powerful impact on the student teachers’ preconceptions and interpretations of the school. In Susan’s case, the “city” became the cultural or diversity factor for the children’s identity. It seemed that since the university “named” the context as “urban,” this label created a stable construct or “cohesive” culture of the city, irregardless of the differences that I observed.
Naming the school as “city” sometimes created misconceptions about the school and the community as well. Lily said she expected to find more “hustle and bustle” in the area, but she found a quiet neighborhood. Faith thought that perhaps they didn’t have “healthy habits” in the city. Also, just by naming the school “urban,” the student teachers came prepared to be more “strict” and “stern,” without knowing the children or families.

I am also concerned that when the university named the area “city” or “urban,” teacher educators have done the act of “naming” and have “othered” this place. Gilmer Park is a city school because it is in the city limits, but it is also considered very “normal” by the people who live there in their quiet middle or working class neighborhood and apartment buildings. Naming a school “urban” also places the school in relation to “rural” and “suburban” or “small town” and therefore creates the preconception that a student teacher might find the opposite of a suburban school. How does this “naming” make those who live in this quiet city community (relative to a large metropolitan area) feel about the university’s power to “use” them to learn about “others?”

There were “projects” in the school’s district, and there was a small area in its neighborhood that Ms. Butler and Mr. Johnson named, “the hood,” but Tison never considered where she lived “urban.” Tison told me that she didn’t understand because Gilmer Park was just a “regular” school to her. It was a nice school in a nice community, her home neighborhood. The study of urban schools certainly has a history of being a topic and context worthy of study; “urban area” can be a cultural factor. However, the words “city” and “urban” have negative connotations in the field of education and beyond.

Tison compared Gilmer Park with a real “inner city school” in a telephone conversation we had during the summer after she left Gilmer Park and transferred to another school in a large metropolitan area in the north. She told me that if I really wanted to study “urban,” then her new school was where I should come. She explained that her new school was sitting in the middle of a place that didn’t look anything like her tidy neighborhood in her smaller Southern city context. Her new school was truly in an “inner city.” She said that she had never been scared driving anywhere in Oakland, but she was wondering about how she would feel when she began to travel into the large “inner” city to teach kindergarten children. She also told me that in Oakland, there was a mix of people, but in the inner city where she worked now, everyone was Black. She said she wasn’t used to it.

Despite my agreement with her that Gilmer Park was not a model of what I considered to be a “city” context, I was sometimes perplexed. There were events at Gilmer Park that I might have connected with my own stereotypical ideas about “urban,” even though the adjacent neighborhood was tidy. The principal had told me about the murder in her school district and the locks on the doors, Tison told me about her suspicions about how many families were involved with drug sales and use, and Mr. Johnson had told me about drug sales in his mother’s neighborhood. All of these characteristics could be stereotypical features of a city setting. The student teachers also shared with me stories from their classrooms that they thought were connected to the “urban” area. However, educators need to remember that events like the school violence at Columbine have occurred in middle to upper-middle-class and suburban schools, families in higher “classes” use and sell drugs, and there are “projects” and trailer parks in my small university town. For some reason, people cluster their fears around the “city,” as Cameron described. These contradictory ideas (that Gilmer Park was or wasn’t a “city” school) require complex knowledge about cultural factors.

The other primary cultural factor that the student teachers discussed was race. Multicultural education was originally developed out of the historic events of the Civil Rights era.
and Black people’s struggle for equal treatment under the law. Multicultural education sought to create social and cultural changes through education about diversity and bias. As stated in Chapter 1 and 2, racial bias continues to be a primary factor in people’s resistance to valuing equity. Whether it is a university’s intention to place student teachers in a city setting to create contexts for student teachers to “work with more Black children” or not, teacher educators need to address the cultural factor of race as most significant in how we interpret people and events.

**Recommendations: Developing Complex and Simple Understandings**

Student teachers need to develop complex understandings of culture and diversity and realize that cultural identity influences who we are, but is not a direct or causal factor in who we are or aren’t. Universities have addressed this notion and need to continue to address the issue of complexity of culture and diversity. Student teachers could begin exploring the complexity of culture during coursework by identifying themselves by the multiple cultural factors that create their own socio-cultural identity, rather than simplifying themselves as only White and middle-class. For example, look at the difference between Susan’s and Faith’s ideas about religion and how their different religious perspectives influenced their ideas about race and choice, even though they were both White and middle-class. Student teachers should also look beyond simplified cultural features that we can see such as skin color, hair, holidays, and foods. Instead, teacher candidates should consider the more complex and sometimes invisible “features of culture.” See Table 13.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deeper Meaning: Features of Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facial expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas about leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas about modesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the natural world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Student teachers should create a visual diagram (or concept map) for the multiple influences on “diversity” and “culture” that must include the factors of race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, “area,” and socio-economic class and the relationship between these factors. By creating a visual representation (or concept map) that includes each factor, teacher candidates will consider and view the conceptual complexity of culture, rather than depend on a simplified concept of culture as singularly defined. I believe that the physical act of “making” culture in a concept map and showing the relationships between the factors would demonstrate the impossibility of simplifying “culture’s” meaning.

An example of an activity that encourages a person to understand a deeper meaning of culture (rather than a simple understanding of culture) is “Iceberg” (Peace Corps, 1998). This activity asks students to compare the visible features of culture (such as food, clothes, and holidays) with invisible features of culture (see Table 13 for examples), so that students can see beyond the simpler understandings of culture. Students should also examine the visible and invisible features of their own culture and how these simple and complex features of culture
affect who they are as socio-cultural people. These are singular suggestions for coursework engagement that addresses the complexity of culture. Etta Hollins’ text, *Culture in School Learning: Revealing the Deep Meaning* (1996) addresses this topic for teacher educators in a more complete way than single activities. The text includes coursework plans for engaging teacher candidates with the complexity and deeper meanings of their own culture and others’ culture and gives examples of coursework which includes an examination of how people make judgments of other people’s values and behaviors based on their own cultural assumptions.

Universities need to address perceptions of the “urban” context, or any context in which student teachers will work, and help student teachers see beyond what they expected to find before they arrive. A seminar on the particular community in which the teacher candidates will work would prepare student teachers for the diversity in that particular setting. A seminar of this type could take many different forms, ranging from a formal seminar created by a school system or individual school at the beginning of the semester presented by the school personnel such as the principal, guidance counselor, and teachers.

Student teachers should participate in a tour of their school’s district, and make an enlarged map with sketches or digital photographs of what they actually see in different locations so as to ensure that their tour includes all of the school community. Such a tour could be done as a study group, or an individual school could set up a “guided tour” with remarks by someone who knows the school district. In addition to discussing the different forms of race, ethnicities, housing, language, economics, and religions that they observe, student interns should also answer these guiding questions, “What did you find in the community that represents its diversity?” “What did you see in the community that demonstrated sameness among its people?” These two questions address the problem of using one cultural factor like “area” to determine that everyone is alike.

If universities create field experiences in a setting such as “urban” or “rural,” then they need to discuss stereotypes that may be acting on everyone’s notions about “urban” and “rural” and how we must look beyond those stereotypes to see complexity. Student teachers should list preconceived ideas and stereotypes, their source for that stereotype, and then compare those stereotypes to what they find and experience in the schools.

Teacher educators need to consider how their “naming” of a school context feels to those being “named,” and they need to establish relationships and dialogues with schools so that public school educators take part in naming and describing themselves, as in the introductory seminar described above. The act of “naming” has been critiqued in that there is a correlation between the act of “naming” and the people who have the power to “name” others. I don’t believe universities intend to “name” a context in a negative manner, but having the control over “naming” and the preconceptions that these labels have on a school context is a powerful responsibility.

Instead, I propose that the university consider using the labels of “diverse” or “multicultural” for several reasons. The labels, “multicultural” and “diverse” are usually conceptualized in relation to “not multicultural” or “not diverse” or “all-white.” Using “diverse” or “multicultural” may also help student teachers avoid making assumptions based on their understandings of “urban” or “city.” Therefore, the terms “diverse” and “multicultural” would give a more positive image of the community or “city” context. “Diverse” and “multicultural” also have many meanings that are related to the multiple cultural factors addressed in this section. Using “diverse” or “multicultural” as a descriptor may also assist universities as they
address the “complexity” of the school context rather than simplify their understandings of the children and school by one label such as “city” or “urban.”

**Theme 2: The Paradox of Diversity: “Same” and “Different”**

From the beginning of the semester, I became intrigued by the constructs I heard in the student teachers’ explanations for their “knowledge” and “practice,” and in particular how they described the children. As I analyzed and discovered narrative themes, I became more intrigued. The student teachers and I used many common words during the interviews, but I heard my participants use multiple definitions for many of them - words like “diverse,” “diversity,” “multicultural,” “race,” “ethnicity,” “individual,” “culture,” “cultural,” “different,” “same,” and “personality.” Each of these words is a different concept, but I heard the words slipping and sliding from one construct to another.

In particular, it seemed as if each student teacher had constructed a different understanding of “diverse” and would each use “diverse” differently themselves, depending on its context. Faith said that the children were “diverse” because they were different from her, (“wait a minute, I’m confused,” she said), and she added that the children were also “diverse” because they were different from each other. Participants said that the children were different from each other, but not what they (the student teachers) were used to. At the beginning of the semester, Lily said the school was like hers and at the end of the semester, she said the school was different from her school and so were the children. Cameron had originally thought that “diversity” was people from other countries, but then said that she had learned that “diversity” was people in this country that were different from her.

The most paradoxical statements to me emerged when Lily said that the children were all so “different” from each other, and Susan said the children were all the “same” (“same as a group”) and were only different based on personality. These examples were researcher “red flags” that compelled me to analyze more closely how the student teacher participants used these words and what their use meant about their “knowledge” about diversity. I raised the question, “How can student teachers look at essentially the same group of children (although in different grades and classrooms) and see the children’s cultural identity in opposing ways?” (All different, or all the same). I literally felt the tension between the two notions of “same” and “different” throughout the semester. These were the words the student teachers and I consistently used to understand, describe, and compare people.

I wondered what this paradox could teach me as a teacher educator about student teacher understandings of diversity and culture. Boler (1999) states that, “Our identities are precariously constructed in relation to one another” (p. 198). The participants used terms to construct themselves and the children in relation to each other. Their constructions seemed “precarious” because the terms sounded alike but they meant something different, but the participants used them as stable ideas for the concrete evidence they had gathered through their observations. How they created these relationships seemed worthy of study. I tried to understand how the participants could have developed such divergent interpretations. I asked this question, “What systems of “knowledge” and “practice” do these words and paradoxes represent?” Whereas I did not attempt to find a cause and effect relationship between the participants’ past experiences and these understandings of “diversity,” I did ask, “How could I create university coursework that would prepare student teachers to better understand and talk about diversity?”

Becker (1998) states that “all terms describing people are relational - that is, that they only have meaning when they are considered as part of a system of terms” (p. 132). Becker continues this proposition and states that if we look at this system of relations, we find that the
“trait” or construct is not just the “physical fact” of whatever — it — is, but rather an interpretation of that fact, a giving of meaning to it, that depends on what else it is connected to” (p.134). The construct of “diversity” (or difference) posits or has a relationship with the construct of “sameness” at the binary opposite. However, when a university sets up a discourse about “diversity,” I believe that in our discussions about “diversity” we silence “sameness” by not discussing our beliefs or notions about how people can be the “same.” Would Susan have talked about “differences” in the children, if we had also acknowledged “sameness”? In a university course could we analyze how we can use “sameness” to describe people in some ways, but we cannot use “sameness” to describe people in other ways?

I felt tension again when I attempted to understand how to analyze the relationship between the words “different” and “same” because the words took on different meanings if I was using the words to describe a cultural group (“Within-Group” Description) or to describe a comparison between two cultural groups (“Between Group” Comparison). I drew visual diagrams of these binaries in an attempt to see how they were related and how the student teachers and I used them. The diagrams forced me to put these words in opposition to each other to see how they were correlated as constructs. The diagrams of the multiple uses of “same” and “different” when we describe and compare people are below.

**Visual Diagrams of “Same” and “Different”**

If we posit that a cultural group exists, then as we describe this cultural group, we describe features of “sameness” that make this a cultural group. Yet within that cultural group there is also “difference” (Within Group “Sameness” and “Difference”). See Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Within-group comparison: “Sameness” and “difference.”](image)

When we compare ourselves to others, we use the words “same” and “different” to determine how we are related or not related to other people or each other (Between Person Comparison.) See Figure 3.
A third comparison, which is related to Between Person Comparison (Figure 3), is Between Group Comparison. When we compare two people or groups, we use “same” and “different” to describe and compare between groups. See Figure 4.

Finally, we use the opposing words “same” and “different” when we use the concept of the “universality of human experience” (or sameness of all people) and the “individuality of all people” (We are all individually different.) See Figure 5.

Figure 3. Between person comparison: “Sameness” and “difference.”

Figure 4. Between group comparison: “Sameness” and “difference.”

Figure 5. We are both or either “Same” and “different.”
These diagrams represented the multiple constructs for our uses of “same” and “different” in our conversations about “diversity.” The diagrams show the relationship between the two words and provide an analytical framework for understanding how two people could use simple words like “same” or “different,” but could be making entirely different comparisons. I created these diagrams as a way to help my future student interns and me analyze our use of the terms and develop a more complex way to describe the children, rather than simply using “same” or “different.” I assert that using more accurate comparisons and descriptors (as in “Within-Group” and “Between Group” descriptions or comparisons) would encourage student teachers to describe the children in a fashion that is more representative of the children that I observed in Susan’s and my third grade class.

These individual diagrams were still not a complete conceptualization of the complexity of culture. They were related to each other because they each described ways in which we compare how people are alike and not alike. Therefore, the individual diagrams needed to be placed together in a holistic visual. I developed another diagram that integrated the multiple uses of “same” and “different.” Figure 6 is a holistic diagram of the multiple meanings through which we describe and compare how our cultural identities are alike and not alike. This diagram incorporates the universality of human experience (Universal Sameness), “Within Group,” and “Between Group” descriptions and comparisons.

**Holistic Visual Model of “Same” and “Different”**

Figure 6 makes explicit the multiple meanings of the words “same” and “different” and can become a way to make sense of the words we use when we describe our differences or reject our differences. Figure 6 first rejects the notion that “same” and “different” are always binaries. “Same” and “Different” as opposites become destabilized. Instead, when we compare people, “different” can be superimposed within “same.” For example, we are all “Individually Different” and “Universally the Same.” Therefore, I placed the construct of “Individually Different” within “Universal Sameness.” How we are all “Individually Different,” can be described through multiple cultural factors “Between Group Differences.” These cultural “Individual Differences” are “Between Group” comparisons and differences as in race, ethnicity, class, religion, socio-economic, community. (We are “different” because we identify with different groups.) Each of these cultural group differences also posits “sameness.” For example, a cultural group, as in Latino, has features of “sameness” that makes it a cultural group (“Within Group” Sameness). Finally, each of these cultural groups of “sameness” also includes “difference” because not all people of a cultural group are alike (“Within Group” Difference) (see Figure 6a). When we find “Within Group” differences, we negate a cultural stereotype that there is total “Within Group” Sameness. We find that each or many of the other cultural factors, as in race, ethnicity (et al.) can exist within one cultural group when we describe “Within Group” Differences. For example, White people (while having the commonality of Whiteness) are each “individually different” (Within a Group) because each person will have differences in language, ethnicity, gender, nationality, family culture, area, and socio-economic class. Figure 6 and Figure 6a show the significance of a particular cultural identity or group; they represent the possibility and difficulty of describing a cultural group’s “sameness;” they make visible the tangled and complex web of culture; and thus negate the simplification of culture.

**Summary Statement and Recommendations: Examining the Paradox**

Figure 6 makes it possible for me to better understand the participants’ fragmented and paradoxical descriptions of the children. In many of the participants’ discussions, they chose to label the children as either “same” or “different” but rarely mentioned complexity. Susan said
Figure 6 & Figure 6a. Holistic view of “same” and “different.”
they were the same as a group (“Within Group” Sameness) but different because of personality (“Individually Different” only by personality). Lily summarized and said the children were completely “different” (“Between Group” Difference). Faith said they were “diverse” (“Between Group” Differences); Cameron said she and Julia were “different” but equal (“Between Group” Difference, but equal based on “Universal Sameness”).

Susan resisted the construct of “diversity” or “difference” with her use of the valid construct of “sameness” (Universality of Sameness). Susan’s use of “Universal Sameness” was her form of a color-blind perspective. Seeing “sameness” in people (“Within Group” or “Between Group”) does not have to oppose or negate “difference” (“Within Group” or “Between Group”). In diversity studies, teacher educators emphasize “difference” and “equal,” but do not discuss “sameness” as an equally valuable analytical framework for understanding “difference.” I suggest that when we talk about diversity we also talk about “sameness,” so that we can learn to identify the differences between being universally the same and being culturally different.

I propose that Figure 6 would be a visual model for demonstrating that although thinking that we are all the “same,” as in “Universal Sameness,” can be true, “Universal Sameness” cannot make invisible the equally powerful construct of “difference.” Therefore, “Universal Sameness” cannot be used as an argument for being “color-blind.” Also, by visually superimposing the concepts of “same” and “different” on each other, “same” and “different” are not used as binaries or opposites. Instead, teacher educators can use both words to create more “nuanced portraits” of people’s identities (Moss, 2003). I suggest that we assist students in “unpacking” these words so as to make certain our conversations about diversity and people are coherent.

**Theme 3: Cultural Identities as Significant-Gaining Knowledge about “Within Group” and “Between Group” Cultural Factors**

When we (teacher educators and student teachers) talk about the complexity of culture so as to not make culture a one-dimensional issue, and as we see that “same” and “different” do not need to oppose each other but help explain that complexity, we cannot let that complexity make us “blind” to the significance of each cultural factor. As I wrote about the complexity of culture, I realized that by only talking about “complexity” we can actually “simplify” culture by only viewing the relational (and inter-relational) nature of cultural factors. If teacher educators are proposing that teachers should respond to culture in the classroom or enact “culturally responsive practice,” then we need to understand cultural factors in order to respond appropriately to a child.

