

## **Preparing Multicultural Educators in an Age of Teacher Evaluation Systems: Necessary Stories from Field Supervision**

**By Patricia M. Cooper**

We live and teach in an age when stories of bad teaching abound and good teaching is increasingly defined in and outside the profession by one thing: a teacher's impact on student academic achievement. In turn, academic achievement is increasingly defined by proficiency on standardized tests, which, presumably, measure content mastery. It comes as no surprise, then, that more and more states are linking teacher

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certification to teacher evaluation systems that focus almost exclusively on the academic efficacy of lesson plans, homework assignments, and videotaped lessons prepared and executed during the student teacher phase. One example is New York State's adoption of the edTeacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). Few have any doubts that these evaluation systems will eventually drive university coursework prior to student teaching. It goes without saying that they will also drive field supervision of student teachers.

Given the shifting landscape of teacher evaluation, the goal of preparing multicultural educators, meaning teachers who see students' academic achievement as but one element in a fair and equitable education

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(Banks & Banks, 2010),<sup>1</sup> may appear dated, an ideal from a by-gone era. Despite the appeal of efficiency here, however, a singular emphasis on teaching to content mastery is a reductionist view of both how students learn and how they experience school in general. Research supports the voices of veteran practitioners and teacher educators, who repeatedly attest that student learning also depends on teachers who control and protect students from the institutional challenges to fairness and equity, which lie in wait for them throughout the school day (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999; Valenzuela, 1998).

For example, many have argued that long term academic achievement is threatened when authentic instruction designed to enhance critical thinking skills is replaced by mandated test prep. It is also threatened when academic support services are inadequate, and when health, nutrition, and safety issues are ignored. Just as important is that students often have a harder time learning from inexperienced teachers. Their chances are even further reduced when new teachers' unconscious biases create unfair or unequal academic opportunities. One example taken from this study is the failure of a lesson plan that fails to capitalize on culturally relevant material or connect to the cultural life and norms of the community.

The view of teaching and learning as embedded within and responsive to a complex, interactive set of phenomena in a given building, on a given day, in a given relationship draws on Brofenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Eisner's (1992) discussion on the dimensions of schooling, and Valenzuela's (1999) work on teaching and caring in a cultural context. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the preparation of multicultural educators has always been a complex undertaking for teacher educators and field supervisors. The effort is typically dogged from the beginning by student teachers' inexperience with and inhibitions around diverse populations (Garmon, 2004). Reasonably, this only makes multicultural teacher preparation more indispensable, not less so.

Responding to Castro's (2010) call for research on specific field-based practices in preparing multicultural educators, this article reports on an exploratory case study in which, acting as a faculty field supervisor, I engaged student teachers *in practicing* the principles of multicultural education through a deliberately low-key, but intensive focus on stories from their teaching days that threatened their growth as multicultural educators. Stories included, but were not limited to, events relative to academic achievement (Banks & Banks, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Assuming an ecological and multicultural view of schooling (Brofenbrenner, 1981; Eisner, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999), the study's objective was to explore the use of narrative, per the tools of narrative and scaffolded inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978), to help students teachers revisit, rethink, and re-see their experiences in the context of a larger conversation on fairness and equity,

I report primarily on three stories or what I called "eco-narrative" constructions from the data. These stories are rendered in detail to underscore the obstacles student teachers face regularly in becoming multicultural educators, as well as the

various and subtle ways supervisors can help them advance their skills by giving them the opportunity to revisit, rethink, and re-see their day-to-day their failed attempts in the field. The three stories highlight three of the five Banks and Banks' (2010) criteria for preparing multicultural educators at work. These are: grappling with disempowering institutional power structures (see "There Are Cockroaches in the Classroom"), reflecting on personal prejudice and bias (see "Her Mother Doesn't Care"), and evaluating ineffective lesson plans and delivery (see "The Subway Outside the Window Goes There").

Analysis suggests the virtue of engaging student teachers in narrative, story, or eco-narrative construction for the purposes of preparing multicultural educators in that it allows the field supervisor to problematize student teachers' limitations, not as something blameworthy or lamentable, but as something to be expected and, potentially, remediated through scaffolded assistance with everyday challenges. Counter-evidence for the two remaining criteria in Banks and Banks' (2010) typology, content integration and knowledge construction, is also presented.

### **Multicultural Teacher Preparation**

Banks and Banks (2010) define multicultural educators as teachers concerned with "(1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure" (p. 20). Theoretically, the goals of multicultural education find their natural home in the belief that the social context in which a child lives and learns also has a distinct impact on development and achievement (Banks, 1994, 2000; Banks & Banks, 2006, 2010; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1966; Dewey, 1915/90; Gutierrez, 2006).

