Increasing Preservice Teachers' Intercultural Awareness Through Service-Learning

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Abstract

Using a qualitative, interpretive research design, this study examined the development of intercultural awareness of preservice teachers in a service-learning setting. We believe that intercultural awareness is a critical disposition for the teaching profession. Data sources included electronic reflection journals of 130 service-learning course participants, comprised of mostly White, undergraduate university students working with elementary school children in culturally diverse settings. Findings illustrated that students increased their intercultural awareness in multiple contexts including linguistic diversity, socio-economic challenges, home culture norms, and military life. We concluded that preservice teachers' capacity to recognize and work with learners' different needs builds as they become aware of cultural differences. Increasing preservice teachers' intercultural awareness is a critical professional disposition to develop given the extensive student diversity in today's schools.

Teacher career development studies reveal that 33% of teachers leave the profession in the first three years (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). Beginning teachers report that inability to cope with the demands of teaching is the major reason they decide to leave. They enter the profession with a lack of initial training for the realities of teaching, including a lack of preparation to work with ethnically diverse student populations (Aguado, Ballesteros, & Malik, 2003; Gordon, 2000). This is further exacerbated by the fact that there is a cultural mismatch between teachers and the students they teach. Moreover, beginning teachers are often given the most difficult assignments for their first teaching experience with little support from the school (Croasmun, Hampton, & Herrmann, 1999). We are looking at pre-service learning courses as a possible solution.

Research indicates that involvement in service-learning projects is considered to be a powerful tool that provides preservice teachers with a general foundation to better understand how to teach children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Reneer, Price, Keene, & Little, 2004). This understanding starts by assisting preservice teachers to raise their awareness of children's cultural backgrounds and the impact diversity has on teaching and learning (Nieto, 1999). An increased awareness of other cultures is the first stage in understanding, and then accepting, differences between cultures. The broader concept of intercultural awareness includes the process of increased awareness, of which consciousness of one's own culture and assumptions about people who are different is essential (Pederson, 1988).

Intercultural awareness is considered to be a critical professional disposition in many professions, including teaching (Campinha-Bacote, 2007; Garmon, 2005). This study examines the development of intercultural awareness in a service-learning setting. We partnered with schools composed of diverse student populations in which there is an opportunity gap related to students of socio-economic disadvantage. We believe that teachers who understand how students' needs vary due to cultural factors are more likely to be retained within the profession. When teachers better understand their students' backgrounds, student achievement increases (Black & William, 1998). In turn, this makes teachers feel more effective about their ability to teach all students in their charge. While the focus of this study is the development of intercultural awareness, it is informed by the literature on multicultural service learning, professional dispositions, as well as intercultural awareness.

Theoretical Framework

Multicultural Service Learning (MSL)

Beginning teachers enter the profession at a time when the demographic backdrop of K-12 classrooms in the U.S. has become increasingly diverse, both culturally and linguistically. The national picture shows 6.3 million students have a primary language other than English and 13 million students come from backgrounds of poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2005). More than 13% of the students enrolled in general education classrooms receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NCES, 2009). Teachers do not reflect these same demographics. Most teachers are White, monolingual, middle class females (NCES, 2008). One can further conclude that they have been sheltered from much of the inequality that permeates society and its institutions, including schools (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). Yet, these teachers will enter a system where gross inequities are evident in virtually every component of the nation's public education (Rios et al., 2009). This situation helps create a schooling system that serves to perpetuate social inequalities.

In order to draw attention to the pluralistic nature of society and to create more equitable structures within the education system, a rise in the number of university multicultural courses took place during the 1980s. Concomitantly, this occurred in teacher education programs which subscribed to Dewey's (1916) argument that education aims to rectify inequalities caused through income and social standing and to integrate students into a broader society. Teacher preparation programs employed a variety of approaches in order to infuse multicultural perspectives into courses. Most of the approaches had their own benefits but a common drawback was that they avoided a direct confrontation of the causes of social inequities (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Sperling, 2007). Overall, teacher preparation programs approached multicultural issues superficially, focusing on differences in cultural celebrations, or offering ways to assimilate those "who did not fit the cultural norm" (O'Grady, 2000, p. 4). One shortcoming was that many courses were theoretical in approach, often restricted to the university classroom. The need to "prepare Whites to work with underserved populations… prompted educators… to begin experimenting with MSL (Multicultural Service Learning)" (Sperling, 2007, p. 311).

Moving students' learning into active engagement with new cultural contexts through MSL courses offered a way to deepen participants' understandings of course concepts and broadened their worldviews, and provided service and support to schools and the students they served (Ford & Dillard, 1996; Palmer & Savoie, 2002). MSL courses which make available, "extensive community-based immersion experience, coupled with coursework" (Sleeter, 2001), seemed to present a more authentic and meaningful preparation for teacher candidates. However, despite the best practice that MSL suggests, Sperling (2007) cautions that courses may do more harm than good and are fraught with some of the inherent problems they seek to amend.