There are some cultural patterns of sameness that make us cultural groups (Within Group Sameness). If I only look at “complexity,” I cannot understand “Within Group” Sameness or a specific cultural factor. What does “sameness” within a group such as “female” mean? What is the “sameness” in a Muslim tradition? What does “sameness” within a group such as “White” mean? If a group such as White is the “same,” how can we also be different within that “sameness” (see Figure 6a)? I pose these as questions because I am not certain that there are accurate or fixed answers for how a cultural group is the “same.” However, there must be “sameness” as a Black person (or Black couldn’t be named as a group [Within Group Sameness]), but we cannot assume that all Black people are the “same” (Within Group Difference).

If teacher educators value “culturally responsive practice,” we need to consider ways to talk about “Within Group Sameness” accurately or critically so as to both define and contest what that cultural group of children is and needs in the teaching-learning process (based on their “sameness”). I suggest that in gaining more knowledge about cultural factors and Within-Group
“sameness” (as in how people in this cultural group of “area” are the same), we can talk in ways that help us identify accurate knowledge about group sameness while also finding “difference,” and thus resisting stereotypes.

Susan raised the issue of “choice” and culture. Yes, we may have the power to make choices about some issues in our lives (jobs, school, mates) despite our cultural group affiliations (such as race, ethnicity, and class), but we have no choice in our original identity with those groups, and there are powerful systems that can define and limit our choices, dependent on those cultural identities. I include in this discussion the multiple cultural groups of race, ethnicity, gender, language, family, area or community, nationality, religious, sexuality, and socio-economic cultures because they all matter in the classroom. For example, teacher candidates need knowledge about what makes a racial, ethnic, or socio-economic class identity significant to a child.

Recommendations: Understanding Cultural Factors

There are important educators and writers of diverse cultural identities that have written accounts of the effect that a cultural factor has on one’s identity (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994, 2000; Howard, 1999; Irvine, 2003; McIntosh, 1992; Nieto, 2000a; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Reading about one’s own and others’ socio-cultural identity is a common coursework assignment in diversity studies. I suggest that we could learn much by attempting to discuss and name the “sameness” factors within groups so as to analyze where we can be and can not be accurate in such descriptions. University programs need to create contexts for students to read, view, and talk over time about each of the multiple cultural factors so as to understand how each factor affects a person’s identity and so as to not place an emphasis on one over the other, as in race. Teacher educators also need to communicate that by naming a cultural factor like “race” or “ethnicity,” as an object of study or a cultural factor that should be “understood,” teacher educators are not intending to stereotype or name one factor such as “race” as a sole influence on any person’s identity. I address recommendations for each of the separate cultural factors because of their “diverse” effects on our understanding of culture and diversity.

Race

Pollack (2004) claims that “Race talk matters. All Americans, every day, are reinforcing racial distinctions and racialized thinking by using race labels; but we are also reinforcing racial inequality by refusing to use them” (p. 4). I suggest that it is necessary for teacher educators to assist student interns in developing a more complex understanding of race and the historical and social construction of race so that teachers can know how to talk about race. Race was a primary topic of interest in our conversations. The fact that the student teachers frequently talked about race could have been for many reasons. There was a majority population of African Americans at the school, and these student teachers had not worked in a context where African Americans were the majority. The participants could have talked about race because some of my participants thought that the university’s interest in diversity was mostly about race, meaning African Americans to them, and because they expected that in the city the population would be mostly Black. Most likely, one of the reasons they talked about race, was because race is still an issue between people.

I acknowledge that my participants may have discussed topics about relationships between African American and White people because there are more negative assumptions about African Americans as a race or cultural group in our country. My conversations with Tison and my experiences at the school confirmed this assumption. I will never forget when I heard Christopher, a dark-skinned third grader from Liberia, tell me that his co-learner in our math
lessons, Maria (who was from Honduras), had told him that “in Honduras, we don’t like Black people.” Christopher was so hurt and angry and had lashed out at Maria. He then shared that some boys in his after-school Boys and Girls Club had called him “African bootie.” “Nobody ever call me that in my own country,” he told me, “Everyone was the same.” I told Tison about Maria’s opinion of Black people at lunch, and there were two other African American teachers at the table with us. Tison laughed, but said with some regret and hurt, “We don’t catch a break from nobody do we?” And the other two Black teachers shook their heads back and forth in negative agreement.

These were examples of negative assumptions about an African American identity. If in Honduras they don’t “like Black people,” we all wondered what Maria assumed about three of her five third grade teachers. I was stunned when I heard that a Black child in the after school program had called Christopher (from Africa), “African bootie.” I could not help thinking about what it must feel like to have moved to “the land of the free” from a refugee camp in Liberia with hopes for a new life and then to have such “negative assumptions” expressed in such a way. I wondered if Christopher experienced the negative assumptions about an African American identity only in America.

I have countless stories from my classroom when the children used race labels to tease, offend, or simply identify each other, “Those ‘White girls,’” the three African American friends would playfully say and use a “White girl” - “California” tone of voice when they described what they noticed about a group of White girls on the playground. “I don’t like to see Black people spit,” Brianna said but then recounted when her Black friend got angry at her for the statement. I could see that race mattered in my classroom.

The student teachers had questions and misunderstandings about race as a cultural factor. Faith didn’t understand why she only considered “White” and “Black” as races in the context of inter-racial marriages. Cameron couldn’t figure out how a label could be attached to a child that had Black and White parents. “What encompasses race?” she asked. Susan didn’t think that race mattered at all. She thought that each child is different, but that race never is a part of that difference. She thought that since “race” was only the color of one’s skin, it could not control one’s destiny or choices.

These are examples from my year at Gilmer Park that reminded me that “race mattered” and that confirm what I believed to be true in the larger social arena of our nation. These examples also reveal many of the misconceptions that remain with us about the historical construction of race. Since there continue to be confusing and sometimes negative assumptions about race, I do believe that university programs need to address the construction of race and the reasons for more negative assumptions about race even today. Cameron saw “race” as a significant cultural influence, and Susan saw “race” as skin color only which she didn’t think could matter if you were a fair person. Susan believed she was being fair by not noticing. Cameron knew that to be fair, she had to notice race. I gathered more evidence for myself that confirmed my belief that “being fair” means acknowledging the significance of race and not ignoring its significance.

Future teachers need to have some understanding about what it means to be a member of a “racial” group and how being part of a racial group or having a certain skin color impacts one’s identity. If we do not acknowledge the significance of race, then we do not honor cultural identities. Tison explained to me at the end of the year, that if I hadn’t told her that I knew that race did matter when I had asked to work in her classroom, she might not have agreed to participate in my research with me. When she let me know I was “okay,” I inferred that she
meant that as a White person, I viewed her as different and equal, not equal and the same, and of course, that I appreciated and respected her differences. This was the most important message that they wanted to convey to me all year: Race mattered, and it mattered to the African American teachers that I worked with. It mattered to them that I knew that race mattered. If I had not had this understanding, they would not have trusted me. Universities need to convey to future teachers that race matters - with children, families, and other professionals. It is a cultural identity of primary importance. A guiding question could be, “What is the “same” or “significant” about a racial identity (Within Group Sameness)?”

**Race Matters and History**

As discussed, race matters; Cameron understood; Susan did not. Faith knew that it did, but didn’t necessarily state that race mattered, and Lily experienced the fact that race mattered through her own ethnic and racial identity. As I thought about the juxtaposition of these four perspectives, I developed an insight into one possible approach in making “how race matters” more evident. Susan said that when she heard the African American students in her cohort talk about their life experiences, this did make her wonder, and she said she would “like to know more about that.” Susan realized she really didn’t know what their lives were like. I think this is a critical piece of diversity studies: understanding the simple notion that we must demonstrate how race matters today.

I considered how the student interns used history in their discussions about diversity. Lily and Faith did not mention how the history of the Civil Rights Movement had affected them personally, but Lily did say that she felt passionate about teaching about Jim Crow laws to her Black students. She wanted them to understand what was in their past. For Cameron, understanding the history of the Civil Rights Movement and realizing how recent the events had been, opened her eyes to a better understanding of the power that long-term oppression can have on a people. Cameron also had local “relevant” knowledge through Julia, and she used her new history knowledge to support her beliefs that history affected the present day circumstances of African Americans.

Susan used history to reject the idea that race mattered. First, she could not see how the history of long-term oppression changed a people or how such a history still influences social systems today. She also described her resentment towards the university’s constant “talk” about race and diversity and thought that professors had lived during history and times of change and that the professors didn’t understand that her own generation already assumed that all people were equal. When Susan compared an historical period to today, this comparison made her believe that change had occurred, unequal treatment was in the past, and now it’s time for us to stop talking about the past and start acting like we are equal and the same.

I thought about my own use of “history” in some of the courses I have taught for future teachers. I often choose children’s literature as examples to read in class such as *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998), *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001), *When Marian Sang* (Ryan, 2002), *Martin’s Big Words* (Rappaport, 2001), *My Brother Martin* (Farris, 2003), and *Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995). These are dramatic representations of the historical struggle for “the dream.” I have made these choices because I think the historical context is significant, and that there are many people living today that do not know about specific events and their powerful affect on people’s relationships and perception of reality. (Understanding history did change Cameron’s views.) However, by using these dramatic, child-centered, and emotional texts from a “by-gone” era, I have shown the stark contrast between “the way things were” and “how things are today;” I have demonstrated that our nation is thankfully
beyond such racist notions of the past. I have perhaps used history in a way that helps us avoid the truth of today. None of the student teachers talked about how social systems continue to maintain unequal opportunities today. Teachers need to know about present-day contexts, funding, relationships, opinion, economics, and school systems that create different realities for different people.

**Ethnicity**

Student teachers need more complex understandings and knowledge of diverse ethnic groups and what makes them culturally the same. Although diverse ethnicities were present at Gilmer Park, the participants did not discuss much about the diverse ethnicities that existed there. They all expressed interest in the children’s lives and made remarks about the children’s diverse languages. Susan said she “wished she knew more” and she said she was “fascinated” by considering how some children “could really blend in so well.”

Lily was an example of how her ethnicity was clearly a feature in her identity and how her ethnicity (and class) changed her relationship with African American children (made her “different” from them) despite their racial “sameness.” She did not find much in common with many of her students, despite the racial-connection with her skin color because the “group culture” of many of the students’ attitude towards education was so “different” from hers. Since the ethnic identities in our nation are changing, I propose much of the same kinds of discussion about “ethnicity” as I suggest about “race.” We need to discuss what the “sameness” factors are that make an ethnic group an “identity” and how that identity is significant to that group.

**Recommendations: race and ethnicity.**

Future teachers need some knowledge about the historical and social “construction of race” and the political and sociological issues related to these cultural factors. Why do some people view certain “races” more negatively? Teachers at least need enough knowledge about ethnic and national heritages to “label” children correctly and respectfully so as to see children as more than simply “Asian,” for example or “Hispanic” or “Spanish.” Future teachers need to understand the significant ties between language and ethnicity. I suggest reading specifically about what “race” and “ethnicity” are as cultural factors, so that teachers will have more informed understandings. I would suggest that university programs make some of these tasks very concrete. When a student teacher is working in a field setting, one task should be to research their classroom’s racial and ethnic diversity by learning how to describe the children’s national and language heritages. I never found out what to call Christopher’s form of English from Liberia and regret that I cannot name it accurately. This is something I should have known as his teacher.

Susan said she would like to hear more from her Black friends about their personal experiences and Cameron had learned from talking with Julia. I suggest that teacher educators work to create relationships with people of diverse racial and ethnic identities who are willing to become part of an on-going conversation in seminars to discuss these issues and to share their personal experiences as Tison, Mr. Johnson, and Ms. Jade shared with me. I could not deny that race mattered when I heard their stories. I also heard my participants say that there was discomfort in talking about race issues in their university classes. Teacher educators need to ask student teacher to discuss how they feel about talking about racial issues while talking about racial issues.
Recommendations: history and today.

Susan said that we should quit talking about what happened long ago. Perhaps she is partly right. History may both help and hurt our attempts to see how race matters. Future teachers should have historical content knowledge about how cultural factors have been significant throughout history (Civil Rights, Holocaust, Japanese). At the same time, teacher educators need to engage student teachers in debates and more critical understandings of present day systems that marginalize people. We need to find books about today that make unequal circumstances for people apparent. Students should read or view videos about current events that have racial, ethnic, language, religious, family, area or community, and socio-economic origins. Some examples are: the diverse responses to the Rodney King trial, news articles about vandalism at local Black churches which occurred in Oakland (race), news stories about families from the Middle East who have suffered persecution in the U. S. (ethnicity), the events surrounding the killing of Matthew Wayne Shepard (sexual orientation), Anna Deveare Smith’s study of the 1991 Crown Heights race riots in *Fires in the Mirror* (Wolfe, 1993) (race and religion), a court hearing about the adoption of a child by two gay women and video of elementary school discussion about homosexuality (family), the book, *Nickel and Dimed* (Erenreich, 2001), or a seminar on socio-economic class (Payne, 1995). The seminar on socio-economic class that my participants attended was one of the university-sponsored events that the student teachers referred to the most as having changed their perspectives on people who were different from themselves.

Future teachers need to understand that these events represent beliefs about differences between people, and that such beliefs find their way into the classroom. Teachers need to realize that their task is to create opportunities for all children, to treat all children fairly regardless of their socio-cultural identity, and to create contexts that encourage such an understanding by their students.

Language

Cameron said several times that she wished she knew more about teaching her children who were learning English and spoke about how she felt perplexed about insisting that the boys in her classroom who spoke Spanish must only speak in English because of their questionable conversations when they spoke in Spanish. Susan said she wished she knew more and was “fascinated” by the children who were new to the country and learning English. Lily told me she really tried to find ways to help her students that were English Language Learners during her math instruction. All teacher candidates should have a beginner’s knowledge of how to assist English Language Learners in the classroom. A related topic is the consideration of how a teacher uses or rejects a child’s home literacy in the attempt to teach standard forms of language and literacy. None of the student teachers talked about the differences between the children’s home language (which ranged from Standard English to a White Southern Dialect to African American English) and Standard forms of English used or promoted in public education.

Recommendations: language.

Universities should provide contexts for future teachers to consider concrete suggestions and understandings about teaching children with other languages. Each of the student teachers mentioned the students who were learning English and were interested and concerned in their welfare. There are many well-developed texts and articles on assisting children who speak a language other than English that would serve as texts or resources for student interns. A seminar on teaching strategies for children who are learning English, conducted by an ELL specialist, would help future teachers while they are immersed in their field work and teaching specific children and content.
In addition to gaining knowledge about teaching strategies, future teachers need to understand the role of language in a person’s identity formation. Future teachers should have some acquaintance with the notion that people think differently based on their home language and that a child’s home language can be a factor that makes us “different.” Student teachers also need to discuss the tensions between using and accepting African American English (AAE) in the classroom and Lisa Delpit’s (1995) proposition that Black children’s language should be accepted, but they must learn Standard English because this form of English is the language of power. This topic is one of broader social interest in our nation as citizens consider how or if speaking English makes one an American.

Religion

Religion is a cultural factor that creates “sameness” and “difference” between groups and people. While we profess “separation of church and state,” the truth is that religious issues arise within schools, and teachers need to be prepared, knowledgeable, and respectful about diverse religious perspectives. Religious talk occurs in schools. I heard children and teachers talking with each other about events at their churches, a group of teachers met for prayer early in the morning, and I also heard a teacher in my school question a child about his religious beliefs. Religion was a sub-text in some of the student teachers’ conversations and explanations.

Cameron said that religion could be a factor in culture. Faith used religion to explain her beliefs about race, inter-racial marriage, and family. (I have inferred “family” because I understand her religious background and assume that she made judgments about the “families of divorce” based on her religious ideology.) Susan said that she believed people had “choice” because she had made a choice to go against the social pressure from her classmates to align herself with an accepted religious ideology. If Susan said that “the kids” at school thought she was different because she wasn’t a Christian, we need to realize that teachers may have some responsibility to negotiate such talk between children.

If we consider immigration and the future of globalization, future teachers need to look beyond their own religious understandings. Ecks (2001) states that our nation has become the “most religiously diverse nation on earth.” Because of recent acts of terror, some religious groups have acquired very negative stereotyped identities in our country. Unfamiliar religious ideologies should be one of our next topics for democratic discussion about equality, justice, and oppression. Susan made this point when she told me that concerns about the Civil Rights Movement were outdated and that today’s controversial issues were “religion and sexuality.”

Recommendations: religion.

Many people use religious ideology to inform their beliefs about social systems and people. The examples of how religion is evident in schools from my year at Gilmer Park demonstrate that teacher educators need to create a context for dialogue about the effects of religious-culture on our assumptions about other people. One difficult issue is that we must discover how to have such conversations about religious ideology without endangering our constitutional beliefs about the separation of church and state. Teacher educators could include the cultural factor of religion in the discourse about the complexity of culture and a person’s socio-cultural identity. I suggest that universities require students in an education program to enroll in general education course on cultural anthropology or comparative religions that would address culture and specific cultural factors and the impact of religion on worldview (and other “Features of Culture” as outlined in Theme 1).
Family

A family unit acts as its own cultural unit by creating a set of relationships between race, ethnicity, class, religion, and language and a particular group of people or family. Each family enacts cultural factors differently and helps support an individual’s identity formation. Therefore, I name “family” as a cultural factor. As I described in the four case studies, all of the student teachers talked about the children’s families and the families’ influence on their school success; however, my participants had very little in-depth contact with any of the parents. These assumptions were based on homework that the children did or did not bring back to school, notes that the teachers sent home to parents and if the parents responded, and whether parents attended PTA or parent-teacher conferences. I suggest that university educators encourage student teachers to examine the assumptions they make without any concrete knowledge about a family. We must discuss how there are other ways that families can demonstrate that they “value education” and that a parent’s response to school (or non-response) can have many different causes.