The preparation of multicultural educators has been a recognized goal of teacher education programs for almost two decades, as evidenced by course titles, course content, and expectations of performance in the field (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2005). Taken to its logical conclusion, multicultural pedagogy matures to "transformative pedagogy" (Freire, 1970/00; King, 1991, 1994; McLaren, 1998; Williams, 1991), in which all students are helped to create "a larger society in which power is redistributed, all have voice, and all make their contribution to the social good" (Perry & Fraser, 1993, p. 14).

There is scant evidence that significant numbers of student or novice teachers are capable of performing at the transformative level. In fact, research continues to show evidence that despite their university preparation, student teachers and novice teachers have difficulty sustaining a multicultural stance much past the initiation phase (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Brown, 2004; Cattani, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cooper, 2007, 2003; Jennings & Smith, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; McCallister & Irvine, 2000; Nieto, 2002; Sleeter, 1992, 2001; Viadero, 1996). Irvine writes, "One sobering finding in teacher education that keeps surfacing in the litera-

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ture is that our programs and courses may have some short term effect on changing students' beliefs about diversity, but our long term influence is minimal" (2004, p. xiii). According to Garmon (2004), success may depend much more on student teachers' previous experiences with diverse communities of color. Achinstein and Barrett (2004) found that novice teachers are not able to withstand "practice shock" when they become head of diverse classrooms. In a previous study (Cooper, 2003), I found that even fully seasoned and clearly committed white teachers, let alone beginning ones, struggled to reach the transformative phase. I also wrote of my own personal journey in this regard (Cooper, 2005).

Most recently, Castro's (2010) review of the research found studies in the last ten or years affirmed the problem of preservice teachers' shallow grasp of the what it means to be a multicultural educator and their lack of knowledge of culturally diverse people and communities. He called for research that uncovers specific practices in the field that have impact on beliefs, attitudes, and critical awareness about issues of equity (p. 207).

### **Narrative Inquiry**

As described by Connelly and Clandinin (2006), narrative inquiry is "the study of experience as story" (p. 477) or "stories lived and stories told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Recursive in nature, narrative inquiry allows for the phenomenon under study—the story of what happened—to be the method to study what happened. Its value to this study is the way it introduced student teachers to the habit of revisiting, rethinking, and, thus possibly, re-seeing an event for further understanding and personal growth.

Narrative inquiry proved superior to my original expectations of using typical case study methodology involving only pattern coding and analysis (Yin, 2002), because, by definition, narrative methodology folds temporality, sociality, and place—classic components of story—into experience and analysis (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). As the data suggests, this was central to the narratives under study, my students' interests, and my supervisory goals.

Narrative-based supervision differs from Achinstein and Barrett's (2004) very useful description of mentoring beginning teachers to use organizational theory to (re)frame classroom contexts in that it limits analysis to the student teachers' experience of their own stories.

## **The Study**

### **Participants**

The six graduate and three undergraduate student teacher participants in the study were enrolled in early childhood or elementary certification programs in a large private university in New York City, where I was a full-time faculty member.

Two of the student teachers were male. Five of the students were Euro-American, one was African-American, one was East Asian-American, and two were South Asian-Americans.

Two cohorts of three were assigned to Bronx School in spring and fall semesters of the same year, and a third cohort of three to Manhattan School the following spring semester. (All names of persons and places, except the locale of the schools, are pseudonyms.) All of the student teachers had asked specifically to be placed in a “high needs” school. The high needs label in New York City typically applies to schools in economically depressed areas serving diverse populations, and evincing below average academic achievement on the whole, though not all schools serving diverse populations in New York City are either in economically depressed areas or are academically underperforming.

All of the student teachers had taken a minimum of one foundational course that stressed the history of education and teaching for social justice. By dint of the preparation program’s mission, multicultural themes were also woven throughout the curriculum. Except for the African-American student, all of the student teachers said they expected that their school population’s racial, ethnic, cultural, or economic populations would be different from their own. One of the student teachers, a White male, had been in a course of mine the semester before. I had not met any of the others before I became their field supervisor.

Each student teacher was observed weekly and each cohort of three met weekly with me for an on-site seminar for open-ended discussions of topic of choice. All student teachers were required to submit eight electronic journal entries over the course of the semester, to which I responded on average within 24 hours. Additional conversation on topics introduced on e-mail was often carried out in seminar discussion or student-supervisor conferences. In addition, each student submitted a mid and end-term self-assessment and completed a supervisor-evaluation form. The only exception to the typical supervisor/student teacher routine in our program was an increase in the number of on-site observations from four to eight per student.

Sites Bronx Public and Manhattan Public had relatively similar profiles at the time of the study. School records indicate that approximately 70% of 4th graders in both buildings tested fell below state standards in math and reading. Over 85% in each received free lunch. The student body in Bronx Public was approximately 50% Black and 50% Latino. The percentages were closer to 25% and 75% in Manhattan Public. Most of the children in both schools were native born, though the numbers of first generation and immigrant children were growing steadily. The majority of the teachers in both schools were White.

#### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Data were collected through observation, conversation, dialogue journals, and oral and written feedback pertinent to my supervisory duties, including lessons taught, in-class discussion of unfolding events, post-observation conferences,

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seminar discussion, and one-on-one office visits. For all events, I constructed, or co-constructed with the student teachers as appropriate, an eco-narrative, which reflected the essential criteria of multicultural teaching with respect to the lived experience.

### **Researcher's Perspective/Personal Justification**

I am a White, middle-aged, middle class female university professor, who was raised and schooled in relatively close proximity to Bronx Public. I was living in walking distance of Manhattan Public at the time of the study. I have more than 25 years experience in both field supervision and on site mentoring, as well as university coursework with multicultural themes. Narrative inquiry requires that researchers begin with a personal justification for engaging a particular experience through a narrative inquiry lens (Clandinin, Pusher, & Orr, 2007, p. 24). My personal justification for this study stems from (a) my desire to see the student teachers succeed in neighborhoods with which I am very familiar, and (b) whose population, statistically speaking, is at risk for academic failure. Also relevant is (c) my belief that student teachers often unintentionally fail at becoming multicultural educators because inexperience prevents them from seeing threats to fairness and equity in very small and seemingly innocuous events.

### **Validity**

My dual role of supervisor and researcher made me a participant observer at the highest degree of involvement (“complete”) in the study (Spradley, 1980). My high degree of involvement in not only collecting, but, in a sense, creating the data precludes any claim of investigator objectivity in the analysis. For this reason, guiding principles and overall conclusions were checked against the literature on preparing multicultural educators and effective teachers of children of color and member checks.

### **Findings**

Findings are presented in the form of eco-narrative constructions of experience in story form. My participation was guided by Banks and Banks’ (2010) criteria for preparing multicultural educators.

#### **Story #1—School Culture and Structure: “There Are Cockroaches in the Classroom”**

Adele was an East Asian-American student teacher in a kindergarten placement, raised about ten miles from Bronx Public. She had attended Bronx public schools, though not this one, which had only recently opened. Her electronic dialogue journal entry after her first day of student teaching opened with the following:

There are cockroaches in the lunchroom. They are crawling all over the children’s

lunch table. This is a serious health violation and no action has been taken to resolve this; something as simple as putting bleach to clean the tables and floor would help. I find it absolutely disgusting. One of my peers exclaimed, "What do you expect? Look where that school is." Instead of letting that comment annoy me like I usually would, I saw it as ignorance. In all of my years matriculating in schools in this neighborhood, I have never encountered a problem of this nature. Of course the children were scared.

Responding to Adele that evening, I concurred that the roaches were indeed a crisis and asked what her cooperating teacher said about the situation. She said the teacher told her there was nothing they could do, but that this was the reason she wiped down the classroom with bleach each day. I also asked permission to discuss the situation in seminar with Angela and Charles, her two fellow teachers in the building. Angela was an African-American female, also raised relatively close to the school, though she had not attended public schools. Charles was a White male, who grew up and attended suburban schools in the tri-state area.

Ironically, Angela's first journal entry the previous night revealed how pleased she was that the school was so new and attractive. She admitted she had been expecting otherwise. In seminar the next day, Adele told the others about the roaches in the lunchroom, noting that the kindergartners had to brush them off the tables with their notebooks before sitting down. Charles demonstrably shuddered, and Angela looked shocked. Adele then told them what her friend had said about what else could you expect in a neighborhood like the one the school is in. This clearly bothered her as well as Angela. Each insisted their own experience was that not everyone in the Bronx lived with roaches, though neither actually spoke to her first hand knowledge. Charles did not say anything.

Unfortunately, as I told the student teachers in our weekly seminar, I had to admit that I, too, believed cockroaches to be a chronic predicament in New York City's poorest borough, even if not every home or building was infested. The fact was I saw more than my share growing up not far from this where this school now stood in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, soon after I read Adele's journal entry, I asked several of my siblings who work or have worked in the Bronx over the ensuing decades, what they thought the current status might be. All reported they thought the situation had changed little. However, none could recall an infestation as bad as the one I described at Bronx Public.

Neither Angela nor Adele protested my depiction of the borough's bug problem, though Angela repeated that not everyone had roaches. Again, I agreed. I then asked the group what they thought should be done about the roaches. Angela suggested telling the parents. She was sure they did not know, and Adele agreed. I asked why they were so certain. They both said that if parents knew, they would certainly have done something about it. I pointed out that the parent liaison's office is across from the cafeteria, and that we had seen parents in and around it that very morning. Though I didn't know for sure, I said I thought it likely that a teacher or



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cafeteria worker would mention the roaches to them. The students agreed this was a possibility, but looked unhappy.

I then asked that if the parents did know, why might they not act on this information? Angela offered that the parents might feel “disempowered” to do anything about the roaches. It’s really the principal’s job, she said. Adele agreed with her.