One potential dilemma is that superficial MSL interactions with culturally diverse communities may serve to replicate the deficit model by enabling participants to feel altruistic, selfless, and enhance their belief they are doing good by giving to the underprivileged. In doing good, students believe they are making up a deficit. Thus, power structures are reinforced (Coles, 1999). Further, MSL course designers are at risk of subscribing to "exposure-centric pedagogies" (Sperling, p. 318) which are underpinned by a belief that interests converge when Whites are exposed to racial and/or ethic minority groups (Bell, 1996). In sum, the concerns are that the limited experiences service-learning students have will maintain "cultural deficit thinking, lowered expectations, devaluation of language differences, and old-fashioned racial prejudice… (towards) Black and Latino children" (Sperling, p. 311).

Sperling (2007) and others (Densmore, 2000; Tellez, 2000) do not recommend abandoning MSL. Rather, they advocate for a critical questioning of how transformative the experience really is and whether it is worth having in our schools. Proponents hold that MSL experiences do provide the opportunities to reflect on practice within a diverse community context that Villegas and Lucas (2002) describe as helping prospective teachers understand and gain skills to become effective agents of change. Guiding students in critical reflection upon their MSL experiences can lead to more social justice-orientation in their thinking and commitment to and motivation for teaching in a multicultural communities (Carter Andrews, 2009). With careful attention to important caveats during MSL course planning and implementation, the potential remains for an authentic exposure of power structures and inequalities and a raising of students' intercultural awareness. While the integration of multicultural education into service-learning courses is not the perfect solution, it can be an effective pedagogical strategy for developing preservice students' attitudinal and behavioral dispositions for urban teaching (Delgado, 1997).

Professional Dispositions

Professional dispositions is a topic much discussed in research literature (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Freeman, 2007; Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, & Ness, 2005). A debate has unfolded over the definition of the term (Diez, 2007; Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw, 2009), the relative value of various dispositions (Villegas, 2007; Wasicsko, 2004), whether dispositions are inherent or acquired (Oja & Reiman, 2007; Wasicsko, 2004), and if teaching and assessing dispositions has a place in teacher preparation programs (Damon, 2005; Hess, 2006; Wilkerson, 2006; Wise, 2006). Like other teacher educators, we follow the debates closely but often take a pragmatic position of acceptance due to accreditation and program demands which override the ethical and moral dilemma (Shively & Misco, 2010). We accept the view that professional dispositions cover a wide range of cognition including critical thinking, values, attitudes, and beliefs. Recognizing the lack of specificity of the definition, we accept NCATE's (2007, n.p.) description of professional dispositions as "attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities…. positive behaviors (which) support student learning and development."

According to Katz and Raths (1986), dispositions are attributions which summarize a trend of a teacher's actions across similar contexts. They can exhibit themselves in a person's behaviors through such activities as: preparedness for class, regular attendance, active participation, flexibility, working under pressure, and the ability to communicate with others (Lund, Wayda, Woodward, & Buck, 2007).

Specifically, we focus on teacher actions pertaining to dispositions which stem from attitudes, values, and beliefs toward people from other cultures. Clark and Digby (1999) maintain that preservice teacher education programs need to prepare students to work with various and diverse populations and to provide the opportunity to acknowledge issues of social and educational inequalities within classrooms. When talking about social inequalities, the term social justice is often invoked but rarely defined (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Rather than offering a simplistic definition, Nieto (1999) delineates four components that generally define a broad view of social justice. The components can be distilled into (a) challenging stereotypes, (b) providing material and emotional resources, (c) drawing on the talents and strengths of the children's culture, and (d) supporting agency for social change.

Fundamental to the idea of challenging stereotypes is an ability and willingness to compare one's own culture to another culture (Kohls & Knight, 1994). When students are disposed toward examining their own beliefs and values about intercultural differences, they

develop an awareness of their own cultural bias (Campinha-Bacote, 2007). The impact of cultural diversity courses on students' attitudes and beliefs have had mixed reviews (Garmon, 2005; Sperling, 2007). However, there is broad-based support among teacher educators that field-based learning experiences provide preservice teachers valuable knowledge about multicultural teaching and learning. This allows them to connect theory with practice, to increase their awareness of intercultural diversity and respond appropriately to students' needs (Czop Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010; Duarte & Reed, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Lortie's (1975) seminal work posited that the predispositions teacher candidates bring to the classroom are decidedly more powerful than the learning that occurs in preservice courses. While we agree with Lortie, we believe that reflection in preservice courses, if properly structured can ameliorate this. Calling upon students to reflect on classroom events and interactions assists them to become more aware of their own attitudes, beliefs and expectations (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). Thoughtful reflection is considered essential practice for teachers (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000). Reflection is a key component of service-learning and teacher education that has great possibilities for preservice teachers in cultural contexts (Correia & Bleicher, 2008; Milner & Smithey, 2003).

The awareness of children's cultural backgrounds is a critical disposition to nurture in service-learning students involved in school settings. An increased awareness of other cultures is the first stage in understanding, and then accepting, difference between cultures. It is essential if we are to communicate effectively and to live harmoniously alongside others. The term intercultural awareness aptly describes this process and becomes pivotal when interacting with cultural communities different from one's own.