Susan, Faith, and Lily all said that they wished they could have known more about the children’s families, but I continued to hear them make judgments about the families’ lives. Susan thought that all of the family structures at the school were similar and were mostly one-parent homes. Faith thought there was a wide variety of family structures, and she named some of the ones with which she was familiar. She seemed worried about “families of divorce” and considered them different from her because she was “lucky” to have parents who had remained married.

Recommendations: family.

During coursework for future teachers, university students should engage in reading, discussing, and viewing topics related to family and marriage that address traditional and non-traditional forms of family so as to present all forms of family as “traditional” and acceptable. Teachers need to develop productive relationships with “families.” I make suggestions about relating to families in a later section entitled Theme 5: “The Effects of Cultural Identity on Relationships: Relationships with Families.”

Area or Community Culture

Each area of our country has a cultural identity. As I discussed in the section entitled, “Complex Understandings of Culture and Diversity,” universities should prepare student teachers for work in specific communities and address how teaching and learning in that community might be affected by the cultural context. At the same time, university programs should equally address the issue that a factor like “area” or “community,” while significant, is not a controlling factor. Several of my participants said that they wished they had known more about the community. They knew it was a significant factor, but they didn’t have time to gain a deeper understanding of the context.

Recommendations: area or community culture.

In the previous section entitled “Complex Understandings of Culture and Diversity,” I recommended several ways in which student teachers can learn about a school community. These include a seminar on the school community prior to their first days in the school and a driving tour of the particular school’s district. The focus of these tasks would be to have a deeper understanding of the community and to be able to talk about “sameness” and “difference” within the area. Some teacher educators require that student teachers participate in school-community projects or social justice action projects. Immersion into the community through social action
projects, along with an opportunity to talk about the project’s influence on the student teachers’ perceptions, would encourage more than a facile understanding of a community’s culture.

**National Culture**

My students did not discuss nationality or national culture except for when they talked about the students who were learning English and who had immigrated from another country. I include “national culture” because I think that national culture is a factor in cultural identities. A person’s nationality is often tied to ethnicity and “Features of Culture,” as in how we view “concepts of self,” “language,” and “time.” These features of culture are examples of characteristics that can be influenced by a national identity. Maria knew herself as Honduran and Christopher knew himself as Liberian. Teachers should have some notion of what such a national identity includes.

In social or educational foundations courses, future teachers examine the role of education to prepare “future Americans.” Cameron told me that she didn’t think that people had to “assimilate” to be American, that she didn’t want to expect each child to be a “cookie cutter” child, and that it was okay for an immigrant family to live in America and still love their own native country. This perspective may be an unusual outlook for most beginning teachers, but a perspective that would welcome any family into a classroom. Teachers are entrusted with the job of “shaping the future,” and how we construct “American” can often be different; therefore, we need to continually consider what it means to “be American.”

**Recommendations: National Culture**

Often there are agencies that assist families as they immigrate or come into the United States as refugees. Such an agency could be a vital resource for future teachers in learning about a child’s national heritage and identity. Teacher educators should invite knowledgeable representatives to explain a child’s heritage and homeland so as to acquaint a teacher with a child’s prior experiences and cultural features.

During student teaching field work, teacher educators must return to the sociological questions that are often asked in educational foundation courses: What are public schools’ goals?” “How will we prepare students as citizens?” “What does it mean to be an American citizen?” Future teachers need to discuss what makes Americans the “same” and discuss the difficulties in being “different” while being the “same” as citizens. I suggest that we continue to raise those questions while students are in their field placements because it is in these concrete contexts that our ideologies get “played out” in the classroom through decisions about or relationships with children and families. We should not have a dividing line in our course work about when such questions are asked. We need to ask them over and over again so that student teachers understand their role in “shaping our future” and how their socio-cultural identity will affect their decisions about making “Americans.” Student teachers need to consider all the ways in which we can “be Americans.” For example, student teachers need to consider how we treat children’s home languages in the classroom. Student teachers need to engage in discussion about what it means to “value education” and the multiple ways this “value” could be demonstrated by parents.

**Socio-Economic Class and Culture**

Each of the student teachers talked about socio-economic class and seemed to see the significance of socio-economic class as a factor in the children’s lives. The student teachers often compared the socio-economic classes of the children at Gilmer Park with their children in their school from the previous semester. Lily and Faith both admitted having difficulty in identifying
to what class a child might be related because the children’s appearance was not obviously “classed.” They each mentioned the seminar on socio-economic class that they had attended during their student teaching semester and shared their understandings with me. This seminar seemed to give the student teachers knowledge about class factors, and this knowledge seemed to give them a comfort level to talk about socio-economic class. Class is also a concept with which they each have every day experience.

One of the most difficult issues for the participants to understand seemed to be the participants’ perception that the children’s families didn’t value education. Whether the families had a different set of values is debatable, but the student teachers discussed repeatedly that the families didn’t value education, and they considered the families disinterest in education to be related to the culture of the school and community. This interpretation (or its reality) could be related to social class (or may have been more related to family patterns of communication with the school or a parent’s need to work). I never heard the participants attach the lack of value of education to a particular race. Cameron’s insight, with which none of the other participants agreed, was that there were people who didn’t have the same values as she did, that these values could be equally “normal,” and that difference in socio-economic class created different understandings of “reality” or a different worldview.

**Recommendations: socio-economic class and culture.**

Universities must help student teachers understand social stratification, the effects of socio-economic class on cultural identity, and “sameness” and “difference” within socio-economic groups so as to understand the commonalities of a “class” group while not stereotyping a person based on “class.” Continued discussions should occur during fieldwork so as to discuss the concrete representations of class and descriptions of “sameness” and “difference” in a particular school.

I suggest coursework and seminars on the issues related to socio-economic class and for student teachers to read a text such as *Nickel and Dimed* (Erenreich, 2001) (or view the play) to understand how socio-economic class does affect one’s reality and how cultural factors change the choices a person might be able to make or want to make. Additionally, future teachers should specifically read about or participate in social action projects that are related to poverty and/or homelessness, so as to acquaint future teachers with the realities of how a socio-economic class can affect a child.

**Popular Culture: Child-Talk about Sex and Drugs**

I include the cultural factor of “popular culture,” although I acknowledge that it is not addressed in most multicultural texts. I do not see “popular culture” as a cultural group; however, popular culture affects our behavior, language, worldview, and other significant features of our socio-cultural identity. The student teachers and I had many conversations about issues related to how “popular culture” influenced the children’s interests and behavior. I address the two primary topics that we raised about the children’s interests: sex and drugs.

Many discussions about diversity and education include biases regarding gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual identity. Issues related to gender and sexuality were not a focus of this study. However, the student teachers were shocked at the kinds of stories that the children told them about sex and drugs. They wondered how to respond to the children. The children’s talk was sometimes about their own sexual identity, sex acts, or judgments about others’ sexual identity. The children were negotiating their understanding of sex and gender with each other and using the talk to sometimes relate to or taunt other children.
In education, some people think that discussing such topics is “off-limits” for the elementary classroom. However, these topics are not “off-limits” in the children’s conversations. The stories from the student teachers’ experiences included: the fifth grade boys who spoke Spanish and talked about Cameron inappropriately (Cameron’s story); the third grade boy who was a “lady’s man” (Susan’s shock at their “maturity with love”); the girl who had decided to wait to have “her baby” (Faith’s story); and the children “having sex talk” at the lunch table (Lily’s question, “Am I going to have to deal with this kind of stuff?”). I had my own experiences with being surprised about my third graders’ knowledge or discussion about sex: Diane’s descriptions of the prostitutes in her video games; the sketch that Tison and I found of a man that was drawn with anatomical sexual accuracy and emphasis in a third grade girl’s desk; children talking about “licking the lollipop” on the school bus; Paulo telling the class that he watched “those dirty movies” with his older brother; Sidell calling Flutura “gay”; Diane wanting to have “woo-woo” with Sidell. I also had to file a report about a male third grade student who touched me inappropriately (who had previously touched another teacher inappropriately and then been transferred to our classroom). Talking and thinking about sex was evident in the school.

Although I do not think that “sex” is a cultural factor, I found in my research that being prepared to talk to children about “sex,” would have been an important “skill” for new teachers when we consider the role of “popular culture” in increasing children’s social knowledge about sex. I am not saying that since this was a “multicultural” or “city” setting that the children talked more about “sex” than a small town or suburban school. From my own experience, my oldest son came home from a mostly White first grade classroom in our own small university town twenty years ago and repeated one of the most vivid sexual images I have ever heard. I am not assuming that a school in a lower socio-economic area than my own, with diverse families would necessarily “have sex talk” at the lunch table more than my own child’s lunch table. I am asserting that all teachers need to be prepared to talk about sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation with children in all schools because of the role of “popular culture” in our nation. Future teachers also need to consider their own biases in the matter.

A second “popular culture” topic is that of drugs. I was surprised to see thirteen of our eighteen third graders raise their hand in our classroom when their teacher asked the children about their prior knowledge about drugs. (This event occurred during drug awareness week.) In another example, during a word study lesson, my third graders and I were studying the vowel combination of “oi.” The selected word was “joint,” and the children clearly “shot glances” across the room at each other in response to the word. This was a response that showed that they had knowledge of “joint” in a context other than a joint of an arm or leg. One third grade girl told us about what happened in her home when the police came and took her father to jail because he had some of that “white stuff” on the kitchen table. There is drug talk in school, too, and I imagine drug talk could happen in the lunch room and playground just as the sex talk occurred.

Recommendations: popular culture and child-talk.

This kind of “child-talk” happened on a regular basis in the school. I believe that universities need to consider how to prepare future teachers for this dialogue about sex and drugs with young children. Generally we send new teachers out to classrooms when they are 21-22-23 years old. These young adults are entrusted with negotiating such dialogue with “other people’s children,” and will do so “on the fly” as they try to simply guess about what to say to children about “woo woo.” A college degree does not ensure having adequate preparation or knowledge base for dialogue about sex with children.
Often I hear adults of all ages express dismay that children know this information and think that movies, TV, and the Internet are sources of such knowledge. This could be true. Since a teacher does not have control over “popular culture” sources, teachers need to consider how they will talk to children about the topics that children raise in the classroom.

I recommend preparing all teachers for dialogue with children about gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and drugs. In Gilmer Park, a police “resource officer” provides in-school discussions about not “doing drugs;” however, I believe that children find their own contexts for using talk about popular cultural topics. We should have honest talk in our university programs about “appropriate” responses to children’s questions and relationships at school, especially as they work with diverse cultural groups. We need to discuss who decides what is “appropriate” talk about sexuality. How would the families in this cultural community prefer for a teacher to discuss “sex” with their children?

I suggest that the university plan a series of seminars that gives students information about how to talk to children about drugs and sexual matters. Seminars should be conducted by professionals such as a nurse, pediatric nurse practitioner, guidance counselor, social worker or other community resource who has a relationship with the school and knowledge about pertinent issues. Social workers or guidance counselors would have suggestions about talking to children about difficult topics and the community’s cultural beliefs about child-rearing. Student teachers should have the opportunity to role play actual possible conversations and teacher responses that would be appropriate.

Theme 4: Understanding Cultural Identities: Tension between Stereotypes and Cultural Knowledge

There is tension between gaining knowledge about people (accurate cultural assumptions about Within Group Sameness) and the possibility of understanding a cultural group stereotypically or making inaccurate or negative assumptions about Within Group Sameness. As stated, I suggest that in gaining more knowledge about cultural factors and Within-Group “sameness,” we can identify knowledge about group “sameness” and “difference” which would thus resist understanding a group or child stereotypically.

The participants expressed this tension between wanting to use what they thought they had learned about the children at Gilmer Park and not wanting to stereotype people based on that “cultural” knowledge. In my own student teaching experience, I felt perplexed and somewhat guilty when I first recognized that my notes about “attitudes” were almost all about Black girls. When I approached Tison, and she said that it was “kind of” true that Black girls “got attitudes,” I didn’t want to agree, and we then identified Black girls in our third grade who didn’t “get attitudes.” Faith said she didn’t want to stereotype the city school by saying that the children’s parents were drug dealers or living in poverty because they lived in the city, but sometimes those were facts that could support that stereotype of the city (“it does fit the mold”). Susan thought that generally a Black interaction style was more “heated,” and a White interaction style was more “calm,” but she viewed the children’s behavior as representing points along a spectrum between those two adjectives. Lily thought that Black families told their children that hitting was acceptable and then knew that a White child was more like a Black person because the White child also thought hitting was acceptable.

When teacher educators talk about culturally responsive practice or pedagogy, these words (culturally responsive) suggest that we expect student teachers to respond to a child’s culture. A student teacher must see “difference” between cultural groups and “sameness” within a cultural group so as to respond to those cultural factors appropriately in the classroom.
However, when teachers compare people and consider them as the “same,” we can become “caught” in this act of either understanding a cultural group accurately or inaccurately as in when we stereotype a group of people and say they are all alike in some way when this is not a fact or relevant.

I created another visual map, based on Figure 4, of the tension that occurs when we attempt to understand “sameness” within a cultural group. When we believe that we know how a cultural group is alike, we need to also consider if we have made accurate or inaccurate assumptions about a cultural group. See Figure 7.

![Figure 7. Within group comparisons.](image)

**Recommendations:** The tension between accurate and inaccurate understandings about cultural groups.

Teacher educators need to draw student teachers’ attention towards recognizing and identifying this tension that arises when we attempt to understand a cultural group. We need to discuss before and during field work how we can know if we have identified an “accurate” cultural factor or an “inaccurate” stereotype as I did with Tison.

A specific concrete example from the participants’ stories was the student teachers’ “knowledge” (accurate or inaccurate) that they needed to be “strict” and “stern” in “the city.”
Each of the student teachers had developed a related notion that they would need to interact differently with the children based on the cultural factor of “area” or “city.” (I wondered sometimes if they thought this because the school was primarily African American, but none of them stated this idea.) These student teachers needed to have conversations about whether this assumption was accurate or inaccurate. They needed to discuss if the assumption was based on concrete evidence, here-say from the previous student teachers, or a popular culture movie such as Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer, [Producer], 1995). They should discuss if there are writers and teachers that support this premise about working with children in the city. Conversations in seminars about specific cultural “knowledge,” such as the need to be “stern” and “strict” and the meanings of “stern” and “strict,” could also lead to conversations about how we can determine the accuracy of this “knowledge” or assumption. Teacher educators and student teachers need to talk about how to determine if an observed difference between people or groups is a cultural pattern or if an observed difference in people is a misguided stereotypical observation. These suggestions are queries to which there are not necessarily accurate answers. There will never be an “answer” to whether Black boys are the more “heated.” The point is that we need to draw attention to this tension between “stereotypes” and being “culturally responsive” and have conversations that help us see when we are accurately and inaccurately responding to children in classrooms.

Some of my participants told me that they had completed a course assignment prior to their field work where they had to identify a stereotype that they had about a person or group of people and then uncover the assumptions related to that stereotype. This sort of task could be continued in seminars that are connected to their fieldwork by using their observations of children and families and working together to understand how our biases continue to affect our understanding of cultural differences. The example that I outlined about being “stern” and “strict” is a specific example of a question that would come directly from experiences in a school that are important assumptions to examine before we send student teachers into classrooms of their own when they may enact “stern” and “strict” inappropriately.

Theme 5: Cultural Identities: Effects on the Social Construction of “Realities” and “Normal”

Susan, in her last e-mail, had a “smack yourself in the head” moment when she realized that when she had spoken with me in her final interview, she had made judgments about whether children were “socially appropriate,” based on her own standards for socially appropriate. This was a significant change in perception for Susan. Cameron had an epiphany and realized that her “normal” was not everyone else’s “normal” and that other groups had “different realities.” She developed this perspective through her friendship with Julia and in learning more about socio-economic class culture that was different from her own.

I related to Cameron’s epiphany because I could remember a moment in one of my graduate classes when I realized that “normal” had been defined by White culture, and then I considered what it might be like to be a member of a different cultural group and always be compared to White standards. “Why?” I asked myself, “Should someone be required to compare themselves to someone like me for standards for their own life? Why aren’t others’ lives equally “normal?” This epiphany for me, along with continued reading on diversity, led me to this study and research. Universities need to assist teachers in considering why “White” is considered normal and what this issue says about power in today’s world.

A culturally responsive teacher’s task is to look at “diverse” cultural patterns or norms and add these cultural or family patterns to a constellation of possible normal patterns of behavior and values. I noticed that many times, when my participants talked about their
observations of the children and families, they compared and judged what the children or families did based on the student teachers’ own family experiences. Comparing a new event with something we’ve already experienced is a common learning process. First, we see a new event or idea, we return in our head to a similar event that we know from our own experiences, and we then compare the new schema or “knowledge” to the old schema or “knowledge.” Their comparisons became a window for me on their own auto-ethnographic journey as they considered their socio-cultural values in comparison to other socio-cultural values.

Teacher educators must create contexts for student teachers to consider that cultural identity is a system of seeing the world and a “way of being” that are equally “socially appropriate” and “normal” (and not just hair, food, or holidays). An understanding that there are multiple ways to be “normal” will assist teachers in becoming people who do not judge other family patterns in relation to their own. If a future teacher understands the complexity of culture, he or she can see that multiple worlds or “realities” exist within the complexity of Figure 6 and that there are multiple “normals” based on ethnic, racial, family, religious, and social class world views.

Recommendations: realities and normal.

If teachers are “shaping the future,” then they need to be knowledgeable about how culture shapes our understandings of “reality” and “normal.” In the process of looking at specific cultural factors (as in Theme 3), student teachers can better visualize how a person can view the world differently based on the person’s cultural identity. Student teachers should also read, study, and talk about issues related to hegemony and the unspoken assumptions of White power and privilege and the effects of White privilege on a global society. Studying “white privilege” is one common feature of many multicultural teacher education programs. I add this suggestion simply to agree with and re-emphasize this important topic of study.