Attempting to get the three student teachers to see the issue in another context besides disgust, I asked about the children. Should they have to go to school with this level of infestation that not only created undignified learning conditions relative to societal norms, but also a serious health risk and impediment to learning? As expected, all said no. I next asked if they were aware that living with roaches is seen as a cause of and aggravation to childhood asthma. They were not. I told them I knew the neighborhood had one of the highest asthma rates in the city. They groaned.

Finally, I asked what each of them might do about the roaches. All three looked surprised by my question. They admitted they had not thought about their having a role to play in the solution. I then asked them what they were going to do to keep the roaches out of their classrooms. This seemed to surprise them most of all, if not give them real pause. Beyond not knowing what to do, I think it had not occurred to them that the roaches would travel upstairs.

Going back to Angela’s point about speaking with the principal, I asked if anyone wanted to do so. None did, and I thought it inappropriate to push them their first week in the building. Wanting to model how teachers must advocate for the greater school culture, I said I would speak to the principal as soon as I could. The principal and I had not met before, as he was unavailable when I made a pre-semester site visit to the school. When I finally was able to catch him a few days later, he did not appear surprised at the news, but nor did he admit knowledge of it. His immediate response echoed Adele’s friend. “What do you expect?” He shrugged his shoulders. “It’s the Bronx.”

When I asked what was being done about the problem, the principal was non-responsive. He appeared not to hear me when I went on to remind him that roaches are known culprits in asthma and related respiratory conditions. Finally, I asked if it would help if I called the health department. He then told me the DOE was sending someone out soon. He got up and reached for his coat. Our meeting was over.

Group seminar discussion the following week started off with the roach issue once again. I gave the student teachers the full details of my conversation with the principal. All three said they heard pest control had been in the building that day, but they were stunned and angered when I told them about the principal’s assessment of living in the Bronx. Then Angela and Charles reported that their friends also asked what else could you expect in that neighborhood. It turns out so did Charles’s cooperating teacher.

Returning to my question from the week before, I then insisted they tell me what else they could do besides report the situation. Much as I wanted to blame the roach problem fully on the principal, I explained they had to keep in mind what



the roaches meant for the children back in the classroom. They had no answer. Eventually, Adele offered that some children would have trouble eating under such circumstances. Finally, all seemed to see this would in turn affect the children's ability to pay attention after lunch, and thus, in time, their learning. Until that moment, however, it was apparent that none of the three had felt the relationship between health conditions in the building and fair opportunities to learn.

To the student teachers' surprise, I endorsed Adele's teacher's practice of wiping down the classroom surfaces with bleach. I also described what my sisters who taught in neighboring schools did to minimize the number of roaches in their classroom.

Judging by her demeanor in the two on-site conversations, I could tell that Angela was the most perturbed by the roach problem. I was concerned that as an African-American Bronx native, she was upset by my suggestion that many if not most of the borough's buildings had roaches. I asked her to meet with me privately. In our meeting, I inquired if she understood why I thought it was so important to acknowledge the roaches. She replied no, but looked sad. I then asked her in a tone of voice I deliberately tried to keep light, why people like us who grew up in these neighborhoods might feel defensive about this issue. This was easy for her. Angela said again that she didn't want people to think that all people who live in these neighborhoods had roaches, including her family. She did not mention race.

I attempted to tease her some by pointing out the obvious somewhat playfully. "But there are roaches in THIS building." Angela nodded her head slowly. I went on to say that it had taken me a long time to publicly acknowledge that my childhood home had had roaches, but I couldn't deny them in a school building. "We have to protect the children from living with them in school," I said, "even if we don't like admitting to the fact of them. Just like we have to teach reading. But how can we get rid of roaches if we don't admit they are there?" At this, Angela smiled. Her exit journal entry included this assessment of school policies that positively or negatively impact students' achievements:

The administration appears to want to make sure things look good at this school (like bulletin boards) but they are not diligent with truly resolving serious concerns within the school (like roaches).

All three students acknowledged in their exit interviews that they never thought they would have to take a stand on roaches as part of their teacher identities.

**Story #2—Prejudice and Bias:  
"Her Mother Doesn't Care"**

Knowing from experience that student teachers often draw conclusions about their students' home lives, which can often have a negative impact on their teaching, I asked each cohort in the first or second seminar meeting what role they thought home life played in the children's school success. None of the student teachers addressed racial, ethnic, or religious culture, but all mentioned they believed parents

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played the most critical role in children's school success, beginning with academic preparation and providing inspiration. They also all spoke to the parents' role in teaching children proper school deportment. Five of the nine openly questioned whether the parents in Bronx Public or Manhattan Public were fulfilling this role adequately, especially with regard to behavior. The data revealed many instances where student teachers seemed angry with the parents for what they perceived was indifference or a lack of concern about their children's education. This section details three instances in which they were asked to consider their criticisms in real life contexts.