Intercultural Awareness

In our study we use Pederson's (1988) definition of multicultural awareness as a consciousness of one's own culture and assumptions about and reactions to people who are different. This definition gave rise to the concept of intercultural awareness. Awareness arises from recognizing our own cultural values, beliefs and perceptions and how they play out in our actions and interactions with people from different cultures. Without being aware of the influence of one's own cultural values and biases, teachers run the risk of imposing their beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior on those of another culture; an act known as cultural imposition (Leininger, 1978). In Pederson's scheme, awareness is the foundation in a sequence of three stages. The second and third stages are knowledge of multiple cultures and developing skills with which to utilize that knowledge to bring about effective changes. Multicultural awareness increases the potential for intentional, purposeful decision making which benefits all stakeholders.

Intercultural awareness stems from self-examination of attitudinal changes which occur as a result of intercultural experiences. This awareness facilitates the acquisition of intercultural skills which make a person more competent when working in culturally diverse settings (Quappe & Cantatore, 1991). Campinha-Bacote (2007) studied cultural competence in health care professionals and identified five interrelated constructs: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill, and cultural encounters and, what could be considered the peak experience, cultural desire. Campinha-Bacote found that individuals displaying high level of intercultural competence shared common dispositions of compassion, authenticity, humility, openness, availability, and flexibility as well as commitment and passion to care, as they appropriately and effectively acted and related in various cultural contexts and spaces.

As Pederson (1988) states, cultural competence is a developmental continuum that evolves over an extended period. In our research, we apply this to undergraduate students who are just beginning their university

studies. Most have had little experience working in schools with students from cultures different from theirs. We see our SLC as providing an early field experience that can assist in developing cultural competence. Thinking further ahead in a teacher's career path, Allan (2002, p. 44) conceptualizes schools as "cultural spaces… into which will come students (teachers) of differing backgrounds and histories, bringing with them certain experiences, attitudes, expectations and preconceptions which constitute their own particular cultural characteristics". Awareness develops through interactions within these spaces as students engage and relate to different cultures, experiences which successfully bridge research and practice.

As with all individuals, university students are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum. Raising preservice teachers' intercultural awareness enables them to determine if they have the disposition necessary to effectively teach children from underserved communities (Burns, Grand, & Marable, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 1999). Raising cultural awareness also builds an emotional platform. This development of emotional resources, through which teachers express a belief in all students' ability and worth, is one of the essential components of social justice (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

One outcome of a lack of social justice in our educational system is the achievement gap. It is now widely recognized in the U.S. that students from underserved ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and those from poor families, achieve lower level of academic performance than other students. Research has found that racial or ethnic composition of student populations can be used to draw accurate predictions of achievement for the vast majority of California schools (AIR, 2007), a situation that has been termed the achievement gap (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). Nieto and Bode (2008) recast the achievement gap in terms of the lack of school resources allocated to poor

schools, rather than the lack of student ability. Traditionally, equity and inclusion have been viewed as a "problem" to be solved. We advocate for a paradigm shift to viewing equity and inclusion as an "opportunity" to understand and embrace differences (Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2007). This new paradigm allows educators to view their roles as meeting the needs of underserved students rather than helping underachieving students.

Appropriate personal values and attitudes are required for a preservice teacher to develop intercultural competence. This competence encompasses the skills of discovery and interaction as well as cultural knowledge. Intercultural awareness is the first and essential step in the process of intercultural competence. Awareness is necessary before students can begin to develop attitudes, knowledge and skills about their own and others' cultures by direct cross-cultural interactions with culturally diverse children and families. Service-learning courses provide opportunities for such intercultural encounters. These encounters promote modification of existent beliefs about cultural groups and lessen the possibility of stereotyping.

Early service-learning experiences in schools provide a way to accrue evidence-based learning that can bridge the gap between theory, methods courses, and real life. This and other carefully planned early experiences help build what Cochran-Smith & Lyttle (1999) term a knowledge of practice. Such early development of knowledge of practice can help stem teacher attrition.

Context of the Study

Service-Learning Design

The course in this study contained two core elements that define it as a service-learning course (SLC): (a) service activities that help meet needs as defined by that community, and (b) structured educational components that challenge university students to think critically about and learn from their experiences (Wade, 1997). Service activities transform learning

opportunities, and what participants learn further informs their service (Carver, 1997). Thus, service-learning can be viewed from a participant's perspective as serving to learn and learning to serve (Levesque & Prosser, 1996). Student involvement in service activities can increase motivation, reinforce learning the theoretical approaches to teaching and curriculum, and enhance understanding of real-world issues (Kolb, 1984; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). Service-learning bridges the gap between theory and practice (Billig, 2000).