Since people often first compare someone’s behavior and values to their own as they attempt to understand or judge another’s behavior and values (or to make assumptions about Within and Between Group Sameness), teacher educators should reveal this practice to student teachers. Student teachers should be asked to critique this way of thinking and to develop other ways to talk and think about other family patterns, rather than simply compare family patterns to their own family experiences. Teacher educators could highlight the unfairness of expecting all people to behave in certain ways by asking questions such as:

- How did my family promote school and education? Why?
- For what reasons might a family not participate in school activities such as PTA, parent teacher conferences, and homework assistance?
- For what reasons would a family not promote education?
- What are other ways that families support education besides attendance at school functions?

If we reveal this way of comparing and judging others, we can work to accept other family realities as normal.

Theme 6: The Effects of Cultural Identity on Relationships

A cultural identity isn’t just the way we look or what we do, as some of my participants thought, it is also a way to think or a particular way to see the world, this different “reality.” Since diverse cultural identities have “different realities,” these multiple perspectives have an effect on the way in which we interact with people. In other words, our cultural identity affects our relationships Within Groups and Between Groups. Our cultural identities also cause us to make judgments about each other.
I collected numerous stories about people in the school that revealed that a person’s cultural identity affected their relationships at school. Faith was worried before she came to Gilmer Park about whether she would be accepted. Susan wondered whether a child’s interactions with her were related to if the child was Black or White. Lily admitted that her cultural identity caused connections and disconnections with her Black students and friends. I wondered if my White identity influenced a child to not respond to me. One White mom told Tison that she was glad that her daughter had a “strong Black teacher.” Ms. Jade asked Tison if I was “okay” because I was White, and she needed to know if I could be trusted as a colleague and friend.

Cameron wondered what the African American teachers at the school thought about her and hoped they didn’t think she was a “stereotypical White person.” Cameron was sensitive to her relationships with other people because she realized that people who were different from her had other “realities.” Her acknowledgement of alternate “realities” based on a cultural identity caused her to be more sensitive to the way in which she related to and was viewed by others.

Universities need to help future teachers consider how they will relate to children, families, and professionals with cultural identities different from their own and how “others” will view teachers based on different cultural identities. This is a subtext or premise of teacher education that is not always expressed explicitly. Field work in diverse settings is planned for student teachers so that they gain experience working with and being with “others,” but teacher educators do not always discuss, “How will we relate? What skills or understandings do we need to be able to relate differently?”

**Recommendations**

Teacher educators and students should talk about the cultural connections and disconnections that we have with our students, families, and other professionals before and during our fieldwork, and we should promote sensitivity to relationships with the people with whom we teach and work. I suggest that teacher educators emphasize the significance of relationships in school and outline or discuss recommendations for developing relationships with people who are different from themselves.

Personal experience with a different “reality” or hearing about personal experience with a “different reality” is often essential in understanding how to relate to someone who has a “different reality.” Cameron and I both had experiences with cultural translators who helped us develop relationships with people who are “different” from us. It is not likely that a university could assign a “cultural translator” for each student teacher as they attempt to learn how to relate to other cultural groups. Instead, one strategy for teacher educators could be to read novels or view movies that create “different realities” or tell a story from a “different reality.” An educational text, novel, or movie can tell a story from a “different reality” and thus show how other cultural groups see reality and determine “acceptable” (as in Theme 5). Student teachers should read books such as *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1999), *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (Paley, 1997), *Other People’s Words* (Purcell-Gates, 1995), *White Teacher* (Paley, 1989), *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982), or *Snow Falling on Cedars* (Guterson, 1994). Stories that have “voice” can tell an audience about people’s lives in ways that many textbooks cannot relate. I recommend that teacher educators also ask “cultural translators” for recommendations for novels, autobiographies, and movies that represent a cultural viewpoint accurately. Specific suggestions for developing positive relationships with families, children, colleagues, and curricular content are included in the following subsections.


*Relationships with Families*

Family is a significant cultural factor because culture is enacted differently within each family unit. Student teachers should consider the multiple ways that families are family units and how those family units are “regular” or “normal” to the children that they teach. University programs need to help future teachers as they observe the culture of the family and discuss how easy it is to compare our own family experiences with others’ family experiences in attempting to understand people different from ourselves. Teachers should protect children’s lives from being compared to other “norms” or cultural “standards,” just as Susan should not have been judged by her childhood classmates based on her or her family’s “different” religious ideology.

A relationship with a family is critical, both in how it engenders a parent’s trust in the teacher’s judgment and in how it helps the teacher understand the culture of each particular family. However, student teachers generally have very few options for relating to parents during their one semester in a classroom. At the same time, teacher education programs assess student teachers’ attempts at building relationships with the community, families, colleagues, and children through final evaluation forms.

Recommendations: relationships with families.

Since developing relationships with families is an important professional goal, and teacher educators evaluate student teachers’ success in developing relationships, teacher educators should develop concrete ways to read about and discuss relationship building with teacher candidates before and during the student teaching semester. Seminars should include discussions about how student teachers’ cultural identities will affect their relationships with families by examining how they might be alike and different from one another. By discussing previous themes (such as different “realities” and “normals”), student teachers should develop more sensitivity to “other” ways of being. Student teachers need to understand how important it is to be responsive to parents based on their cultural knowledge and consider if their children’s families will interpret them as “okay” and trustworthy. Teacher educators could require that student teachers develop a Relationship Plan during their student teaching semester so as to emphasize the importance of developing relationships with families as well as with other people (children and colleagues).

The participants sometimes referred to the children’s homes as “chaos.” Teacher educators need to help future teachers view families in non-stereotypical ways and analyze words like “chaos” to examine what that word means and implies about a family. Student teachers should examine the “evidence” they have for making statements about families and consider if they should develop a generalized judgment about a child’s “home life” based on a child’s behavior in school.

Student teachers should be expected to participate (when possible) in school festivals or weekend events that include the children’s families. Some schools provide clothing and school supply “fairs” to assist families in obtaining necessary resources for the school year. This would be an excellent volunteer project in which student teachers could become familiar with the community and families.

University coursework and seminars should be planned for a time when schools are less likely to have parent-teacher association meetings so that student teachers can attend those meetings. Student teachers should participate in parent-teacher conferences and should prepare a parent-teacher conference presentation (role-play) on at least one particular child during the seminar. Student teachers should simulate this conference with a student teacher colleague so as to discuss and practice appropriate formats and language for relating to parents. Student teachers
could consider other forms of parent-teacher conferences for families that cannot attend, such as creating a written conference packet or a video of the student teacher’s oral presentation of a conference report, both of which could be sent home.

University professors should plan to include parents in seminar discussions on topics such as: “How I can tell that my child’s teacher cares about my child;” “Communication tools that my child’s teacher has used that were helpful;” “Understanding the Community Culture;” and “Talking to Children about Difficult Topics (sex and drugs).” By including parents in this dialogue, future teachers can learn how to be responsive to the culture of the community.

Student teachers should develop ways to connect with and relate to individual families on a regular basis. As many teacher education programs require, student teachers should be expected to create a letter of self-introduction to families and a classroom newsletter. If their classroom uses a weekly take-home folder with school and community information, student teachers should assume responsibility for communicating with parents through this vehicle. Student teachers should spend time in seminars or coursework looking at the purpose and content of Weekly Take-home folders and classroom newsletters and look at them from a parent’s perspective.

The analysis of “Homework and Behavior” demonstrated that student teachers used this piece of paper to make judgments about families without much concrete evidence from the parents’ words that supported the participants’ claims. Homework is also a daily example of a paper that finds its way from school to home and through which parents could make judgments about a school and the teacher. Student teachers need to carefully examine the sets of papers that schools send home and imagine how a family from a diverse culture might view those communication tools. Teacher educators should help student teachers consider what this piece of paper conveys to a family as a representation of “school.”

A seminar during fieldwork should address issues related to concrete school processes such as homework. I suggest that as student teachers are learning about curriculum design and lesson planning, teacher educators should include a study of homework policies and procedures as a primary daily connection between school and home. The lesson plan should include a description of the “homework” that could be related to the lesson and its purposes. Discussing how this concrete process conveys messages about the teacher, school, and the parents should be an integral part of this study. Student teachers can share examples of homework policies that they have experienced themselves or are observing in school by bringing in examples of assigned homework. Future teachers should consider what other forms of homework papers might be more representative of the teaching and learning process. In a seminar of this type, student teachers could discuss and hear about alternative forms of homework and homework policies that might be culturally responsive to particular communities and family needs.

Relationships with Children

Whether children learn in a classroom or not is directly related to the relationship a teacher and child have with one another. This is a primary teacher’s task: to create a positive relationship with each child. A second primary task is to assist their children in developing positive relationships with one another, so as to create a classroom environment that is supportive of learning and of being together as people.

Since relationships are affected by our cultural identity, student teachers should consider how they view their children and how their children view their teachers based on this cultural identity. Did Susan ever consider that some of the children might not like her because of her White identity? After all, Susan did believe there were White and Black racists in the world. Lily
did consider this complicated question based on her socio-cultural views and found both
correlations and disconnections with the children and talked about this issue. I think that our
discussions about classroom management needs to center on the concept of creating positive
relationships with our children, and how creating a classroom environment should be more than
the rules and consequences and wall charts that we might establish. Although establishing
classroom routines are an important element of stable and productive classroom relationships,
the relationship should be the focus.

My participants did make assumptions about the children’s behavior, sometimes based on
race and class. Lily said she thought that Black children believed that hitting was an acceptable
measure of settling disputes. Cameron and Faith said the children at the school thought that
hitting was acceptable. Susan said that Black children’s behavior was generally the more
“heated” and White children’s behavior was generally the more “calm,” before she rethought her
ideas about “socially appropriate.” Tison told me that having an “attitude” is sometimes
associated with Black girls. Several of my participants were worried about the city children’s
attitude towards school. Teacher educators need to talk with student teachers about how to
understand and relate to children with unfamiliar behaviors and interactions. We need to build
better relationships by addressing the tension in making stereotypical assumptions about people
when we’re trying to understand what “culturally responsive” means as in Theme 4.

Teachers use their relationships with children as they guide the teaching-learning process.
It is likely that children will respond more positively to our behavioral expectations if they
respect us and have this positive relationship with the teacher. At the same time, teachers cannot
necessarily alter who they are as cultural people in trying to relate to someone who is “different.”
Tison was clear with me and told me I should not try to talk like the Black children. She
said that talking like someone else would be fake and that she had witnessed a White teacher
attempting to talk differently, and the children knew it wasn’t authentic. My third graders
laughed at me once when I tried to “rap,” when I used “rap” as an example of “rhyming” and
“word structure” during one of my word study lessons (and my feeble attempt to be “culturally
responsive”). This became a common joke among the children and me (some of them literally
rolled on the floor), and we loved to remember that infamous day. But my attempt to connect
with my children by inaccurately using one of their cultural language forms is a reminder that
teachers need to be authentically themselves while they try to interact with people who are
different from themselves. (Thankfully, my children had, and I had, a sense of humor, and they
included this suggestion to me in their good-bye message and recommendations to me at the end
of the year, “Don’t Rap!”)

As discussed in Theme 4 through the topic of stereotypes and cultural knowledge, the
student teachers seemed to all think that they were going to need to be more “stern” and “strict”
with these city children. This is also a “relational” issue. How we interact with children is a
primary tool to relationship building. When the student teachers talked about “stern” or “strict,”
they mentioned sources like Delpit (1995), recommendations from the student teachers who had
been in the city schools the previous semester, their own observations of the teachers in the
school, or their impressions from watching Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer, [Producer], 1995).
One other student teacher mentioned that she had read “something” that she thought had said she
would need to be “a little bit strict” in a city school and that the school would have to have more
“structure.” If this idea has such significance in student teachers’ perceptions, teacher educators
need to address this assumption in a straightforward manner. Otherwise, this commonly held
assumption becomes true and naturalized as related to the “city.”
Susan also said that while she thought she was going to need to be “stern” and “strict,” this whole notion was not an idea that the university would have promoted, according to the discussions and texts that they had used in their university seminars on classroom management. It seemed that Susan discounted what she had learned in her university seminars on classroom management as relevant to this setting since “stern” and “strict” was the assumed model for classroom management in the “city.” Faith said that she had tried strategies that had worked in other places to no avail. Teacher educators should help student teachers translate or transfer a possible “White middle-class” form of classroom management that student teachers read about in a text like *Teaching Children to Care* (Charney, 2002) to how this management approach might look in a “diverse” context.

Cultural identities matter between the children’s relationships whether we recognize it or not. As we talk about our cultural identities as teachers, this may help us learn how to talk with children about our how they view each other in the classroom. Relationships between children should be another focus as student teachers talk about how they create a classroom environment.

I’ll never forget the moment when I was reading *When Marian Sang* (Ryan, 2002) to the class. I was explaining Jim Crow Laws to my nine year olds and how years ago some White people thought that Black people weren’t equal. In the corner of my eye I saw Brianna raise a fist to her chest level and quietly move it up and down in a silent “Yes” or approval of such a view of “others.” From that moment, I knew that her family patterns or views were not positive towards Black culture. (Could I suppose that she was a racist in my classroom?) I watched closely for the remainder of the year to see if she said anything more outwardly to some of the Black children in the room. (She said that she “didn’t like to see Black people spit.” And she wrote on a social studies assignment in Susan’s room that she “had rights because she was White and it’s the law.”) Tison knew about Brianna’s views and just shook her head in response. “I’m telling you,” Tison said with regret. This is an additional story to the others that I have told about the children’s labeling of each other that made me believe, in opposition to Susan’s deduction, that race and identity mattered in the classroom.

**Recommendations: relationships with children.**

Teacher educators and student teachers need to examine together what research says about relationship building and interactions in diverse settings. There are articles that describe culturally responsive behavioral management and relationships in more complex ways than simply being “stern” and “strict.” If “stern” and “strict” are relevant models, teacher educators and student teachers need to examine and talk directly about what “stern” and “strict” mean. Teacher educators and student teachers need to examine classroom management texts and transfer or translate those texts to what is needed in a diverse context.

I suggest that we should find examples (in visual form such as videos) of teacher behavior with “urban” children or children from “diverse” backgrounds, who have other behaviors and interaction styles than White and middle-class, so that student teachers can see positive examples of relationships and interactions in the classroom. Creating relationships and one’s interaction style are concepts that we can read about, but we have to be able to “see” in order to “understand.” Otherwise, we return to models of interaction that we know and have experienced without even considering other ways to interact.

Many of my participants said that they appreciated having the chance to observe the African American teachers in their school, and that they noticed the differences in the way the teachers and children interacted with one another. Susan said she needed, “good models.” There are excellent examples of teaching styles in diverse contexts that would help student teachers
gain a more concrete picture of such teaching styles. Viewing a video of teachers and children with “diverse” interaction styles does not suggest that student teachers should necessarily attempt to mimic the interaction style (according to my experience), but viewing other interaction styles makes other interaction styles not “diverse,” but “normal.”

Discussions about how to develop relationships with children who are different from ourselves would be an important topic. (I will address some overall recommendations about “Talk” in a later section.) However, I suggest that student teachers need to talk about the cultural connections and disconnections they have in their relationships with children during their fieldwork. The discussions should address the way these factors influence the relationships that the student teacher has with the child and how their socio-cultural identities could be in conflict with one another. By making cultural connections and disconnections a topic of conversation, the difficulties become less of a sub-text of the student teachers’ worries. Instead, such discussion makes the relationships with children a pivotal point of teacher candidate “knowledge” and “practice.”

In order to understand the children’s diversity, student teachers should include classroom projects in their Relationship Plan that will focus on relationship building. Such simple projects could be the creation of individual “About Me and My Family” books (for each child) that help children share and talk about their families. A book “About Me” should include topics beyond favorite foods and holidays, and should include activities that the family enjoys doing together. In today’s technological world, there might be school settings in which children could take disposable cameras home to record information about their family that they want to share.

Teacher educators should make time to talk about how to negotiate difficult talk in the classroom with children. Some university programs use a case study approach to develop teacher candidate thinking, and a case study approach would be helpful in considering children’s negative talk about one another in the classroom. It would be important work to discuss and role play what a future teacher should say when a White child says to a Black child in anger, “I’m going to slap the Black off you!” or when a Black girl turns to a White girl and says, “You White girl,” and sarcastically mimics a “White girl’s” tone of voice. I would suggest that university students look at case studies and simulate responses to develop more comfort in guiding children’s understanding of each other. Student teachers should discuss possible teacher responses and what those teacher responses might evoke from the children.

The previous discussion on “Sex and Drugs” in the classroom is also correlated with the topic of relationships between the teacher and child and the children with one another. Knowing how to negotiate how the children talk to each other about sex and sexual relationships is significant when we consider that the children used such talk in relating to each other, either positively (wanting to have “woo woo”) or negatively (labeling someone as “gay”).

Relationships with Colleagues

Some of the participants and I were concerned about how our cultural identity as White influenced our relationships with our colleagues who were African American. I found that our concerns were justified because Tison told me that an African American teacher (Ms. Jade) had asked her if I was “okay.” How we relate to colleagues is important and I include this concern in this overall theme of examining the effects of our cultural identities on our relationships at school.

Recommendations: relationships with colleagues.

As teacher educators create contexts for student teachers to consider and examine their socio-cultural identities, student teachers will become more sensitive to this issue as well.
However, I suggest that teacher educators promote that student teachers discuss this issue openly since it was a topic that the participants raised in our private interviews. Cameron said, “I can’t just come out and say ‘I’m not racist.’” Yet, we need to discuss personal interactions and styles that can communicate an openness to “diverse” “ways of being” and different cultural identities. Finding personal “cultural translators” is not realistic, but teacher educators could develop relationships with teachers in schools who might speak at seminars on such topics as relationships with colleagues.

Relationships with Content

I include “relationship with content” in this discussion of “relationships” because I perceive that a teacher “relates” differently to curriculum content based on the teachers’ socio-cultural identity and may “relate” the curriculum differently to children based on the teachers’ and children’s socio-cultural identities. Cameron, Lily and I all had experiences with teaching subjects or content in which we realized that because of our own cultural identity, we had a different relationship with what we were teaching, or we realized that our audience might respond to the content differently based on their socio-cultural identity. Cameron felt differently about her lesson on the Civil Rights Movement when she “looked into the faces” of her children and realized how differently they might feel about this lesson than if she were teaching it to a White middle-class group. The history lesson was relevant to this group of children. She also felt guilty as a White person. Lily said she felt more passionate about her lesson on Jim Crow Laws because of hers and her students’ Black identity, and she was motivated to help her students learn about their cultural history.