Denise, a White female student teacher in a 4th grade placement in Manhattan Public was raised near Las Vegas. She had gone to public schools with largely Hispanic populations, and was generally more guarded in her criticisms of the student population and their families than other White teachers. In her electronic journal, she became more critical and wondered if the fact that many of her students' parents failed to show up for report card night was indicative of their lack of ability to support their children.

In my response to Denise's journal entry, I asked her to take stock of everything she knew about coming to parent night before drawing any conclusions about parents. Did the school provide child-care on report card night? Were there any arrangements made for parents who had more than one child in the school? Was dinner available?

Denise wrote back immediately that it hadn't occurred to her to ask why—besides not caring—parents wouldn't come to report card night. I shared that I came from a very large family, and that my father not only often worked at night, he left all school matters to my mother. She always struggled to attend report card night, as it involved coordinating the schedules of older siblings with dinner, baths, and so on for the younger ones. Then, even when she did get there, she rarely had time to make it to as many classrooms as she had children in the school. Denise immediately replied the school did not provide childcare. Nor had she thought about the implications of having more than one child in school. She faulted herself for not thinking the issue through ahead of time, reminding herself and me that she had attended schools with poor and diverse students and should have known better.

Henry, a first generation Asian-American student teacher, also in a 4th grade placement, confronted a more stressful situation around parents' involvement. When I arrived to observe him as scheduled one day, I discovered that the class was getting ready to go on a field trip to a museum. Neither Henry nor I had known about the plan earlier. Henry was visibly agitated when he greeted me and insisted we speak in the hallway alone. He then reported that the assistant principal had come into the room before I got there to tell one of the girls that she would have to stay at school because she was not wearing her uniform (actually, just a white collar shirt) as mandated for field trips. He said the girl told the assistant principal that her shirt was dirty. At this, I looked through the open doorway to see the child

in question sitting at her desk, head bowed, not doing anything as the rest of the children bustled around her.

Henry commented on the administrator's harsh tone of voice in delivering the bad news. He thought it inappropriate, but it turned out he didn't disagree with her decision. He was angry with the girl's mother, he said. In a very agitated tone, he declared the girl's lack of clean shirt was proof that "her mother doesn't care about her child's education."

I asked Henry what he thought might prevent a mother from having a shirt clean besides indifference to her child's education. He looked as if he did not understand my question. I asked him to think about doing laundry in this neighborhood. Again, he looked confused. What do you see when you walk from the train, I asked? No answer. I reminded him that the neighborhood consisted mostly of pre-war four to six floor apartment buildings. In case he didn't know, I told him most had no elevators. Clearly frustrated with me, he finally said he did not understand what I was getting at. I told him directly that most apartments in this area would not be allowed to have washer/dryers, and that most families must use machines in the basement or even local laundromats. In either case, all would involve going up and down the stairs with heavy baskets, and all would cost money. It was possible that this was the reason the child did not have a clean shirt on that day.

Henry admitted he had not thought about the cost and trouble of doing laundry as an explanation for why the child's mother might not have had the laundry ready. But, he countered, if doing the laundry was the problem, then the child could have worn a dirty shirt instead of missing the field trip. At this I asked if he thought it possible that a mother might be reluctant to send a child to school in dirty clothes, even if it meant missing an educational opportunity. I asked if his mother ever let him wear dirty clothes to school. He said no. I asked if the classroom teacher had sent a note home or given the children one or more reminders about having their shirts ready for the field trip. Henry said he had heard nothing like this.

Henry's agitation seemed to decrease as we talked, especially when I turned the conversation to how the teacher might have prevented the problem. He said the teacher could have been more proactive in reminding the children about the shirts, warning them ahead of time, and that it would be wonderful if schools had extra shirts on hand for these occasions. Though by no means convinced he was entirely wrong, he seemed decidedly less sure of his original stance.

Finally, Melissa, a White student teacher in a 6th grade placement, also questioned her students' parents' values. Early in her placement, she wrote in her electronic dialogue journal,

Lately I have been thinking a lot about the bigger picture for the children I am teaching at this school. I know that my childhood and my background (socio-economically, and family life) is completely different than the kids I am with every day, but does that slate our futures to be different also? The children in this school are some of the most at-risk kids I have ever seen...I have worked with

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children in schools and after school programs in the neediest areas of Houston and Chicago and I feel I can make this judgment based on my past experiences. It is my feeling that most of the children in the 6th grade class I am in and the 5th grade class I was in come from homes in which education is either not highly valued or higher education is not seen as a possibility—therefore education is not the highest priority.

I wrote back simply, “Education not valued? How do you know?”

Melissa replied, “I feel that education is not valued at home because I have yet to see or hear of any parent involvement or communication to/from the teacher in the class I am in. I understand that many of the parents work/have children and are very busy, but I would expect them at least coming to a conference or a phone call.” She then pulled back some of her negativity. “It is possible that I see this as a lack of parent communication, when in fact it could also be the fault of the teacher for not communicating more with the parents.”