Our SLC has proven to be successful in terms of meeting the expectations of both the university offering the course and the local school district, our community partner, receiving the service. It is based on the community partner's expressed needs to have more instructional time provided for English learners and economically disadvantaged children in two elementary schools. Negotiations resulted in an agreement that the partnership should meet the needs of the elementary school children and also help the university students attain the learning outcomes of the course (Bleicher, Correia, & Buchanan, in press).

The design of our SLC involved what Varlotta (2000) terms an intertextual integration. In this type of course design, the service component and the academic component inform each other, with neither occupying a superior position. In Varlotta's scheme, the setting for this study was full and narrow in which, for the better part of the semester, all students in the class served at the same agency. The service-learning activities were examined through the theoretical lens of the course, in this case, educational theories about teaching and learning in multicultural elementary school settings. The extended time students serve allows them to develop and maintain relationships with each other and the communities they serve. According to Varlotta, the advantages of this type of service-learning context are that students share a common on-going experience that lends itself to class discussion.

The SLC in this study provided the following three requirements for a quality service-learning experience:
1. Orientation and training to service-learning;
2. A meaningful and well-structured field experience;
3. Opportunities for critical reflection following the service experience.

Course Structure

A team of two students worked in each classroom for three hours each week for 13 weeks. All students met with the course instructor for an hour-long seminar at the school site immediately following their service-learning experience (SLE). During seminar, students wrote reflections, shared experiences, raised important issues and questions and considered how educational research and theories inform their personal learning. Seminar was a safe place for mental reflection as students discussed any cultural incongruence they experienced, explored their heightened cultural awareness, and revealed their assumptions about children and learning.

Students engaged in several activities that the community partner felt would benefit the elementary school children. These included one-on-one tutoring in the classroom during the lessons, leading small group instruction, and roving around when the teacher was doing whole-class instruction to assist students. Our students were also encouraged to provide "big sister/ brother" role modeling on the playground during breaks.

The elementary schools were in close proximity to the university. We placed students with expert teachers in the SLE to allow for rich opportunities to develop competence in an occupation (in our case, teaching). Each teacher had a deep knowledge base, both theoretical and practical, and recognized behavior patterns in their students that lead to effective actions (Berliner, 2004). Our students gained from working alongside expert teachers and began to build their own knowledge base and conceptual

understanding (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

The learning outcomes for our students were clearly defined in the course syllabus and aligned with the California Teacher Performance Expectations and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards. The outcomes required students to demonstrate that they can effectively: (a) engage with K-8 school children in one-on-one tutoring and small group guidance; (b) respond sensitively and appropriately to the needs of diverse learners; (c) recognize that deliberative action demands that they act in the world responsibly and empathetically; (d) think critically, particularly in their awareness of dispositions and assumptions; and (e) reflect on their interactions with children and communicate those reflections by keeping a reflection journal.

An impetus for designing the course was the lack of preservice cross-cultural experiences that sometimes impede teachers from being effective with diverse students (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). The course attempted to address the call made by Grant and Gillette (2006) for teacher preparation programs to expose candidates to different viewpoints so they can examine their assumptions and beliefs, and to provide support as students engage with others from diverse backgrounds.

Partnership Success

The community-university partnership in which this study was set has run for eight years. The impact on our students appears to have been profound. This current study focused on reflection and the writing of reflections. Other factors that were strongly affected through the SLE were the attitude and beliefs of the undergraduate students, particularly confidence and self-esteem. According to the teachers and principals, as well as direct observations by the course instructors, the extra tutoring and pro-social interactions with the university students have increased the elementary school children's learning. Such

outcomes and conclusions are beneficial and can be expected from a service-learning course that has been carefully designed. Details for developing this service-learning course will soon be published elsewhere (Bleicher, Correia, & Buchanan, in press).

Methods

This opened-ended interpretive research was designed to capture the portrayal of SLC events in the participants' own terms (Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2000) as they experienced the world of the classroom and interacted with adults and children and with the setting in which these interactions take place (Packer, 2011). The process of opened-ended interpretive research is concerned with generating context based understanding, with researchers trying to make sense of participants' meaning and perspectives and, as such, is dependent upon trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Participants

A total of 130 undergraduate students participated in the study over a period of four consecutive semesters. Students were predominately liberal studies majors who, for the most part, did not yet know have firm career aspirations. This study took place in California where a bachelor of arts in education is not a degree option. Students pursing a career in elementary teaching are advised to complete a bachelor's degree in liberal studies. They then take a post graduate teacher preparation program. In this paper, when we discuss preservice teachers we are referring to undergraduate students who are not yet enrolled in any teacher preparation courses.

The school district in which our course took place was in a rural area with a naval base within the catchment area of the schools. The District Accountability Report Card (2009 n.p.) described the student body as a "multi-ethnic population, a microcosm of the nation, and its diverse heritage". More than 60% of the children came from economically

disadvantaged households. Many are children of agricultural workers while one third of the schools' students are from military households. Consequently, a large number of children were regarded as transient, having attended different elementary schools in several locations, and frequently in more than one country, and an atypically high proportion of students left (permanently or for extended time periods) during the school year. This break in school attendance stability greatly impacted the academic achievement of the children as well as their social and emotional development (school principal, personal communication, October 14, 2009).