When I had read When Marian Sang (Ryan, 2002) to my classroom, the word “Negro” was in the text. As I read the word, several children responded with an, “AWWWWWW.” They were not familiar with the word, “negro” and thought that I had read the bad “n” word. Even after my explanation that “negro” was an “okay” word that was used during these historical times, they did not seem satisfied until I literally didn’t read the word again and exchanged the word “negro” for “Black” as I finished the book. I wondered if they responded this vehemently because I was a White person reading this text, and I wondered how they would have responded if Tison had read the same book to them.

Recommendations: relationship with content.

Teacher educators and student teachers need to discuss how their socio-cultural identities affect their enthusiasm for and perspective on a subject or content and how our children will respond to that content. When we ask student teachers to create culturally responsive lessons, we should require student teachers to include in their lesson plans a place where they consider and write about how their cultural identity and the cultural identity of their audience or classroom might change the impact or significance of the lesson. Student teachers often write “reflection papers” on a lesson. In this reflective writing, student teachers could discuss if their own or their children’s cultural identity influenced the lesson.

Theme 7: Teaching Differently

I respectfully ask this question, “What is culturally responsive pedagogy and practice?” There are many important scholars and writers who have discussed and outlined culturally responsive practice and from whom I have gained important insights. I do believe that good teachers who believe that culture matters in the classroom attend to and use a child’s cultural knowledge and “ways of being” as they teach and know a child. However, from my student teachers’ conversations, I became concerned about how the student teachers interpreted the
concept of “culturally responsive teaching,” not necessarily how they “practiced” culturally responsive practice. My study became a study of how they talked about the “practice question.”

My interest in how the student teachers interpreted “culturally responsive practice” began at the beginning of the semester. Lily told me in her first interview that she thought she would need to “teach differently” since she would have Black children. I assumed that she believed that “teaching differently” for Black children was a form of “culturally responsive practice.” Susan acknowledged the idea of “culturally responsive practice” in her first interview when she rejected the university’s promotion of such pedagogy. She did not think she should “teach differently” based on “Black and White.” Both of them knew that the university wanted them to consider that “culturally responsive practice” was a possible approach to teaching children who were “diverse.”

Each of the student teachers were required to develop a lesson that included culturally responsive elements; they each saw the value in including multicultural literature and topics in their choices for those lessons. However, aside from these singular lessons, each of the participants translated “culturally responsive practice” “differently.” The participants’ summary statements about “teaching differently” gave me a window on their fragmented and converse interpretations of “culture” and “practice.” Susan and Lily’s notions about being culturally responsive or “teaching differently” were in opposition to each other. Lily said that she thought she would have to “teach differently,” but she changed during the semester to think that she couldn’t “teach differently” because the children were all so “different” from one another. She had witnessed her teacher from the previous semester “teaching differently” because the children were all alike in the rural setting. To Lily, a teacher could or should be “culturally responsive” if the children were all “alike” (Within Group Sameness) and also different from a more middle-class population (Between Group Difference). In her final interview Lily did say that she had changed her perceptions again and thought she might have needed to “teach differently” at the city school if it had really been an “inner city” school. I am not certain if this statement assumes that the children would have been more “alike” in the inner city school or simply more “difficult” or “rough” in the inner city school and thus needed a “different” style of teaching.

Susan didn’t think she needed to “teach differently” because the children at Gilmer Park were the “same” (Within Group Sameness). For Susan, being culturally responsive was an approach a teacher would use if the children were “different” from one another and needed “different” approaches (Within Group and Between Group Differences). She did not think such a diverse school existed. Cameron talked about how she changed her thinking and feelings when she taught the lesson on Civil Rights, although she did not name this feeling or lesson as “teaching differently” or “culturally responsive practice.” Faith said that she tried to figure out what the children’s experiences were, so she could relate the content to something they knew; this sounded like she was being responsive to their cultural knowledge or was “culturally responsive.”

I do not believe that any of my participants thought that they were “teaching differently” in response to the children’s culture or because they were in the city school, except that they thought they may have enacted some approaches that were related to being “stern” and “strict” and the fact that they planned culturally responsive lessons that focused on multicultural topics such as Jim Crow laws.

These questions emerged for me based on their interpretations: Do the student teachers translate culturally responsive practice as being responsive to a group? To an individual? Based on race? Which cultural factor? Based on a complex cultural identity? Can these student teachers
be “culturally responsive” without responding to a stereotype (such as needing to be strict or stern)? Is “strict” or “stern” a culturally accurate response or is it a response to a stereotype? Do student teachers know enough about “teaching differently” to be able to talk about what they are changing in their teaching so as to be accurately culturally responsive aside from teaching a “multicultural” topic or text?

My combined answer to these questions is essentially that I did not hear the student interns express enough concrete or accurate understanding about culturally responsive practice or the children’s culture for the student teachers to be able to translate this “practice” to this setting. I do believe that the student teachers talked frequently about “relating differently” as discussed in Theme 6. Subsequently, I suggest that “culturally responsive practice” may be better translated for beginning teachers as “culturally responsive relationships.” Even though Lily said that she didn’t think “teaching differently” “mattered,” she did talk about connecting with some of the children because of their similar skin color and hair and being more passionate about teaching them. Susan said she didn’t change anything based on “Black and White,” but based her teaching on each child’s personality and noticed how some of the teachers “interacted” differently. All of Susan’s insights were related to understanding people. I believe that it was evident that Cameron’s changed perspective on race and the social construction of reality led her to focus on her relationships with the children and families through assuming a less judgmental attitude toward their cultural patterns. Faith was very interested in how she could communicate and know the children’s families.

Teaching is a relational act and culturally responsive pedagogy or practice is primarily about relating differently. The fact that teaching is relational is not necessarily a new idea. Cochran-Smith (2004) said that if we think of teaching as “text,” then we can assume “that teaching, like all human experience, is constructed primarily out of the social and language interactions of participants” (p. 88). What we say to each other with our words matters.

As teacher educators and student teachers discuss their understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy and practice, they should create an alternate focus to “pedagogy” or “practice.” The terms “pedagogy” and “practice” more generally imply what educators might call “strategies” or “how we teach,” or more broadly, “teaching approaches.” When we use the word, “relationship,” the word connotes personal connections, interactions, behaviors, and how one relates the content to one’s students and the students’ prior experiences. “Relating” is tangibly and intangibly related to “getting it” and being “okay” in the eyes of people who might not trust a person who is different from them. By making “relationships” the central idea to culturally responsive work, we place in the forefront the truly more difficult issue of how we view and respect each other in the classroom. If we talk about relationships, our conversations will help us become “okay” in the eyes of others.

I suggest that “teaching differently” should be expressed as how we relate differently to families, children, colleagues, and curriculum content as diverse people with diverse cultural identities, not necessarily or only a pedagogical “approach.” A teacher’s job is not to judge, it is to relate. Our most significant task is to relate to children, to families, to other professionals, and to relate the content to our children’s lives. We do this in the midst of our own cultural and relational identities.

The student teachers worried about their relationships, and the quality of their relational networks was a topic they wanted to discuss. Therefore, making “culturally responsive relationships” a focal point in the university program would establish “relationships” between cultures (as acted out between teacher and child and parents) as worthy of discussion and
examination. The underlying assumptions in Chapter 1 (ideas regarding racism, classism, science as truth, deficit cultures) affect people’s beliefs about one another and those beliefs affect people’s “relationships” in the broader social stage beyond the school. Many people are most uncomfortable when they are with someone who is different from themselves – as Cameron experienced).

Student teachers may feel more positively about and be more open to “diversity” studies if we highlighted the issue of culturally responsive “relationships.” With “relationships” as the central focus, student teachers might embrace the idea of being responsive to people, be appreciative of the opportunity to talk about their misgivings, and investigate how cultural identities alter these relationships. Therefore, the topic of “culturally responsive relationships” could contain more every day relevance in the student teachers’ perspective. I suggest that when teachers “relate” differently based on being culturally responsive to our different cultural identities, our “practice” or “pedagogy” will change.

**Recommendations: culturally responsive relationships.**

I suggest that teacher educators make “culturally responsive relationships” a focus of the “knowledge question” about culturally responsive practice and pedagogy. This shift in focus makes the more difficult issue in our schools and nation, relationships between diverse people, at the forefront of our discussions and not a subtext. The following recommendations are some generalized suggestions for how to make relationships in school a focal point for consideration and discussion in teacher education.

**Contexts for building relationships.**

Teacher education needs to provide contexts for student teachers in which it is possible to create positive relationships. Therefore, I suggest that student interns be placed in a school for longer than one semester. If teaching is relational, it is more than difficult to establish relationships in school in a matter of 15 weeks. If relationships with children, families, and colleagues are one of the most significant factors, then we need to give student teachers the time to establish relationships, to sense how important those relationships are, and to have time to talk about them. Student teachers should develop a written plan for developing relationships with their children, families, and other teachers, just as they create written plans for curriculum design (Relationship Plan). Student teachers should discuss this plan with their university mentor. This plan for creating and building relationships would also work as an assessment tool for end of semester criteria for professional attributes. This Relationship Plan could include such activities outlined in previous sections (participating in community activities, developing social action or social justice projects in the community, communicating with parents, creating a climate of trust with children, newsletters home, developing relationships with colleagues, reading novels or texts from a different cultural perspective.)

Many teacher education programs include a partnership relationship (or professional development school model) in which there is ongoing dialogue between the university and school so as to create an environment for professional learning for both future and in-service teachers. Through this partnership relationship, teacher educators could communicate to schools and faculty that culturally responsive pedagogy and relationships are a focus of the university program. With this knowledge, schools and faculty can support the university’s efforts to prepare teachers to work with diverse children. Teacher educators can become familiar with teachers, administrators, and parents who can act as “cultural translators” for future teachers and become partners with teacher educators in preparing teachers to work with “other people’s children.”
Talk.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Gergen (1999) suggests “dialogic relationships.” “Dialogic relationships” became a model for my conversational interviews because I believed that, through language and talk, the student teachers and I could construct or represent our interpretations of our experiences at school. Friere believes that, “human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (2002, p. 88). bell hooks (1994) knows that the physical act of listening and hearing each person’s voice makes it more possible for us to learn together. I began my research with this belief in the power of talk and reflection in helping us understand what we experience. During Phase II, the four student teachers unknowingly used talk as a construction process for their “knowledge” building.

University education courses already use “talk” and “discussion” in coursework and seminars. So what do I recommend differently than what is already in place? Teacher educators need to make “culturally responsive relationships” a focus of the conversations on culturally responsive practice as already outlined. As Lily said, “Talking about anything really helps me sometimes …. Just because … sometimes you have certain thoughts, but when you say them out loud, I’m kind of like ‘well, oh!’” Lily told me that it felt good to her to talk about diversity since she knew it was important. Cameron said that she thought more about diversity issues while she was at Gilmer Park because she knew that I would be asking her questions during our interviews. Reflecting about our interviews ahead of time made her more thoughtful about what she was doing. Susan said that when she and I talked, she was learning about herself more, and she appreciated that she felt like I was not being judgmental about her opinions. It was when Susan was driving home one day, and she was thinking about what she had said during our interview-conversation about “socially appropriate,” that she had her epiphany. This “talk” wasn’t just “talk” about the children and the events of the day, although that was our touchstone. Our conversations became conversations about what we thought about our and others’ socio-cultural identities as we tried to figure out what to do about our relationships with the people at the school.

“What you value, you talk about” (Paley, 1989, p. 138). My experience has been that discussing how we relate to and understand others is an important topic of conversation for student teachers while they are in the field. I am curious about how to make talk about how our cultural identities affect our relationships commonplace in our lives as teachers before and while student teachers are in the field. If we talk about relationship issues, I believe our talk will help us see our inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes and help us have more “epiphany” or “smack yourself in the head” kinds of moments.

Individual talk.

In my research context, I had the luxury of having these individual conversations with my participants. Finding time for individual students is a difficult task. However, university mentors have this opportunity, and they need to maximize this time so as to address issues related to diversity in schools. Therefore, I recommend that university mentors should be charged with the responsibility of creating a context for such discussions during their school visits.

Previously, as a university mentor or supervisor, I never asked my student teachers any questions about diversity issues. I followed their lead in regard to any topics they wanted to discuss along with our discussion of my observations of their teaching. However, if “culturally responsive relationships” was a targeted topic by the student teachers and teacher educators, supervisors could ask such questions and create a non-judgmental climate for individual talk about these difficult topics and make such conversations more “commonplace.”
Susan all said that while they talked in their university class, they were careful about what they said. I’m sure they monitored what they said to me also, but I think that at some level, talking on an individual basis made it possible to share insights that might have been difficult to share in a group setting.

Conferences between a student teacher and a mentor are the times when student teachers receive the most one-on-one attention from university educators. Therefore, I see this relationship as vital in creating a context for dialogue about student teachers’ experiences and questions during their concrete experiences in the field. Therefore, universities should assign student teachers a university mentor for the entire year of fieldwork so as to support and encourage important talk and follow-up between the two people. University mentors could ask about how a student teacher is negotiating relationships with families, children, colleagues, and content and how those relationships might be affected by their cultural identities. These issues should not be avoided since the participants in my study revealed that they worried about their relationships. Mentors could assist student teachers as they develop a Relationship Plan and a self-assessment process to evaluate the student teacher’s success at relationship-building based on that Plan.

**Group talk.**

Teacher educators intend for class and group discussions to create contexts for teacher candidates to develop their “knowledge” about teaching in diverse settings. During this study, I considered how group talk could be constructed to encourage future teachers’ developing “knowledge.” Susan felt like she was told to “teach differently” based on race and to aspire to Banks’ fourth level of multicultural curriculum, but she told me she appreciated having the chance to vent or talk about what she believed with me. Although I participated in many of the student teacher seminars and did not feel like professors “told” us what to believe, and I thought I had the opportunity to talk in small groups, evidently Susan did not feel the same way. I simply suggest that universities continue to promote talk during class work that is not judgmental, but gives student teachers the opportunity to share their concerns. Teacher educators need to specifically discuss issues related to complex cultural identities, relationships, and stereotypes as I have discussed in some of the previous recommendations (such as talking about current social justice issues rather than only historical social justice issues, understanding the complexity of culture, unpacking the words we use such as “same” and “different,” gaining information about specific cultural factors, and examining the tension between knowledge about a cultural group or developing stereotyped knowledge). In addition, I make further specific recommendations about “talk” on campus in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

**Talk: Using concrete examples.**

I recommend that student teachers write individual case studies for the next year’s group of student teachers based on their experiences in the classroom like the ones that Cameron, Faith, Lily, and Susan shared with me. (These would be stories from events in their classroom in which they needed to solve problems or negotiate relationships with their children and colleagues.) Student teachers should also be charged with writing case studies that include instances of positive descriptions of a family’s care for their children such as those that Cameron described.

In small groups, each student teacher could share orally an experience in school that was related to diversity and relationships with children, families, colleagues, and content. Student teachers could use time in seminar as a writing workshop to record what they experienced in school and the questions this experience raised for them. The class could help the author develop other related questions that this case example raises for them as beginning teachers. So as to
ensure confidentiality, these cases would be saved (without names) for the next year’s student teachers. During the subsequent year, student teachers would read last year’s case studies and help each other talk about the cultural complexity in the event. Specific analysis should include an examination of how specific cultural factors are working in the event (race, ethnicity, class, gender-sexuality, language, nationality, and area or community), how cultural identities affected the relationships during the experience (either cultural connections or disconnections), the tensions between our assumptions about stereotypes and being culturally responsive, whether the student teachers have made accurate or inaccurate assumptions about children and families based on evidence, and what responses a student teacher could give during such an experience to create positive relationships. By analyzing an event in this way, the student teacher may look at the experience with different eyes and “talk” about culturally responsive relationships. Teacher educators would have the responsibility of helping student teachers “see” when groups are using inaccurate and accurate cultural assumptions.

An extension of this idea is to create times in seminars during fieldwork semesters for student teachers to simulate experiences in school and assist each other in determining appropriate teacher responses. Student teachers would use case studies to role play events as teachers, children, and parents and then examine ways to articulate issues with parents with a culturally responsive understanding. This activity needs to be more than the activity of talking about what happened. Students should analyze the events to consider the cultural factors that I have outlined above. “Talking about” an issue does not necessarily encourage an analytical critique of the event and can sometimes simply provide a forum for “venting” about a frustrating problem.

**Talk and writing: socio-cultural self-critique.**

A sub-text of this individual and group “talk” is the necessity of participating in “self-critique.” “Reflective practice” (Schon, 1983) is a highly valued and common-place teacher education process. In our studies about diverse lives, we should add to the concept of “reflective practice,” the notion that we must “self-critique” by examining how our socio-cultural identities inform all of our understanding about our children, families, colleague, and content. Cochran-Smith (2004) suggests “inquiry communities” in our study to understand “diversity.” Student teachers can become “inquiry communities” as they work to participate in socio-cultural “self-critique” in the context of group and individual talk. I recommend that this question be integral to all of the contexts for “talk” that I have outlined. When teacher educators give assignments for reflective writing about a student’s teaching, a new question should be added to the reflective writing suggestions: “How does my socio-cultural identity influence my teaching and relationships in this event?” and “How do the children’s socio-cultural identities affect this event and relationship?”

**Talk and media.**

Our lives and our teaching are like a text (Cochran-Smith, 2004), but our teaching texts are also physical, auditory, visual, and emotional. Seeing visual images of teaching captures those physical, auditory, visual, and emotional dimensions of teaching, perhaps in different ways than reading a text on “culturally responsive pedagogy” could. I always promote reading as a means of gaining knowledge and perspective. However, as academicians who learn from reading and seek reading as a learning medium, we must acknowledge that media images are powerful cultural shapers that can also create opportunities for gaining knowledge and perspective.