Melissa then admitted that her own background was pivotal in shaping her judgment. “I think a lot of how I view the kids' and parents' value of school is related to my own experience as a student. My parents were very involved and part of why I wanted to do well in school was because my parents taught me that doing well in school would get me anywhere I wanted to go.” I acknowledged this, but cautioned her against using our autobiographies as a uniform standard of good parenting.

In another electronic exchange, Melissa noted that one reason education might not be a priority for a particular mother whose child she as having trouble with is that she is only 30 and has seven kids.

I wrote back and asked why she thought having a lot of children meant education is not a priority for mothers. In the interest of full disclosure, I then revealed that my mother had six children by age 30 (and six more after that). Melissa was clearly somewhat chagrined by her remark, because she responded quickly that her own grandmother had ten children, and that she is one of five. Still, she was not willing to give her classroom parents a pass at this time. She went on to say that she thought the children's attitudes towards learning and the school's 8th grade attrition rate is evidence that the parents did not support education.

Melissa and I continued to discuss parent involvement issues on line and in person. Later in the semester, she evinced a shift of perspective. Moving on from blaming the parents, a few weeks from the end of her placement, Melissa shared what she had learned from the other teachers in the building about the parents. “Many of the teachers in this school talk about the reason that many parents aren't valuing education is because they feel failed by the education system themselves. They went to the same schools their kids are going to and they are living in the same Section 8 housing on welfare. It seems they don't have a lot of faith in the education system.” Melissa wondered whether this was true.

In one of her last entries, Melissa once again looked at her own autobiography, but for the first time in less than an ideal light. It seems that a younger cousin of hers

was having a much tougher time being successful in school than his older siblings, despite her parents' efforts, which Melissa knew to be close to that of her own parents. She told me her parents are very upset, and so is she. Her final journal entry says,

By working with my cooperating teacher and just being a part of the daily "drama" of what goes on in schools, I have been able to take a close look at the effects of choices and actions on students, parents, and other professionals (i.e., the Math teacher quitting a month before the test, teachers not being able to work together, unsupportive administration). I have been able to see that many times the teachers, administration, etc. do not even realize the effect these relationships have on the students. I will continue to reflect and ask questions to further my understanding of what it means to be an effective educator.

**Story #3—Equity Pedagogy:  
"The Subway Outside The Window Goes There"**

The data showed that the student teachers' difficulty in teaching for academic achievement was directly related to their content knowledge, lesson planning, and pedagogical techniques, as so often described in the literature on beginning teachers. Less reported on in the literature and more troubling because it is so difficult to correct in field supervision was the student teachers' almost universal use of imprecise language, which undermined their effectiveness. For example, Henry was asked by his cooperating teacher to do a lesson from the textbook measuring geometric shapes. He prepared for it with great diligence. At the start of his lesson, he distributed three-dimensional paper geometric objects, which I knew took hours to make. The kids were very excited. Then he opened with a question to the class he and I had not discussed. "If you were walking on your object, how many directions could you go?" The whole class looked at him in silence. He repeated the question. Still, no answer. He tried several different more ways to get the class to answer the question. More silence. Somewhat frustrated, he moved on, leaving the students not knowing and in the position of not knowing. I asked Henry later what he was trying to get the students to think about, and admitted I couldn't figure it out either. Unlike the students, however, I assumed the problem was Henry's, not mine. He said he wanted them to think about themselves in the middle of one of the surface planes and then count the number of sides they could walk to from there.

Some student teachers simply tripped over the details in the questions they asked, such as when Melissa introduced a lesson on fractions by asking her 4th grade students how many "16's" could be found in  $1/8$ . As in Henry's class, no one asked a clarifying question, but just sat quietly. Later she told me she meant to ask how many 16ths equaled  $1/8$ . In a lesson on place value, Denise asked her 4th graders the sum of the digits in 1,050. A child answered 6, and was told she was incorrect. The student teacher said the correct answer was 15. She didn't explain to why or what she was thinking. She explained to me afterward she meant students to consider what number could be made by dropping out the zeroes.

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Just as importantly, the student teachers on average did not question pre-set curriculum that might work against the students' confidence, such as a picture card that called for kindergarten children to identify a picture of a lemon and then name the beginning letter. When a child said, "Yellow," the student teacher, Adele, did not affirm the child's knowledge of colors, but ignored her and asked the class again what the picture was, clearly indicating that yellow was the wrong answer.

Another threat to academic achievement was the student teachers' low-level knowledge of child and cognitive development that could have been useful in promoting academic achievement by building on personal concerns, cognitive stages, or cultural connections. None, for example, knew what age young children typically lose their teeth or why they stop believing in Santa Claus. None seemed confident of when children could be expected to grasp basic principles of chronology, identify parts of speech, or manipulate mathematical symbols. Other than their belief that Native American children are not taught to look adults in the eye, none could name a specific learning behavior associated with cultural differences.