Statistics for the ethnicity of children in the school district included 4.4% African American, 1.2% American Indian, 1.2% Asian, 18.9% Caucasian, 2.8 % Filipino, 70.6% Hispanic, and 0.9% Pacific Islander.

Data Sources

Each participant wrote a total of 10 electronic reflection journal entries during the semester. This gave us a database of approximately 1300 journal entries. Beyond the weekly journal entries, a final meta-reflection required participants to read all of their reflections and synthesize the main learning from their experiences. The meta-reflection findings will be reported at another date.

As a frame for assisting students in writing reflection journal entries, we used "small moments". Small moments refers to a writing strategy for young children (Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2005) that encourages writers to think about a small moment they have experienced and then write a story about it. Our rationale for choosing the small moments method was because classrooms can be overwhelming environments for our students. What we observed previously was that students were keeping a log of all classroom events, much like a journal. The small moment method allowed them to focus and capture the importance of one event, allowing students to go deeper, rather than broader in their reflection.

Instead of providing participants with writing prompts, we asked them to focus on a small moment that occurred during their time in the classroom, and then write a story about a small moment that they perceived as important or informative. In line with Dewey (1933), we believe that allowing participants to make the choice enabled them to find meaning in their belief as they inquired into a difficulty, troublesome event or experience that they did not immediately understand. This method worked well for undergraduate college students.

Analysis

Emerging themes and patterns were developed both inductively from the data and deductively from the conceptual framework (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007). Typical of interpretive data analysis (Erickson, 2006), this was a recursive process, which we now describe.

In preparing the journal entries for analysis, we gathered all journal entries in one document. We independently read through the journal entries and looked for patterns in what types of small moments students were writing about. The first reading revealed patterns of who was doing certain things with whom. We noticed that some interactions were child to child, teacher to child and student to child. Using this as a lens, we then re-read the journal entries and developed deeper themes within the interactions. These tended to be conflict, curriculum, or culture related. Discussions among the three researchers (authors) of prevalent themes were recorded as analytic memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). It became evident that the most compelling theme for many participants was that of developing cultural awareness. Further analysis and discussion distilled four aspects of developing cultural awareness: linguistic diversity, socioeconomic challenges, home-culture norms and military life.

Results and Discussion

The heart of the problem of teacher attrition is students' lack of authentic experiences early in their training that enables them to decide if teaching is right for them. The students in this study benefited from being in an SLC during their first years at university that was designed to provide such authentic experiences. The voices of students quoted are representative of the entire corpus of student reflection journal entries. They are telling examples of the growth of cultural awareness that we argue is critical to developing teachers who will not only enter the profession but remain there for a full career, often in schools with diverse student populations.

Overall, we found that our students were not content with the obvious. Although they were novices to working in classrooms, they often demonstrated a depth of inquisitiveness beyond their initial observations. Making their reflections public through their writing encouraged students to go beyond surface level understanding of classroom activities, procedures, interactions and events. It also allowed for conversations with instructors and peers about how they interpreted their service-learning experiences and the dispositions they formed based on those experiences.

For the remainder of this paper, we will use student to refer to the undergraduate students enrolled in the SLC and children to refer to the pupils in the elementary school.

The path to developing cultural awareness began when students observed and wrote about experiences that were different from their own. This prompted students to go beyond surface level understanding and reflect on why these differences existed, understanding intensified as they explored how they can go beyond differences and reach all children. Students wrote about multiple dimensions of culture. In this study, we focus on the four most frequently referenced aspects; linguistic diversity, socio-economic challenges, home culture norms, and military life.

Linguistic Diversity

In journal reflections, students often noted the cultural and linguistic diversity of children. There were times when reflections discussed overt differences such as the child's home language, or ethnic heritage, and there were times when reflections revealed deeper levels of cultural understanding and insights about school children. These insights were sometimes revealed through language, a key component of culture that provides a window into deeper aspects of children's culture in and out of school (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 1999). The following reflections illustrate how Sara developed a deeper understanding of the how the home language and culture have the potential to affect learning.

> As I was helping Mateo, I noticed his homework was incorrect. He said his dad had helped him. At that point, I realized his dad must be a Spanish speaker based on how Mateo had written his homework. If this is the case, Mateo is in a difficult situation. I must investigate. (Sara)

Before this point, Sara had not realized Mateo came from a home in which a language other than English was spoken. The discrepancy in Mateo's in-school writing and his homework writing led her to theorize that Mateo's father must be a Spanish speaker.

Sara's intuition of Mateo's home language raised her awareness that the experiences and culture of children may be different from the teacher's. Mateo's experiences and culture lead her to consider a whole new dimension she was not aware of. This is what Pedersen (1988) calls the awareness stage, where people begin to realize there are people who are different from them culturally. In Sara's case, we can presuppose she was beyond the basic-level awareness that people are different and come from different backgrounds. However, her awareness became more refined. We can presume that, in her experience, the help her parents gave her with

homework in elementary school was correct, at least linguistically because it was a shared language with the school. In Mateo's case there was a discrepancy between the home and school languages. She also realized that this discrepancy leads to a larger issue. The help parents provide at home to their children, although with good intentions, may not be the help they need, and may in fact result in incorrect homework.