In some instances, media images may be more powerful than any book we may read, publish, or create. Media has become like a set of present-day cultural tales about “folk,” tales
that tell stories about differences and sameness in people. This is not a new issue, for minority
groups have questioned how they are portrayed in TV and movies. Susan, in her third interview,
referred to movies, “I think about movies that I’ve seen which is a horrible thing to … even try to
compare to real life, but I think of some of the stereotypes from that, and what I’m seeing in
movies.” People often refer to the stereotypes that movies and television portray, but this doesn’t
erase that stereotypical picture from our minds.

Few of the student teachers mentioned “books” or “discussions” from classes that
changed their perspective on diversity. The books and authors they did mention were Lisa Delpit
(1995), Shirley Bryce Heath (1983), McIntosh’s White Privilege (1992), and Essential 55
(Clark, 2003). This book list is a summary of the influential books they had read. They also mentioned
reading something about needing to be “stern” and “strict” in city schools. However, the student
teachers and I referred to media images of diversity and teaching during our interviews: The Bill
Cosby Show, Will and Grace, Dangerous Minds, Guess Who? and Guess Who’s Coming to
Dinner.

I was surprised at my participants’ continual referral to Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer,
.Producer), 1995) as they told me about what they expected to find at Gilmer Park, and when
Lily continued to consider her own ideas about “teaching differently,” based on this movie. This
film was a popular culture movie, and they wanted to learn something about “high quality"
teaching from viewing it. They knew that this movie wasn’t necessarily a realistic example, but
they continued to use it as reference point for their questions about teaching in the city.
Universities need to replace such powerful unrealistic media images of “teaching” and
“diversity” with other realistic images of school that provide models of positive relationships and
interactions in a diverse setting. It seems like a simplistic recommendation to suggest that teacher
educators should find videos that represent quality interactions in the classroom. Using videos in
a university classroom may seem like a non-academic approach to teacher professional learning.
However, if student teachers use popular cultural movies as they make teaching decisions and
judgments (which it sounded as if some of the participants did), teacher educators have a
responsibility to replace the use of such movies with more accurate representations.

Teacher educators should select professional and educational images of culturally
responsive relationships and practice that are based on real life examples of classrooms, children,
families, and authentic teachers. In addition, Susan told me she realized that she needed “really
good models” after she had observed the other third grade teachers in her school. Student
teachers are looking for that visual model, something more “concrete” than they read about in a
classroom management text.

Teacher educators could also use current movies to deepen the future teachers’
knowledge and culturally responsive understandings about people. Cultural translators could
suggest films that accurately depict a cultural group. In addition, viewing a movie that depicts
other cultural realities may be a way to introduce and discuss the concept of multiple “realities”
and “normals,” based on a socio-cultural identity. Cameron understood this important concept
because of her “translator,” but perhaps a movie could create “other realities” for student
teachers who do not have a “cultural translator.”

Final Word

Even though I believed in the value of qualitative research with small numbers of
participants, I originally worried about conducting a study on only four cases and trusting my
dissertation process on four individual women’s sets of experiences and my own. My worries
were resolved as I sat in the interviews and heard the student teachers interpret their experiences,
and as I heard the multiple and complex ways that they explained their “knowledge” and “practice.”

Although these four participants were “different” from one another, there is “sameness” in their “difference.” In the qualitative process of analyzing and comparing the differences more thoroughly, I found their “sameness.” The participants’ “differences” and “samenesses” are superimposed on one another because they are related, and the synthesis of this relationship is expressed through these recommendations for teacher educators. I did not expect to find a revolution; I hoped to find those small practices that might change my university pedagogies and content. Teacher educators who view education as the “practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994), study, seek, and embrace small and big changes in our work to prepare teachers to teach all children well. Small changes can engender small and big changes in children’s lives, classroom lives, and the institution of education.

Epilogue

One of my “readers” asked me why (or contested why) I included stories about my experiences in this scholarly work. My advisor asked me at the end of my writing process how I would now name or label my research design. I had planned the study as a case study of student teachers and planned to include my own stories only as a way to represent how my experiences influenced my research questions. However, as I analyzed through writing, I wanted to include and represent my own ideas and experiences. It wasn’t until the end of the year, that I could actually “name” what I knew I had experienced as a researcher. With these two questions (my “reader’s” and my advisor’s), I finally “saw” that this work was not just a case study of student teacher experiences. The study had become my own auto-ethnographic journey and an “auto-ethnographic case study of five student teachers.” The study year became my journey in preparing myself to be a culturally responsive teacher educator through a study of my own and others’ socio-cultural “knowledge” and “practice.” Therefore, my stories were equally important and valuable as the four participants’ stories.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe auto-ethnography as a genre of research that “displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.” “Reflexive ethnography” is a research and writing genre in which the researcher’s own personal experience becomes equally important in the interpretive processes and can include “confessional tales” where the researcher becomes the investigated. My study is a set of such stories about my participants and me. The stories connect one to another through our interview-conversations and through my written analysis. The narratives describe the “complexities of lived moments of struggle” (p. 744) in our classrooms and in how we tried to make sense of these everyday events in relation to the influences of cultural sameness and difference.

In looking back, I realized that during our “practice” at the school, we were each in the midst of rewriting our own auto-ethnographies. I had included questions in the first interview through which the student teachers could share with me their auto-ethnographic journey. At Gilmer Park and through our conversations, we re-wrote what we knew about ourselves and others in relation to culture. This could be the case in every encounter we have with someone who is “not like” us. As we relate and understand others, and understand how our identities influence those relationships, we are re-writing the texts of our lives, the auto-ethnographic text that expresses our cultural perspectives.

Whereas I intended for my stories to influence my research questions for the student teachers, my stories now inform me personally and my practice as I teach again in the university setting. I can substantially document the change in my understanding of the three “Questions” I
identified in Chapter 2 as relevant for this study. My “knowledge” and “practice” regarding multicultural teacher education have changed, and I witness that change daily as I plan and implement “teacher learning” contexts and events for the teacher candidates that I mentor in coursework and field experiences. My stories are powerful shapers in what I choose to teach even if they remain unstated or my “hidden curriculum” (Paley, 1989, p. xv). My experiences will help me express to future teachers the compelling need to change their “lens” and strive for “getting it” so that others will know that they are “okay.” I have stories from my multicultural classroom that I share as examples with my university students. (“We love your stories. They give us something to remember,” one student intern recently said.) I have a different comfort level in addressing their fears and questions, because I have experienced those worries and question myself. Therefore, the stories also express my visible curriculum as we “talk” in class about how we are re-writing our “auto-ethnographies” through our encounters with the curriculum content, children, families, and colleagues.

I lived with (in her classroom) a dynamic “cultural translator” for nine months with whom I am now friends and can share my continued questions. I also share Tison’s stories with my teacher candidates so as to offer to them a “different reality” than their own as I encourage them to consider how “other people” experience the world. To her, I am forever indebted. I will look toward the future to see if these small changes in my “knowledge” and “practice” will influence teacher candidates’ “knowledge” and “practice,” and as they begin to tell me their new stories about teaching “other people’s children.”

As to my auxiliary research question and notion of “getting it,” I can say that Tison said that she trusted me, and I therefore felt as if I reached some level of “getting it” with my new friend. However, “getting it” must always be an ongoing process in attempting to understand cultural identities that are different from our own. “Getting it” with Tison might not necessarily be “getting it” with someone else. “Getting it” is never a static state of being or knowing, but a continually recursive process in considering and reconsidering oneself in relation to others. We can use our new state of “getting it” while attempting to still learn more about lives outside of our own. I know that there are many pieces of Tison’s cultural identity and experiences that I can never truly feel and understand and should not assume that I could since I live in a “first world” (Lather, 1991) woman’s world. Instead, I must “see” that “other people’s” assumptions about “same” and “different” could be a different set of assumptions about the world than my own. I make my “getting it” a commitment to this recursive process of continually honoring another’s voice and adjusting my understanding of how another person sees and experiences the world. This “getting it” makes me more “fully human.”
REFERENCES


*Teachers College Record, 87*(1), 53-65.


Wolfe, G. (Director). (1993). *Fires in the mirror* [Motion Picture]. USA.


### APPENDIX A

#### Critical Multicultural Studies Propositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Dimensions of Multicultural Education (p. 14)</strong> Five inter-related dimensions</td>
<td>Teachers should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Content integration from diverse groups</td>
<td>• have content and pedagogy knowledge and be more culturally sensitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of construction process</td>
<td>• view teaching as a calling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prejudice reduction</td>
<td>• have sense of identity with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equity pedagogy</td>
<td>• care about students deeply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empowering school culture and social structure</td>
<td>Effective teachers are dreamkeepers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural education:</td>
<td>Contextual classroom factors in multicultural education (p. 160):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowing oneself</td>
<td>• Make schooling and learning more equitable and accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We must be transformed</td>
<td>• Work for a more democratic and equitable society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comprehensive school reform</td>
<td>• Change interactions between teachers and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship between teacher and learner changes</td>
<td>• Change the value assumptions underlying teacher attitudes towards student performance and learning activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Action for social justice</td>
<td>• Change the messages and content transmitted through curricula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge that power is implicated in culture</td>
<td>• Change social interactions between students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning to see reality from a variety of perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Anti-racist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education for social justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Critical pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eight Common Views in the Critical Thinking Movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To know who we are racially and culturally</td>
<td>• Classroom environments are based on dialogical and dialectical reasoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To learn about and value cultures different from our own</td>
<td>• Educational sites act as indoctrination centers for dominant-class practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To view social reality through the lens of multiple perspectives</td>
<td>• Oppressive powers can prevent citizens from critical engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To understand the history and dynamics of dominance</td>
<td>• To understand oppression, students must see how oppression acts towards the most oppressed subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To nurture in ourselves and our students a passion for justice and the skills for social action</td>
<td>• The family cannot be the only agent of moral and character development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We must understand the hidden messages of texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Critical engagement assumes autonomy of thought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Critical pedagogy is grounded in hope and possibility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Consent Form for Research Informant: Tison Butler

Title of Project: Pre-service Teacher Experiences in and Reflections on Multicultural Schools

Investigator: Dana R. Gregory, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Teaching and Learning

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of student teachers in a multicultural school through a year-long two-phase case study. Universities develop teacher education programs that include an immersion experience for student teachers in multicultural schools so as to prepare teachers to work with and teach diverse populations. Since this field experience is critical to the university program and student teacher preparation, it is important to investigate the student teachers’ experiences in the field.

Procedures: While the researcher investigates pre-service teachers’ experiences in multicultural schools, the researcher will assume a participant-observer stance and volunteer to teach in a school with a multicultural population for 2-3 days per week during the school year. The classroom teacher will act as a research informant by allowing the researcher into her classroom to assist and teach as needed or appropriate. The research informant will discuss the daily interactions in the school and classroom and will share her understandings of the broader community, cultural, and family practices that are relevant to the school environment and teaching and learning. The researcher will keep field notes on her experiences in the classroom and the researcher and research informant will discuss the classroom events and field notes. Some of their after school discussions will be taped and transcribed. The research informant will have access to the researcher’s field notes and can have control over which conversations and information the researcher can use in her final analysis and publication.

Benefits and Risks: There is no guarantee of any benefits to the research informant for participating in this study. The researcher hopes to create a collaborative and shared research process in which the research informant and the researcher can co-construct the researcher’s knowledge about working in multicultural schools. There are sensitive issues embedded in the topic and context of multicultural schools; discussion of these issues could cause discomfort; however, it is the researcher’s intent to create a research context in which participants will not feel at risk or judged. If at any time, the research informant questions the appropriateness of the work within the study, the researcher encourages the participant to report this to the researcher, to Dr. Ann Potts, or Dr. David Moore (see below).

Extent of Anonymity: The research informant’s identity will remain strictly confidential. The written study will have a pseudonym in the place of participant’s name at all times, unless the researcher gains permission to use a participant’s words and wants to credit the author-participant. The name of the multicultural school site will remain confidential. However, since student teachers are appointed to a particular school, it may be possible to trace a participant’s identity through common knowledge or school records about where a participant is working as a student teacher. There are also confidentiality issues that arise in a case study of a group. Each participant will know the other participants involved in the inquiry. Agreeing to participate in the study also requires that the case study participants also agree to treating each other’s and their own identities with total confidentiality. Results of the study will be published as a dissertation and presented at conferences in the future.

Freedom to Withdraw: You may refuse to respond to any question and can withdraw from the research interview at any time. Simply inform Dana Gregory (731-0099; drg@vt.edu), Dr. Ann Potts (231-8339; apotts@vt.edu), Dr. Jan Nespor (231-8327; nespor@vt.edu) or David Moore, Chair of the university IRB (231-4991; moored@vt.edu).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Researcher’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Participant’s Signature | Date | Researcher’s Signature | Date |
APPENDIX C

Relationship with Research Informant Tison Butler

Before school, during planning time, and after school, Tison and I often had conversations about issues in the classroom, or in popular culture, or from life experiences that were related to race, ethnicity, and culture. These were topics that Tison thought were relevant to my understanding and that she believed I should hear about from her perspective. She took it as her duty to educate me and tell me about her views and perspectives on all sorts of topics. We discussed TV sitcoms that did not represent “regular black guys.” She asked me about why White standards for beauty in women were more highly valued than beauty in people of color. We talked about her feelings about being marginalized as an African American teacher in the school; she told me about how one White family removed their son from her room while she taught Black History because they disagreed with the Black History Month emphasis.

One day we perused a magazine marketed for upper-class audiences that represented the people embedded in “society” in another city and laughed about the kinds of talk and activities people in the upper-class enjoyed. We laughed about our different responses to a popular movie, “Diary of Mad Black Woman,” and the possible differences in our two senses of humor based on our cultural identities. She taught me about children’s current music and dance interests and modeled how to communicate with the parents in the community.

One day her best friend, who she has known since childhood, came by after school, and we ended up talking about their racial-cultural identity and how they continued to experience racism. LaShay was a graduate student at a local university and she described specific examples of differential treatment that she had experienced by professors and students because of her color. Tison said that she always felt like she had to be on guard around White people and LaShay said that she felt like she had to be a “dual being to survive.” Her words reminded me of DuBois’ “double consciousness” (1903) and I told them about his wise writings. Tison explained that Black people always have to think about that one extra thing – their race. Tison and LaShay wanted me to hear their stories, and I asked if I could keep notes. When I wrote them up, I shared the notes with them, and LaShay responded in writing to my narrative about our conversation. She told me she had never talked to a White person about her perspective before.

Tison told me the next day that LaShay was worried that maybe she had said too much and that she didn’t want me to think that she was mad at all White people. I explained to Tison that I could not express how appreciative I was of their conversation with me and that somehow I “get” what it is they are telling me and am appreciative that they were willing to tell me their stories. In May, I got a surprise phone call from LaShay. It was the day before she was leaving for her journey to Africa. She wanted to say “good-bye,” and I congratulated her on her recent graduation from graduate school in counseling. Again, I felt honored that we had the kind of relationship in which she would call to make contact with me before she left on her trip.
Research Journal 9/8/04

…but for some reason, I guess I sort of “get” what Tison and LaShay are talking about and respond instead of with anger, with a sort of awe that I have two people that have come into my life that I can talk to openly. I only hope that I can deserve their trust. I think it might seem scary or risky to say some of the things they said and feel honored/lucky/fortunate that here are two authentic, thoughtful women who have lived a different life from me, and we can somehow share all sorts of understandings, fears, and questions…. I guess I still sense serendipity. I’m not sure how these conversations about ourselves will ultimately fit into my dissertation or if they will, but I know that they are making me a different person and isn’t that what real learning is about? …changing one’s sense of self and the world. I do not think I can be truly “double conscious” but I can at least have a changed consciousness.

Tison and I had un-countable conversations about her teaching role which was often connected to her Black identity. Once Tison said, “I may not be the best teacher, but when I come in here, the main thing is that I am some kind of model for them. They expect to see a White lady when they come into the classroom, and it’s good to see a Black woman here” (Research Journal 9/8/04). She wasn’t happy about how few African American teachers were present in her school system. One more poignant moment in the fall occurred after a PTA meeting. We returned to the room together to gather our things and she eventually burst into tears, apologizing because she had ‘never broken down in front of anyone” except her family. As I listened, she told me that one of her students had introduced her to the student’s mom and said, “Mom, this is my ghetto teacher.” Tison was visibly disturbed that while she wanted to connect with her students and want her students to appreciate her as a Black woman, she had never wanted her students to view her as “ghetto.” Another African American teacher came into the room, and we ended up talking late into the night about what it meant to “teach” as African American women. I went home that night with their words and feelings swirling. I realized that I had never truly had to face how my White identity affected my role as a teacher. It was assumed that I would be White the minute I walked into the classroom and that everything I did would be normal.

I collected questions for Tison during the Fall Semester, and we took time off after school for what I considered to be our “formal-informal” interview-conversations. Once we went back to Olive Garden, and at other times I brought food in so that we could eat and talk at length without interruptions. I had questions about the community - all about its history, the people who lived there, the kinds of jobs they held, the families, and Tison’s experiences as a resident. It took the two full dinners for me to exhaust what I was interested in and for her to share her answers and more. Of course, there was personal talk interspersed into these interviews because at dinner we were friends.
Tison had envisioned and was “in charge” of the Snow Ball Dance in December, and I attended that Friday night event that included the crowning of a King, Queen, Lady-in-waiting, and dancing to a DJ and refreshments down the hall in a fifth grade classroom. My job was to guard the doorway and keep all the 3-5th graders in the multi-purpose room, unless they were desperate for a bathroom. This was not a high school dance. The children and the parents who came to observe were screened as they came in the building and corralled into the multi-purpose room for the evening, until it was time to let small groups wander down the hall for brownies, chips, or drinks. The DARE officer agreed to be present at the entrance to keep out loiterers and other possible outsiders. This was a triumph event for Tison because so many people came, “more than any other event for years,” she said. However, I witnessed her dismay and hurt as a White parent accused the dance planners of not controlling how the children danced. The parent felt like the children used inappropriate dance moves for this age child. A quiet cultural conflict ensued and was talked about privately between teachers, but never discussed publicly in a faculty meeting. I supported Tison and tried to remind her over and over again about how much the event had meant to the children and the community.