Charles' reading lesson with 5th graders showcases a mix of multicultural mishaps that lead to reduced academic proficiency. Given permission by his cooperating teacher to teach any children's book he wished to teach for a lesson on cause and effect, Charles chose *The Babe and I*, by David Adler (1999), a Depression-era story about a boy who only discovers that his father has lost his office job when he sees him selling apples outside of Yankee Stadium. Charles announced the lesson by telling the children to come sit on the rug. Sitting on the rug is a district-wide requirement for most lessons. The students crowded on, despite the fact it was about half the needed size for them all to sit comfortably. Charles held up the book he read the day before and asked, "Does anyone remember reading this book yesterday? The group replied in a kind of dull unison, "Yeaaaaah." Charles next asked, "Does anyone want to explain what this book is about?" A girl in the back started to speak, but Charles stopped her to chastise a group of boys for making too much noise. He then asked one of the boys to explain what the book was about. The girl who had started to answer pushed back on the rug, disgruntled, but said no more. As Charles read, many of the kids appeared to be listening, but just as many did not. From where I sat behind the group, I wondered how many could actually see the pictures from their place on the rug.

A few pages in, Charles interrupted his reading often to ask the class to tell him what in the text explains the difference between the "cause of an effect," and the "effect of a cause." Two children attempted to answer, but struggled. Charles pushed the students to remember what they had talked about yesterday, but still no one was able to come up with a satisfying answer for him. He never explained the difference. Among other text-related questions, Charles paused to ask the students whether they thought the reason the father in the book was too embarrassed about losing his job and having to sell apples to tell the boy or his mother.

Charles interrupted his reading again many times more, not for academic

reasons, but to reprimand some students, all boys, for not paying attention, moving about on the rug, or not keeping their hands to themselves. In the meantime, outside the large window to his right, subways to the north Bronx and Manhattan ran by twice, each time sending a rumbling noise into the classroom. Many students turned to watch, but Charles did not.

Charles and I conferred for about 30 minutes immediately after the lesson. I began by commending him for his generally pleasant manner and acceptable control over the class. I described what I had just witnessed, sticking closely to my written notes (to avoid relying on my memory), which I pointed to as we spoke. I wanted to help Charles remember the parts of the lesson as they actually unfolded. I also wanted him to read between the lines of the lesson as the children might have experienced it.

I began by asking Charles about his choice of reading material. Adler's book is recommended for 4-8-year-olds. I asked on what basis did he deem it appropriate for to use with 5th graders. I thought he might say its cultural relevance (see below), but he said he thought it was on the students' readability level. I questioned if this were true for all the students, some of whom I suspected based on past visits to the classroom were reading well above this level. Charles thought the children's understanding of cause and effect would decrease if they were asked to grapple with a text for older children, where causal events are less concrete. I suggested he might not be expecting enough of the children.

I next wondered about his opening remark, "Does anyone remember reading this book yesterday?" I asked him if this was a rhetorical question. He looked confused, until I asked why he chose those particular words. Wouldn't he assume that any 5th grader could remember a book that was read yesterday? Though an innocent remark in some way, what message did this, too, send about his expectations of them?

On the other end of the spectrum, I wondered if his question regarding cause and effect wasn't asking too much. Questions should lead students to answers, I pointed out. What answer was he looking for? That the cause of an effect means that the something made something happen and that the effect of a cause means that something happened because something made it? That one was an action with a result and the other a result of an action? Could most fifth graders produce this tongue twister after one lesson on cause and effect? Charles smiled sheepishly, and indicated he didn't think so.

We turned next to how fairness and gender roles came up in his lesson. I reminded Charles that the girl who spoke up first never got a chance to say her piece, because he not only interrupted her to attend the boys, he moved on from there to let a boy answer. He nodded in understanding. He then became very interested when we talked about the physical constraints that can impede students' learning, such as the too-small rug. Though Charles had no control over the rug requirement, he had earlier realized it was inadequate to hold the number and size of the class, but



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he hadn't known what to do or that he could do anything. The bigger boys, in particular, were squeezed as they clustered in the back against the desks. Charles could see easily that it students might pay more attention when they were comfortable during a lesson, could see the pictures or the chart, and when teachers interrupted lessons less frequently reprimand students for not sitting properly and so on. We talked about how the bigger boys might be moved off the rug to chairs behind it.

The one question Charles did not seem to connect with immediately was when I ask why he didn't solicit the students' prior knowledge of baseball or Yankee Stadium. He looked confused. The subway outside the window goes there, I reminded him. It takes about 5 minutes. No doubt some of the children have either been there or are at least aware that it's not far away. Others might have family members that work there. Did he realize the subway ran twice by the window while as he was reading? He hadn't.

Finally, the last point we discussed was why Charles led the children to infer that the father in the story was naturally embarrassed about losing his job and working as a vendor, but said no more. Though a fair representation of the text (its "cause and effect"), he lost the opportunity to empathize with students who parents in fact had lost jobs, or worked as vendors, as one boy offered that his uncle did. I had no doubt that other adults in this community did as well. Was this not sending a very clear message to the students about what work is valuable and what is not?