Sara demonstrated an increased awareness that children sometimes come from a different background than their teacher (Sleeter, 2001). Sara's willingness to look deeper into the situation indicated her interest to investigate how home factors impact the child's learning (Burns, Grand, & Marable, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009). When teachers understand children's diversity, including their home language, ethnic backgrounds, and home culture, they make a greater difference in children's learning (Haberman, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009). A likely change Sara could make in her teaching that would make a difference in Mateo's learning would be to assign homework that would call for parents to be involved, but not require them to intervene.

An awareness of the linguistic challenges children may encounter as they reconcile the language of the home with the language of the school is one aspect of developing a greater understanding of the linguistic and cultural diversity in families. In order for teachers to be prepared to create culturally relevant learning environments, socio-economic issues also need to be considered as one aspect of multiculturalism (Nieto, 1999).

Socio-economic Challenges

Understanding the multicultural backgrounds of children encompasses knowledge of socio-economic factors (Clark & Digby, 1999). Alice related an incident involving such factors that appeared to have affected her deeply.

During one classroom experience, I got to learn about one little girl's home

situation. This little girl is smart, but has trouble in school. She also brings pennies from her piggy bank to pay for her lunch. We found out through one incident that her mother had her at a very young age. The mother is currently trying to get her high school diploma, and she is more focused on her education than her daughter's. I feel like the daughter is getting the short end of the stick (Alice).

Alice demonstrated awareness that home socio-economic factors might impact a child's classroom performance. The incident of the child bringing pennies from a piggy bank to pay for lunch alerted Alice to the challenging home context that might be contributing to the trouble the child was experiencing in school. Alice's final comment regarding her feelings that the little girl "is getting the short end of the stick," indicated her room to grow in the area of intercultural competence (Campinha-Bacote, 2007). She concluded that it was unfair that the mother was spending more time on her own education. This conclusion was based on her personal cultural norms. She made it in the absence of important factual information about the mother and the home culture of the child. Being 18 years old, it is not surprising that Alice might require more life experiences to move along the cultural competence trajectory (Pederson, 1988).

This service-learning experience gave Alice an opportunity to develop her understanding about the importance of the home culture and its impact on school performance (Ladson-Billings, 2009). One of the causes of beginning teacher attrition is the lack of preparation to face the challenges of the social realities that affect teaching in socio-economic diverse classrooms (Gordon, 2000). Alice began to develop a disposition of looking beyond the classroom walls to understand children's learning needs. This disposition places her one step ahead of the game due to her inquisitiveness and ability to express her views. As her instructors, we would build upon this, encouraging her to become aware of the

personal assumptions and cultural norms she brings to the classroom and upon which she formulates conclusions about others (Allan, 2002).

Home Culture Norms

Another aspect of home culture that became apparent to students was parenting. Students became aware of the varying parenting styles and the implications for the classroom context. There may be what Irvine (2002) calls a lack of cultural synchronization between the home culture norms of the teacher and those reflected in children's classroom interactions.

In the following excerpt, Denise reflected on how a child's behavior was different than how she expected it should be light of her own home and school experiences. She pondered how it was different than what she assumed to be acceptable school behavior.

> All I heard from John was "No" when referring to the jet puzzle pieces. He wouldn't put the pieces together, but neither could anyone else…. I also realized that the things parents teach their children really can affect them in a classroom. When I went to school you didn't say no to your teacher, let alone you parents, but John's tells his mother no all the time. (Denise).

Cultural awareness becomes central as we see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways. What is considered an appropriate behavior in one culture is frequently inappropriate in another. As Denise reflected on how she felt John should behave, her journal entry suggested cultural discontinuity (Talbert-Johnson, 2006) between behaviors deemed acceptable in the home and school. Denise's portrayal fits Pederson's (1988) description of how multicultural awareness arises from recognizing our own cultural values, beliefs and perceptions and how they play out in our actions and interactions.

Denise, in a later experience, changed her thinking as it related to the role of home cultural practices influencing classroom behavior. In this second excerpt, she recognized it was not her place to intercede in the beliefs of the child. Rather, it was the parents' prerogative.

> During the second 20-minute rotation, the students all finished their plates early and broke up into pairs to play tick-tac-toe. At one point someone mentioned Christmas and I really didn't pay attention to their conversation at first. It wasn't until Alvin claimed that God hated Christmas that I decided to say something on the subject. I immediately denied the fact and asked him where he heard such a thing. He replied by saying that his sister told him. I could have gone off on a long spiel about how God didn't hate Christmas and that Jesus was born on Christmas, but I refrained. …. If I were ever faced with this situation again, I would let Alvin say what he needed to say and not comment. I am not in a position where I can tell him what to believe or not, that is for his parents to decide (Denise).