Before the close of the semester, we were talking about the time she would spend with her long-time boyfriend over the holiday. I told her I would like to meet him and somehow in the conversation we realized that she and Bennie could make the drive to my hometown 50 minutes away during the Winter Break, and we could visit in my home. Tison said that she would love to come. I knew that the best thing to do would be to invite them for dinner three nights before Christmas. My Research Journal entry tells the story.

Research Journal Entry: 12/04

Research Journal Entry: I was envisioning how Tison and Bennie might come for an afternoon visit with Christmas cookies and something to drink. On the drive home from school, I continued to think about all my excitement and misgivings. The idea of sitting by the Christmas tree for a visit seemed stilted and unnatural, and it washed over me that the right thing to do, the right way to be with each other would be over a meal. We would invite Tison and Bennie down for dinner, when we would have time to ‘break bread’ and visit over warm food and talk.

Anyway, the bottom line was that I knew I was going to be embarrassed for Tison to see that I live in a nice house. (I remembered that she had said that her school sometimes had holiday parties at one teacher’s house and that this particular woman liked to have the party because she got to ‘show off’ her house.) The last thing I wanted to do was to ‘show off’ my house, although the house was one of those kinds of homes that stand out because of its architecture and history. It was an old Victorian that we had bought for less than it’s value and we had restored.

The night when they arrived, Tison began the evening as her usual enthusiastic self and proclaimed at the front door that this was ‘their first dinner party.’ I think she meant “their first dinner party” ever or either “their first dinner party” as an engaged couple, but I guess I will have to ask her. I introduced them to my three sons, husband, and my husband’s mother who was visiting for the holidays.
We had the blessing, held hands around the table and gave thanks for being together. Tison told us the story of their engagement and Bennie’s romantic plan for asking her. What else did we talk about? I don’t remember, but Tison kept my boys enraptured with her humor, her sense of delight, her talk about the children, and our stories of the dance and the dance trouble. There was a lot of laughter at the table. Tison talked about me and what she liked about my work in her classroom, and I complimented her about her relationship with the children and her ability to communicate in such an engaging way. We took Tison and Bennie up to the roof to see our widow’s walk and on the way back to the first floor I showed her my “office” – strewn with papers, piles, books, notes, files, journals, and job announcements in the Chronicle. I showed her the four hundred pages of my Research Journal that I had composed in the past four months and opened up the journal on the computer so that she could see what I was working on and how. I read her the last few lines of entry which told the story of the holiday gift that LaSona had given us, matching angels, one White and one Black, that matched our cultural identities. There was something special, sacred, and revealing about showing my office to her. In the first place, it’s embarrassing to show to anyone, because of the piles and piles of stuff and the fact that I can’t seem to work any other way. So it’s embarrassing. But at the same time, I relished the idea of Tison having a picture of me in her mind and where I worked each evening, so that next semester when I tell her that I worked for three hours on my Journal she would have a clear portrait in her mind of me sitting at this chair, in front of this screen and surrounded by these piles (or others much like them) when she thinks about me. I gave her a glimpse of my research process and how my Field Note Jottings on my notepad in her room became Field Note Tales at night. After all, I live in her work space every day I go to Gilmer Park. Everyday I might have to go on her desk and rifle through her papers to find a document or a worksheet or grade list that we need to use. I know her routines; I know some of her organizational strategies; I know how she sweeps the floor every afternoon even though the custodian comes in every day. Seeing my office gives her some idea about my rituals and my way of working.

After this “tour” of our old house, we sat as a group by the gas log fire and Christmas tree which we just decorated the night before, and we visit some more. What did we talk about? More about school, about Bennie’s job and future, about Tison’s and my work with the children. Again, I stand in awe of her sense of humor and style.

When it is time for her to go; I get out my camera and we take pictures of us as a group to record the evening together. I offered to take some couple shots of Tison and Bennie. Tison says that these photos will be great, and she will use them as her engagement pictures for the newspaper. I told her she doesn’t have to use them, but that I will give them and the negatives to her. She says, “no, you don’t understand.” She explained to me that she won’t have any professional shots; these will be all she needs for a formal picture…

We got coats back out and they prepared to make the 50 minute drive back to their home. I gave Tison a hug and said, “Love you,” like I usually do with my boys or husband or my girlfriends. It’s just a natural response when someone you care about is leaving you. For some reason, I realized that she didn’t respond, and I realized that this was the first time I had told
Tison that I loved her and that perhaps this was awkward. The words simply popped out. I hadn’t preplanned it, or thought I needed to tell her. In the middle of the hug it just came out. The fact that Tison didn’t know how to respond is much like me. I would have been too shocked to be able to respond if someone had said this to me when I didn’t expect it. It did just come out, but of course I meant it. I loved Tison as a friend and loved knowing her and thought over and over again about how lucky I was to know her. To be working in her classroom, and to be learning from her.

I received an email from Tison the next week. Her email read …

Hey Dana! I hope you are having an excellent holiday. I really hope that you aren’t working too hard! I have been thinking about you and your family everyday since we met. I really had this feeling of joy and happiness by being with your family. Your family has inspired me to be more close to mine and enjoy the small things. I really think it is amazing how open and relaxed your family is. I felt as if I have known all of you since birth. I really could go on and on, but basically I want to tell you thanks for the experience and the love. I’m crying now because I really feel blessed to have you in my life. You told me before I left your house that you love me and I have to say that I feel the same way. E-mail is really helping me express my feelings, because you know how hard it is for me to tell people stuff. Well I hope you have a sensational new years. Tell the whole Gregory fam that I said hey and happy new years! Thanks for coming along Dana- love ya Tison.

(personal communication, December 29, 2004)

During the Spring Semester, our classroom work and our relationship continued, but I felt our relationship had been established during these early days of my immersion in the school. The first semester had ensured us both that we could share our ideas and ourselves. During the second semester, our after-school talks were more sporadic because we were busier with after school responsibilities, my conference presentation obligations, and my research responsibilities in school and on campus at particular times during the weeks. I was absent from school for her birthday when her mom brought a celebration into the classroom. So, on the day I returned from my conference, I stopped by her home with a surprise birthday gift. Her mom and I had a chance to visit as “moms” and I found that her kitchen cabinets in her 1950’s home were an exact match to the kitchen cabinets in the 1950’s home in which I had grown up in Richmond, Virginia. Josephine talked to me of her high blood pressure issues, the financial burdens of the wedding, and her relationship with her husband. I enjoyed the visit and appreciated making the connection with Tison’s family.

In May, Tison and I went shopping together for earrings to go with her wedding ensemble which I wanted to purchase as my bridal gift to her. While our personal relationship flourished, our professional relationship continued to grow. I developed more research questions about the children and by April, we began some final interviews in which I asked Tison questions regarding what she wanted me (as a White upper middle-class woman) to know about teaching children who were different from me.
APPENDIX D

Consent Form: Research Informants – Community and School

Title of Project: Pre-service Teacher Experiences in and Reflections on Multicultural Schools

Investigator: Dana R. Gregory, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Teaching and Learning
Dr. Ann Potts, Department of Teaching and Learning

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of student teachers in a multicultural school through a year-long two-phase case study. Universities develop teacher education programs that include an immersion experience for student teachers in multicultural schools so as to prepare teachers to work with and teach diverse populations. Since this field experience is critical to the university program and student teacher preparation, it is important to investigate the student teachers’ experiences in the field.

Procedures: While I investigate pre-service teachers’ experiences in multicultural schools, it is important to understand and describe the particular community and school within which the study takes place. You will act as a research informant by answering formal and informal questions regarding demographic characteristics of the city and school community, family and student histories residing in the community, and the school’s and students’ academic standing. You will share your understandings of the broader community, cultural, and family practices that are relevant to the school environment and to teaching and learning. I will take field notes on my classroom experiences and conversations with you. We will audio-tape some of our conversations and I will transcribe them for data collection. I will keep the audio-tapes in my home where no one will have access to them. I will destroy the tapes after I have completed sharing the research. At times I may ask you to check my writing for its accuracy regarding your comments.

Benefits and Risks: There is no guarantee of any benefits to you for participating in this study except that I am assisting in a classroom during the year. I hope to create a collaborative and shared research process in which you and I can co-construct knowledge about how student teachers work in multicultural schools. There are sensitive issues embedded in the topic and context of multicultural schools and relationships; discussion of these issues could cause discomfort; however, it is my intent to create a research context in which you will not feel at risk or judged. If at any time, you question the appropriateness of the work within the study, I encourage you to report this to me, to Dr. Ann Potts, Dr. Jan Nespor, or Dr. David Moore (see below).

Extent of Anonymity: Your identity will remain strictly confidential. The written study will have a pseudonym in the place of your name at all times, unless we change the final outcomes of the research and I have your permission to use your name when citing your words. The name of the multicultural school site will remain confidential. However, since student teachers are appointed to a particular school, it may be possible to trace a participant’s identity through common knowledge or school records about where a participant was working as a student teacher. There are also confidentiality issues that arise in a case study of a group. Each participant will know the other participants involved in the inquiry. Agreeing to participate in the study also requires that the case study participants also agree to treat each other’s and their own identities with total confidentiality. Results of the study will be published as a dissertation and presented at conferences in the future.

Freedom to Withdraw: You may refuse to respond to any question and can withdraw from the research interview at any time. Simply inform Dana Gregory (731-0099; drg@vt.edu), Dr. Ann Potts (231-8339; apotts@vt.edu), Dr. Jan Nespor (231-8327; nespor@vt.edu), or David Moore, Chair of the university IRB (231-4991; moored@vt.edu).

Participant’s Signature ______________________  Date ________________  Researcher’s Signature ______________________  Date ________________
### APPENDIX E

*Interview Record: Tison Butler and Research Informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/04/05</td>
<td>Tison</td>
<td>Olive Garden/Lunch</td>
<td>Getting to know one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10/05</td>
<td>Tison</td>
<td>Olive Garden/Dinner</td>
<td>Description of community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/17/04</td>
<td>Tison</td>
<td>Conversation in the room</td>
<td>Description of community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/09/05</td>
<td>Tison</td>
<td>Dinner at HL</td>
<td>My questions</td>
<td>Two tapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12/05</td>
<td>Tison</td>
<td>Phone conversation</td>
<td>School dance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/18/05</td>
<td>Tison and Ms. Jade</td>
<td>Tison’s room</td>
<td>Conversations about school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/13/05</td>
<td>Tison, Ms. Jade., Mr. Johnson</td>
<td>Tison’s room</td>
<td>Conversations about school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/04/05</td>
<td>Tison</td>
<td>Tison’s room</td>
<td>Conversations about school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/11/05</td>
<td>Tison, Ms. Jade, Mr. Johnson</td>
<td>Mr. J’s room</td>
<td>Conversations about school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/10/05</td>
<td>Tison, LaShay, Ms. Jade</td>
<td>Her classroom</td>
<td>Their lives and my questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX F

**Interview Record: Research Informants on the School and Community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/04/05</td>
<td>Ms. Hope, Principal</td>
<td>Principal’s office</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/12/05</td>
<td>Ms. Hope, Principal</td>
<td>Principal’s office</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/5/05</td>
<td>Ms. Kellymae</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/26/05</td>
<td>Mr. Johnson</td>
<td>His classroom</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1/05</td>
<td>Mr. Johnson</td>
<td>His classroom</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1/05</td>
<td>Ms. Klepper</td>
<td>Her classroom</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/6/05</td>
<td>Mr. Johnson</td>
<td>His classroom</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

Consent Form: Student Teacher Participants
Participant Consent Form: Participant Spring Semester. Phase 2

Title of Project: Student Teacher Experiences in and Reflections on Multicultural Schools
Investigator: Dana R. Gregory, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Teaching and Learning
Dr. Ann Potts, Department of Teaching and Learning

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine your experiences as a student teacher in a multicultural school through a year-long two-phase case study. Universities develop teacher education programs that include an immersion experience for student teachers in multicultural schools so as to prepare teachers to teach diverse populations. Since this field experience is critical to the university program and student teacher preparation, it is important to investigate the student teachers’ experiences in and reflections on this field experience. Whereas multicultural education suggests principles for pedagogy and understanding, each context has its own complexities.

Procedures: During your student teaching semester, the second phase of this two-phase study, you are volunteering to participate in three individual interviews at Weeks 2, 7, and 11 and two focus group interviews at Weeks 4 and 9. Questions for the first interview will include but not be limited to questions regarding your knowledge about and experiences with the children you are teaching and their cultural background. Interviews will give you the opportunity to share the questions you have about pedagogical processes for multicultural classrooms and share stories about the complexities in teaching in multicultural schools. The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed as data for analysis. I will keep the tapes at my home where no one will have access and I will destroy the tapes after I have completed publishing and presenting about the research findings. The focus group interviews will be group interviews that include all the research participants during which we can discuss what we are experiencing and the questions we have about teaching in multicultural classrooms. We may refer back to our book discussions and attempt to make connections between what we read and discussed in the fall and what we are experiencing in the field. I will be present in the school two-three days per week, working and teaching in a third grade classroom. Since I will be a part of the school culture, I will be taking notes on my own experiences and conversations we may have about our teaching in multicultural schools as we informally meet in the hallway, during lunch, or after school.

Benefits and Risks: There is no guarantee of any benefits to you for participating in this study. I hope to create a collaborative and shared research process in which your and my experiences and reflections will be the focus. There are sensitive issues embedded in the topic and context of multicultural schools; discussion of these issues could cause discomfort; however, it is my intent to create a research context in which you will not feel at risk or judged. If at any time, you question the appropriateness of the work within the study, I encourage you to report this to me, to Dr. Ann Potts, Dr. Jan Nespor, or Dr. David Moore (see below).

Extent of Anonymity: Your responses will remain strictly confidential. The information that you provide will have a pseudonym in the place of your name at all times, unless I gain permission to use your words and want to credit you as an author-participant. The name of the multicultural school site will remain confidential. However, since student teachers are appointed to a particular school, it may be possible to trace your identity through common knowledge or school records about where you worked as a student teacher. There are also confidentiality issues that arise in a case study of a group. You will know the other participants involved in the inquiry. Agreeing to participate in the study also requires that each participant also agrees to treat each other’s and their own identities with total confidentiality. Results of the study will be published as a dissertation and presented at conferences in the future.

Freedom to Withdraw: You may refuse to respond to any question and can withdraw from the research interview at any time. Simply inform Dana Gregory (731-0099; drg@vt.edu), Dr. Ann Potts (231-8339; apotts@vt.edu), Dr. Jan Nespor (231-8327; nespor@vt.edu), or David Moore, Chair of the university IRB (231-4991; moored@vt.edu).

Participant’s Signature                   Date                   Researcher’s Signature                  Date
## APPENDIX H

### Interview and Conversation Record with Student Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/27/05</td>
<td>Susan Lowen</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1st interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/27/05</td>
<td>Lily Dulce</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1st interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/27/05</td>
<td>Cameron Derhaag</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1st interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/28/05</td>
<td>Faith Seitz</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1st interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17/05</td>
<td>Group Interview I</td>
<td>Government office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>2nd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17/05</td>
<td>Car Talk</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Car talk about teaching</td>
<td>Students chose to tape conversation during afternoon trip home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All student teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>children about segregation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/22/05</td>
<td>Susan Lowen</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>2nd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/24/05</td>
<td>Cameron Derhaag</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>2nd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/23/05</td>
<td>Faith Seitz</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>2nd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/00/05</td>
<td>Group Talk about</td>
<td>Ms. Kellmae’s room</td>
<td>Conversations about families</td>
<td>Students chose to tape this conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“hitting:” Ms.Kellymae, Cameron, &amp; Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21/05</td>
<td>Group Interview II</td>
<td>Government Office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>Students chose to tape this conversation, however tape was blank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21/05</td>
<td>Car Talk</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Car talk about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All student teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/12/05</td>
<td>Lily Dulce</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>2nd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/05</td>
<td>Susan Lowen</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>3rd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21/05</td>
<td>Faith Seitz</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>3rd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21/05</td>
<td>Cameron Derhaag</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>3rd Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/26/05</td>
<td>Lily Dulce</td>
<td>Library office</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>3rd Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

Bus Tour of School Community
Adapted from Research Journal Entry
8/19/04

Word spread down the hallway that teachers were to congregate at the front of the school around 1:00 for a surprise. We were in the middle of getting our rooms and rolls ready during a teacher work day. There was chatter about the summer and the school days ahead as we waited at the front door. A yellow school bus appeared and the principal explained that we were going on a tour of the school community. I couldn’t have asked for a better beginning of the school year because I am not familiar with Gilmer Parks’ school district and had hoped that Tison might be able to take me around the neighborhood….The neighborhood across the street from the school is a neat and tidy neighborhood of brick homes built in the 1950’s. This adjacent neighborhood is a rectangle about six blocks across and three blocks long. Many houses have the same floor plans or are variations on a theme of homes that look like working and middle-class family dwellings. Most have a front door centered in the middle of the house with a single window on each side. Four to five steps lead up to the front door. The houses are two rooms deep unless there are add-ons, so I assume the basic house has four rooms with a bath. Each house represents family changes and choices through porches, car ports, raised dormer windows, full-room or two story additions, and various versions of chain-link, picket, split-rail, or stone fences. In one front yard we saw seven African American children playing, ages six-to-twelve approximately, and in another yard we saw two older White boys around twelve to fourteen years old with their bikes getting ready to ride out. All of the children offered bewildered waves when they saw our teacher waves and heard our cheers from the school bus.