By acting on her first instinct in this episode, immediately correcting the child's statement, Denise made an emotive response borne out of her own cultural background. Because we are often not cognizant of our own cultural dispositions, developing awareness of our cultural dynamics is a difficult task. However, through reflecting on the event, Denise showed how she was developing aspects of cultural competence when teaching children of diverse backgrounds (Campinha-Bacote, 2007; Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). The reflection implies Denise's awareness of her own culture and assumptions, her ability to compare her own culture to another, and willingness to question her reactions to cultural difference.

The SLC offered Denise a context for extending her cultural knowledge, which will move her toward the second stage in Pederson's (1988) model of multicultural

development, "knowledge of the culture in question" (p. 6). Denise was aware of the beliefs she espoused and how they led her to interpret the actions of others. In reflection, she realized there was a place where they may not be appropriate. This provides evidence that Denise will be less likely to run the risk of cultural imposition (Leininger, 1978). She learned where cultural boundaries lie. She realized, in reflection, that she overstepped the mark by trying to supplant another family's culture by imposing the beliefs and values with which she was reared. As teachers, we hope that Denise will use this realization to guide her own students in conversations that allow all students to share their thoughts and ideas in a respectful environment. To move along the intercultural competence continuum stage outlined by Campinha-Bacote (2007), like all preservice students, Denise will increase her intercultural knowledge and develop a set of meaningful skills through more intercultural encounters.

Military Life

There are aspects of multiculturalism in schools that are context bound, aspects that arise from a shared culture that transcends the multiplicity of family cultures. For example, the school setting for this SLC serves children from a nearby military base. Students learned a lot about the shared culture of military families and its impact on teaching and learning. In the following excerpt, Maricela discussed how she needed to abandon her lesson plan and focus on the emotional needs of a child.

> Then Lucia told me she was moving to Germany. I was in disbelief. Working with a military school I am sure this happen all too often. She was moving to the base in Germany. I thought how exciting, personally I would love to live in Germany, but from the look on her face I realized that this is not what she wanted. Leaving all her friends and school would be hard for someone her age. … I found myself completely avoiding the lesson plan in order to

> help Lucia with what was most important to her life at that moment. I taught her to count in German. The funny sounds I was making by counting in Germany made her laugh and got her off the depressing aspect of moving away… The professional disposition that I learned in this small moment is the ability to adapt. Adapt to change and adapt to each child's personal situation so that I can better teach and help my students. (Maricela)

Maricela learned about the cultural issues specific to this school's population. Cultural issues can lead to emotional reactions in the classroom. Maricela's willingness and ability to adapt plans to meet new needs that developed demonstrates flexibility, which she recognized as a critical disposition. When such emotional issues arise, the teacher needs to protect the emotional wellbeing of the children. Maricela acted as an emotional resource for Lucia in a manner consistent with one of Nieto and Bode's (2008) essential components of social justice. Maricela attempted to create a low-anxiety learning environment and lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1981) for the child, thus allowing her to move away from the cause of her anxiety. She was experiencing theory, developing knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 1999), and thereby bridging the gap between educational theory and real life.

The importance attributed to familial factors, including home life diversity, has often been regarded as the critical factor in children's achievement in school. Edmonds (cited in Neisser, 1986) contends that achievement in school learning cannot be solely attributed to familial contexts and getting children to be able to learn in the ways that schools teach. Rather, Edmonds' school effects movement postulates that teachers and their students profit by knowing what is "consistently effective for the full range of the pupil population, and especially for low income minority students" (p. 95).

Culture counts. It is at the heart of all that we do in education, whether it is

curriculum, instruction, assessment or interacting with students (Gay, 2000). The decision that led Maricela to effective change and appropriate action exemplify the interplay between how beliefs about pupil performance derive from family background and school response to it (Neisser, 1986). In Maricela's case, it was by avoiding the lesson plan and adapting her plans to address what was most important to Lucia's life at that moment.

Maricela displayed dispositions of compassion, availability and flexibility as well as commitment and passion to care as they appropriately and effectively acted and related in the specific context created by military culture. These are dispositions that Campinha-Bacote (2007) found present in individuals with high levels of intercultural competence. Maricela made effective change based on awareness and knowledge of the culture in question in line with Pederson's (1988) third stage of actualized multicultural development. This is not to say that she has reached the final stage of multicultural development or has arrived at the end of the cultural competence continuum. As Pederson reminds, cultural competence is a continuum that evolves over an extended period. Rather, Maricela began developing cultural awareness and applying the knowledge gained to build a repertoire of skills that, we believe, will make her more competent when working in culturally diverse settings.

Conclusions

The classroom is a communal cultural space truly occupied by multiple, and often opposing, cultures. It is a collective of both shared and individual cultures of children, influenced and managed by the teacher, and bounded by a culture of schooling that is unique to the setting yet sharing common features with educational institutions. Teachers must span boundaries as they come to know and then reconcile what is taught in the home with what they need to teach in the classroom.