I see carefully tended flower beds and gardens in many yards, but as the bus passes through this neighborhood and onto the next section of homes, the size of homes enlarges and each house seems built from a different design. The houses look like they were built after the 1950’s. One of the African American teachers describes one of these homes as her “dream home,” selling for $200,000, and she says that she wishes she could have gone into the home when it was up for sale last year. The bus weaves down and up the residential streets and past the three-story apartment complex surrounded by grassy space where most of our students, who are ELL learners live, according to our principal. According to the principal, immigration services places most of the families who have arrived from out of the country here in this complex, only three blocks from school. The principal is narrating our journey with some additional remarks from teachers who live in the area or are familiar with children’s homes and families. “Do you know the Gray family? They live down that block at the end.” The bus emerges out onto a commercial street that’s flanked with chain fast fooderies and gas stations, and assorted traditional businesses like book, ice cream, convenient, discount, and clothing stores. We pass over the four-way limited access highway that divides the school district with cement and motion and we turn left into another residential area much like the first. Once again I see neat and tidy homes that look alike or are again variations on the same theme. As we turn, the principal says that we won’t take the time to ride into the trailer park that’s part of the school district. We pass more three-story apartment buildings with concrete parking lots. I notice church buildings and names that represent religious ideology outside of the larger Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish
congregations that are more recognizable to me. I’m sitting midway in the bus with Tison and behind us are her friends. She’s good to sit with me, and I wonder if she’d be sitting with Ms. Brown if I weren’t there.

When we wind our way past Mr. Johnson’s family home (another third grade teacher who grew up in the Gilmer Park District and attended the school in the first group of African Americans to be bussed into the all-white Gilmer Park), he tells those close by him that he remembers what it was like to move into the neighborhood as an African American family and have White families move out. He was restricted from the local lake resort a half of a block from his home and would sometimes ‘sneak’ in at night after hours to swim. The resort closed in the 70’s, he said because of the pressures of integration.

The busload of teachers made it to the farthest corner of our district where the “projects” are built. The “projects” take up several blocks of real estate and is divided into two major sections. One major section sends children to Gilmer Park, the other major section sends children to another nearby school, Highland Heights Elementary. As the principal explains this districting measure, a White teacher behind me in the bus calls out, “Share the joy.” I see a few children outside in the grass and they’re watching our yellow school bus. An adult is walking to his car. There’s not much activity at 2:00 in the hot afternoon on the project grounds. As we turn in our circle tour back towards Gilmer Park, we pass a section of houses that are not as well maintained as any of the other neighborhoods. There’s a sofa on a porch, I see bars on some windows, there’s a lack of paint, a screen door is hanging by one hinge, and there are bare dirt brown yards. Mr. Johnson says that this is ‘the hood.’ This is not what I expected. It looks like a poor neighborhood, but I would not have thought that it was a ‘rough’ or ‘tough’ section of town by the looks of it…just poor. I think to myself, “What does it mean to be ‘the hood?’” I honestly don’t know what makes a place “the hood.” On the loop back home, we drive by a construction site for a new elementary school in the city. “Now, that’s an elementary school,” Mr. Johnson says. The school has a lot of curb appeal with its beautiful architectural appearance and features such as infrastructure for technology and both a cafeteria and a gymnasium. We end up at the local ice cream store with soft-serve chocolate, vanilla, or swirl in our hands, a treat from the principal, and then back to Gilmer Park. I wonder what lies ahead in this multicultural school where I will be engaged with third graders, teachers, staff and administration, and families for the entire school year.
Brief History of the School Neighborhood

My Research Informants, Tison, Ms. Hope, Ms. Kellymae (a fifth grade teacher), Mr. Johnson (a third grade teacher) and Ms. Jade (a third grade teacher) helped me with their local knowledge about the neighborhood’s history. Ms. Kellymae, who began teaching in the city area in 1966 and has taught 18 years at Gilmer Park, remembers when the land a few blocks from the school was a farm, the Gilmer Family Farm. So, before the mall was built, cornfields were there. Ms. Kellymae said the land for the school was part of that farm and that the city had purchased this small piece of property for Gilmer Park Elementary School. She described the neighborhood closest to the school in our interview in February.

And at that time this was a blue collar-working neighborhood and these houses were built for your middle-to lower-middle-class socioeconomic status and that is the way it developed. It was very much all-White and probably even up until probably as much as the late 70’s, early 80’s before, I don’t know when Tison’s family moved in. (Interview with Ms. Kellymae, 2-15-05)

Tison lives less than a mile away from school and told me that her family was the first African American family to move into the neighborhood around 1984-1985. Therefore, she has a twenty-year history with the school neighborhood and its cultural identity.
APPENDIX K

City Demographics

In their most recent plans (2001), the cities planning districts reported the nature of their populations. Neighborhood 1 stated that, “Until the 1960’s the population of Neighborhood 1 was predominantly White. Urban renewal programs in Jackson Street during the 1960’s displaced many of Oakland’s African-Americans from the community and many moved to Neighborhood 1. The neighborhood began a transition to a predominantly African-American neighborhood. The 1990 Census recorded a 96% black population.” The plans for Neighborhood 2 and 3 include a demographic chart of population that also describe the changes in the population from 1990 until 2000.

Table 14

Changes in Racial Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neighborhood 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Neighborhood 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2000 % change</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2000 % change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>5719</td>
<td>+ 4.5 %</td>
<td>14,064</td>
<td>- 0.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>- 17 %</td>
<td>13,034</td>
<td>- 11 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>4968</td>
<td>+ 4.5 %</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>+ 89 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other races and</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>+ 359 %</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>+ 343 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>5193</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neighborhood 2 and 3 give statistics on present population characteristics in their neighborhoods.

Table 15

Population Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neighborhood 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Neighborhood 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>2,273</td>
<td></td>
<td>13,957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,921</td>
<td>84 %</td>
<td>11,559</td>
<td>83 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>11 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other races and</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These statistics reveal that while Neighborhood 1 is 96% African American, Neighborhood 2 and 3 remain mostly White, but with noted decreases in the White population and increases in the African American population between 1990 and 2000. A very significant change is represented by the increase in “other races and multiracial” populations in Neighborhood 2 and 3 with an increase by 359% and 343% respectively.
Immigration is the primary factor in the increase in “other races and multicultural populations” in the community. The Census Data shows that most of the immigration in the school neighborhood has occurred between 1995 and 2000. 286 of the 320 reported immigrants in the Census Tract in which the school is located came to the city between 1995 and 2000. Household languages spoken, according to the Census 2000 Summary File, include English (1,965), Spanish (95), Other Indo-European languages (57), Asian and Pacific Island languages (7), and Other languages (40).
APPENDIX L

Income Levels in the School Neighborhood

I chose to study the two Census Tracts that are found nearest and including the school. Therefore, the statistics cannot be exactly related to the school’s district because of the differences in the lines drawn for the school district and the census tracts. I used this information as a way to have some reference for income and poverty levels in the general area. Census Tract A is the name I have given the Census Tract in which the school building is located. Census Tract B is west of the school, more towards the middle of the city, but still included in the school district, plus one other school district to the west. The table below shows that the economic levels in the households in the area are varied, with some, but few households falling in the highest levels of income.

Table 16

Family Income in 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census 2000 Summary File</th>
<th>Census Tract A</th>
<th>Census Tract B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,278</td>
<td>1,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10,000</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 to 14,999</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 to 19,999</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 to 24,999</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 to 29,999</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 to 34,999</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35,000 to 39,999</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000 to 44,999</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45,000 to 49,999</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 to 59,999</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000 to 74,000</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75,000 to 99,000</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000 to 124,999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125,000 to 149,000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150,000 to 199,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000 or more</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poverty levels are also reported in Census data, and I include this data as another way of understanding the surrounding community. About 10% of families in the school’s neighborhood are determined to be within “poverty status” and there are more families within “poverty status” in the Census Tract that is west and closer to the center of the city.
Table 17

Poverty Status in 1999

Census 2000 Summary File

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Census Tract A</th>
<th>Census Tract B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,740</td>
<td>4,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income in 1999 below poverty level</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX M

Immigration and English Language Learners

According to the teacher for ELL (English Language Learners), Ms. Hawthorne, the following is a list of the countries from which her students had immigrated. (These were only the students who were learning English.)

Table 18

Students Who Are English Language Learners and their Homelands (ELL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total ELL students (5-05) = 23 students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico – 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan – 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Former ELL students AY 2004-2005

Sudan – 1          Bosnia – 1

As I look at these numbers, I see how isolated one child from Sudan, Columbia, Liberia, or Cambodia might feel. To have no one else at school with your cultural experience might seem to be a solitary existence. Would a child who was alone at school want to become like everyone around him or her? During my interview with Ms. Kellymae, she said that the first ELL students at Gilmer Park came around 1994 and were from Bosnia.

I had the first ELL students to come into Gilmer Park. I had a fourth-fifth grade combination….And I had two students that came in from Bosnia. One of them, came from a very affluent Yugoslavian family before the split of Yugoslavia, and his mother had been, she was an economist and had run the State Department stores, and his father was an agricultural engineer and ran the co-op of the Farm Distribution produce of whatever for the country. His grandparents were college professors in Yugoslavia and they had like eight homes in Yugoslavia and all of these trips into Europe and whatever. Of course he had a little English and was pretty good. And then a little girl came the same year and spoke absolutely no English. (Ms. Kellymae, Interview, 2-15-05).

She went on to say that the next year,

I got in one whose family had been absolutely devastated by…especially the war between the Serbs and Muslims…the father was killed, he was beaten to death in their yard, the mother took the kids and hid in the woods for the summer months and then lived in the streets and ate out of garbage cans. The child had been in school off and on when they had friends to live with for a temporary spell, so he had very little school. These were the first students, who needed to learn English at the school, but Ms. Kellymae said that prior to 1994, the school had taught children from Mexico whose family
operated the local Mexican restaurant and a second generation family of Greek descent. It was not until the first Bosnian families came that other nationalities and language-diverse families, began to move into the school district. This year her fifth grade class included children from Mexico, Honduras, Columbia, and Vietnam. One student from Germany had already transferred to another city school. I mentioned that there was a child from Liberia in third grade this year and Ms. Kellymae replied, “I had one from Liberia last year; had never been in school. Didn’t know what a bathroom was when he came.”
APPENDIX N

Susan's Examples of Culture Despite Race

Isom's Home Culture

Part 2: My Home Culture

- Customs are ways of doing things that are passed from one generation to the next. Below, list 5 customs or traditions that your family does. Some examples of home customs and traditions are special things that you do for a holiday, special daily routines, and special places that you go with your family. The customs and traditions can be big or small.

1. We get to go on Christmas Eve.
2. We go to church on Easter.
3. Open one present Christmas Eve.
4. We ride around looking at Christmas lights.
5. Halloween we watch movies and eat junk food.

Part 3: My Diversity

Your relatives and your family are part of your diversity, but so is your personality. What you like, don't like, and enjoy doing are all part of your diverse personality. In order to describe your personality, answer the questions below.

1. What is your favorite food? **macaroni and cheese**
2. What kind of music do you like to listen to? **Rap**
3. What kinds of things do you like to do to have fun? **Play the game and play outside, and ride my bike**
4. What are things that really annoy you? **My br-**
5. What do you want to do when you grow up? **Be a wrestler**
6. What is your favorite color? **green**
7. Is there anything else that you think is different about your personality? **No**
APPENDIX O

Susan's Examples of Culture Despite Race

Jared's Home Culture

Part 2: My Home Culture

- Customs are ways of doing things that are passed from one generation to the next. Below, list 5 customs or traditions that your family does. Some examples of home customs and traditions are special things that you do for a holiday, special daily routines, and special places that you go with your family. The customs and traditions can be big or small.

✓ 1) We go to "Donatos" to celebrate birthdays.
✓ 2) We get most things from Walmart.
✓ 3) Thanksgiving Dinner
✓ 4) We go to my Babysitter's house to sleep.
✓ 5) We go to school everyday so we can go to college.
✓ 6) We go and learn, so we can get a Job.

Part 3: My Diversity

- Your relatives and your family are part of your diversity, but so is your personality. What you like, don't like, and enjoy doing are all part of your diverse personality. In order to describe your personality, answer the questions below.

✓ 1. What is your favorite food? Anchovies.
✓ 2. What kind of music do you like to listen to? Rap.
✓ 3. What kinds of things do you like to do to have fun? Play my PlayStation 2 & put Jack 18 in.
✓ 4. What are things that really annoy you? My Sisters are stupid.
✓ 5. What do you want to do when you grow up? A cop.
✓ 7. Is there anything else that you think is different about your personality? I have over 75 foreign coins.
APPENDIX P

Susan’s Examples of Culture Despite Race

Sina’s Home Culture

or 3: My Home Culture

- Customs are ways of doing things that are passed from one generation to the next. Below, list 5 customs or traditions that your family does. Some examples of home customs and traditions are special things that you do for a holiday, special daily routines, and special places that you go with your family. The customs and traditions can be big or small.

1. We play a game for the holidays.
2. We have a wedding too cow beside us.
3. We have a wedding in church when the wedding with. The cow is white.
4. My dad married my mom with 2 cows beside them.
5. My dad paid 2 cows for my uncle’s wife when they got married.

or 3: My Diversity

Your relatives and your family are part of your diversity, but so is your personality. What you like, don’t like, and enjoy doing are all part of your diverse personality. In order to describe your personality, answer the questions below.

1. What is your favorite food? Pizza, chicken, noodles.
2. What kind of music do you like to listen to? R&B.
3. What kinds of things do you like to do to have fun? Play video games, play with my sisters and brothers.
4. What are things that really annoy you? Overpay.
5. What do you want to do when you grow up? Singer, writer.
APPENDIX Q

Summary of Questions

Questions from Homework and Behavior
• Why do we make negative assumptions about families’ patterns such as responsibility, organization, and values based on an unfinished piece of paper and a child’s behavior or attitude towards school?
• How could university programs address how we use such concrete artifacts and actions to make possibly inaccurate assumptions about families?
• How could I take what I learned from examining this concrete artifact to examine student teachers’ responses to other concrete artifacts and daily routines in the school?
• How can we create other processes that set up more positive intersections between school and home?
• How do we “relate” to children in our classrooms whose behavior and attitudes are different from our own?

Questions from Cameron’s Study
• How do we assist teachers in changing their consciousnesses so that they realize that culture and race are related in complex ways?
• How do we assist teachers in developing an awareness that our culture, race, and ethnicity can change our relationships in the school and classroom? or How can universities assist future teachers in developing a sensitivity about relationships based on socio-cultural identities?
• How do we explain or demonstrate the merit of socio-cultural self-critique so that teachers can examine how their socio-cultural identities affect their relationships at school?
• Can a university create experiences like Cameron’s experiences with Julia in which student teachers could experience a “different reality” or a “different world,” other than a White and-or middle-class reality? or How do we create contexts at the university to help student teachers embrace a constructionist perspective which acknowledges that there are multiple realities in the world?
• How can student teachers develop an understanding that their experiences are not the “norm,” and that it is not the teacher’s task to compare children’s actions with their own experiences and to make judgments about children’s behavior and values based on those “norms”?
• How does the university’s act of “naming” the context as “city/urban,” create misconceptions or inaccurate preconceptions about the school and the community? How does this “naming” make those who live in this community feel about the university?

Questions from Faith’s Study
• How can university professors open the door for conversations about how our religious perspectives inform our understandings of others and informs our roles as teachers and cultural “shapers,” without offending people or inappropriately blending church and state beliefs and policies?
• How can we emphasize the role of relationships in school beyond calling it “creating a classroom environment” or “classroom management?” This sounds as if we believe that
if teachers put certain behavioral strategies (rules and consequences) in place or organize our materials and desks in a certain way, we will be consistent and nurturing. How can we make “relationships” a central feature of our classroom pedagogy?”

- How can teachers learn how to relate to different cultural identities?

Faith wished she could have known more about the children’s families and recognized the significance of relating to families. As educators, we do not need to talk only about “school-home connections” or “parent-teacher conferences,” which refer to phone calls, “notes home,” classroom newsletters, and report cards. Shouldn’t we also talk about teacher-parent relationships, so that we examine how our socio-cultural identities can affect those relationships?

- How can universities support or engender student teachers’ actions to learn about the children’s families while they are in a field placement? What is important for them to know about families? What is not important for them to know? What kinds of field placement schedules could support student teachers’ need to know about families?

- How can student teachers better understand and value different family structures, besides an “intact” family with two parents and children?

As Faith and I tried to understand the children’s “attitude” responses, we, or certainly I, felt the tension of thinking stereotypically and trying to understand people who responded differently than me.

- How can any knowledge about a person help a teacher understand that person while not creating negative judgments about the person? How can this knowledge help student teachers create positive relationships with the children’s families?

- How can teacher educators create space in university classrooms to talk about the tensions between “stereotypes” and “culturally responsive?” When is an understanding about a cultural pattern accurate and when is an understanding inaccurate or a negative stereotype?

Questions from Lily’s Study

- What does it mean to “teach differently” or what does “culturally responsive pedagogy” mean? Sub-questions to this overarching question include: Does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to teach a child differently because he or she is different? Does it mean to teach a group differently than another group because the members of the group are alike? Does believing that only one of these options is “responsive teaching” negate the possibility of the other option? Does “teaching differently” refer to a “teaching strategy” or to a teaching “relationship?”

- How can university professors talk about the role of cultural-racial-socio-economic identities in our relationships with children, parents, and other professionals? How does our identity affect content, affect how other people see us, and what we can talk about and not talk about?

- Should we talk explicitly about the cultural connections and disconnections we have with our children and examine the standards for expectations embedded in those connections and disconnections? How do we participate in such discussions without judging “others?”

- How can universities address more concretely the ways in which we make judgments about children and families based on “otherness?”

- Most teachers will teach “other people’s children” in the future. How can university courses consider the complexity of cultural identities when preparing student teachers?
Questions from Susan’s Study

- How can teacher educators demonstrate how history continues to influence present day social systems?
- How can teacher educators help teacher candidates see the significance of racial identity to all people and realize that race matters even today? What resources are there to help student teachers hear about “others’” experiences?
- How can teacher educators lead teacher candidates to construct a complex understanding of culture with a fuller knowledge of the multiple factors that influence one’s cultural identity?
- How can I create contexts in my coursework during which we can focus on the importance of creating positive relationships with children and faculty in schools? Or how do we make “relationships” central to our work towards “culturally responsive pedagogy?”
- How can teacher educators set up a context for talking about diversity issues that engenders “self-critique” of one’s socio-cultural understandings?