We view growth in preservice teachers' intercultural awareness as multi-dimensional.

Children's cultural diversity and the range of cultural values they bring to the school continue to challenge schools. Teachers need to learn how to effectively teach children from cultures different from their own (Burns, Grand, & Marable, 2008). Often, people are not conscious of their own cultural dispositions making awareness of intercultural dynamics a difficult task (Quappe & Cantatore, 1991). Through their service-learning experiences, preservice teachers learn ways to manage complicated and demanding situations. They develop the ability to channel the personal, emotional, and social pressures of a group of 30 or more children in order to help them become better learners. They begin to realize that standards can be raised if teachers acquire the skills to tackle this task more effectively. This developmental sequence aligns with both Pederson's (1988) and Campinha-Bacote's (2007) sequential models of acquiring cultural competency skills.

In their reflections many of our preservice teachers express a disposition toward the belief that all children can learn. A preservice teacher's capacity to recognize and work with learners' different needs builds as they become aware of cultural differences. Research has found that some teachers treat minority students with lower expectations and make decisions about students' academic potentials based on false or stereotyped information (Ferguson, 1998; Sperling, 2007; Taylor, 1979). From this study, we are hopeful that our preservice teachers will not develop such attitudes.

Educational Importance

We argue that increasing preservice teachers' intercultural awareness is a fundamental professional disposition to develop given the extensive student diversity in today's schools. Gay (2000) and Sperling (2007) argue that good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about the change that is necessary to prevent the inequalities that students from diverse backgrounds endure. We

agree with Gay and Sperling. We stress the notion of awareness particularly because our preservice teachers are undergraduates, many of them freshmen. We believe developing intercultural awareness is a good place to start. Many of our preservice teachers move beyond awareness as they gain more knowledge of the cultures with which they interact. But, given their role as classroom tutors in a service-learning context, we believe awareness is an excellent first step toward eliminating inequities that exist in schools.

As preservice teachers gain exposure to and become more aware of the nuances of how culture plays out in classroom life, they develop areas of self-knowledge that naturally spring from increased awareness. The path to developing intercultural awareness begins when they observe and write about experiences that are different from their own. They begin to develop a confidence to create their own definitions of cultures. This encourages preservice teachers to transcend surface level understanding and reflect on why these differences exist and continue to grow as they explore how they can go beyond differences and reach all children. This, in turn, deepens beliefs that all children are capable of learning.

Teacher turnover rate increases as the percentage of underserved students grows in school districts (Sharpton, Casbergue, & Cafide, 2002). An additional issue is the shortage of teachers from these same underserved populations entering the profession (Shinnar, 2007). If beginning teachers do decide to stay within the profession, once they gain experience they transfer to schools that have higher performance standards and which mirror the settings they came from, typically White, middle class (Talbert-Johnson, 2001). This drain of experienced teachers from impoverished urban areas aligns with Nieto and Bode's (2008) concept of the gap created by the inequity in schools' resources.

An SLC can play a crucial role in preparing students for a teaching career. It provides each prospective teacher with planned, structured observations and experiences in classrooms beginning as early as possible in their undergraduate program. Our contention is that an SLC designed to increase cultural awareness can provide an especially beneficial early field experience that can reduce attrition from the work place, thus minimizing the loss of time and money that results when undergraduates change their major course of study to follow a different career path. Our SLC also allows us to provide our students with an extended preparation period that is not typical for California. Normally, the model of teacher preparation within the State is limited to one year of post-baccalaureate coursework combined with field placements. Graduates of extended teacher education programs are shown to have higher rates of retention (Andrew & Schwab, 1995).

In constructing an SLC, we advocate that instructors pay particular attention to professional dispositions. Lack of developed professional dispositions, sometimes called employability skills, is a well-recognized problem in many careers (Cotton, 2001). We argue that an SLC can effectively aid students in self-selecting a career before investing substantial time and money. They can also increase students' occupational commitment. Coming to a career with the right set of professional dispositions can help employers who lament new employee attrition during the early years of service (Croasmun, Hampton, & Herrmann, 2006).

Sperling (2007) points out that service-learning studies rarely ask the recipients of the service what impact it has had on them. Taking notice of this, we plan to include surveys to gather such information from the school children who receive the extra tutoring from our preservice teachers. We are interested in triangulating this with data derived from reflection journals and seminar discussions in order to examine correlations or deviations in perspectives. In fact, one group of our preservice teachers had this idea and acted on it by asking the school children what difference they thought the extra tutoring was making on their learning. We plan to formalize this as an

assignment for future courses. This will engender what Sperling refers to as growth in becoming ethically responsible.

The next step in our research agenda is to continue to examine the development of other relevant career dispositions in students. From our findings, we hope to develop service-learning experiences that will guide our students along the self-efficacy continuum (Bleicher, Buchanan, & Correia, 2009) and move them from a state of awareness to practicing a culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 1999; Romanowski, 1997). We view these developments as ethical imperatives (Leverett, 2006) in order to prepare high quality educators to teach all children in an increasingly diverse society.

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