Charles and I discussed each of my observations in great detail. At the end, he asked for a copy of my notes. Below is an excerpt from the reflection he emailed me that night:

I was incredibly impressed with the feedback PMC gave me. Absolutely incredible, actually. Being able to read exchanges that I had with kids, having someone talk to me about my language and seeing what I might have unconsciously implied helps me to be a better teacher.

In addition, he wrote to say how much he now realizes how just word choices can make all the difference in his relations with the children. He noted how the children's interpretation of an event (in this case, street vending) could conflict with the teacher's. He wondered, "How might they (the children) feel" that his "target answer" was to see street vending as a non-job? "These are things that I might not have, indeed did not, pick up on without substantial feedback." He then offered that he had forgotten that his own great-grandfather was a street vendor. Finally, he admitted that the social significance of the baseball stadium or the trains in the children's lives had not occurred to him. He did not know how this could happen when he, himself, is such a big fan of the same team.

#### ***Highlighting Criteria***

As noted, these three stories highlight three of five Banks and Banks' (2010) criteria for preparing multicultural educators at work (grappling with disempower-

ing institutional power structures, reflecting on personal prejudice and bias, and evaluating ineffective lesson plans and delivery). Significantly absent from the data was evidence that the student teachers were able to address the first criteria in Banks and Banks' (2010) typology for multicultural educators, integrating multicultural content knowledge into the standard curriculum. Such efforts were limited to the occasional reading of children's books featuring diverse main characters or themes related to diverse peoples.

Evidence of the second criteria—how knowledge construction is typically controlled by the dominant and mainstream authorities in schools, be they texts or teachers—was also missing. By way of counter-evidence, when asked in seminar about the need to engage the issue of knowledge construction, all the student teachers reported familiarity with this issue. But to a person, each reported their program coursework in the colonial and racist underpinnings of American history and education made them self-conscious about teaching a non-mainstream view of history, as well as reluctant to teach the traditional viewpoint. Since all teachers were in elementary schools, this issue came up repeatedly with regard to holidays. The student teachers in the fall semester, for example, all wished to avoid teaching the story of Christopher Columbus, despite the fact that Columbus Day is a federal holiday and most New York City schools are closed. Two student teachers, Charles and Angela, also refused to teach the Thanksgiving Story because they did not know how to address the historical inaccuracies in the traditional story without “ruining” the holiday for the children.

Two years after the final semester of data collection, six of the nine student teachers were working in urban schools, five in New York City and one in Los Angeles. One student teacher had left teaching, and the employment of two was unknown.

## **Discussion**

Analysis of the findings leads to three conclusions important to preparing multicultural educators, and the value of a narrative approach to field supervision in doing so. First, and central to concerns around student academic achievement touted by teacher evaluation systems, is that the goal to improve teachers' content delivery and students' content mastery is undermined when the broader goals of multicultural education are ignored in field supervision. As shown, the student teachers in this study were frequently prevented or distracted from teaching well by a wide range of institutional and interpersonal challenges, such as a roach infestation, too crowded seating arrangements, and personal biases. The study of teaching as story also revealed a common problem among the student teachers with content delivery that both runs counter to multicultural principles and has received far too little attention in the literature or in teacher evaluation systems. This was the student teachers' tendency to use imprecise or confusing language to introduce or implement a lesson plan. Among other examples were Henry's obscure questions

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about the sides of a geometric figure and Charles' misguided question about cause and effect. When teachers do not express themselves clearly, students are often left confused, and, conceivably, blamed for not knowing, when in reality it was the student teacher who failed to elicit what they knew. As Charles' email response to my observations suggested, though this tendency has arguably severe consequences for student learning, it is also remediable through supervisory assistance. The student teachers were particularly interested in critique of their teaching around the use of precise language.

The evidence also echoed a prominent theme in the literature, the role of autobiography in multicultural teaching (Garmon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2005; Siddle Walker, 1996; Viadero, 1996). This was evident throughout the data, but in the narratives described here, student teacher autobiography was viewed as starting point in supervision, not an ending. Angela and Adele, for example, moved through their personal need to defend the reputation of people living in the Bronx to engage the professional question of what to do about roaches in the school without condemning a community or ignoring it in need. Denise's initial frustration with what she perceived as parent indifference on report card night was easily mitigated when she was presented with possible explanations, allowing her to call up and then recommit to her previous experience as a White student in majority diverse schools. Henry's angry dismissal of parents who don't send their children to school in their required uniforms is another case in point.

These examples showcase a distinguishing feature of an eco-narrative approach to supervision directed at preparing multicultural educators, which is that it makes possible the pursuit of multicultural principles with student teachers, but not the assumption of their skills in this area. The fact that three student teachers had not anticipated they were to play a role in the roach problem, for instance, indicated that they started their student teaching semester with an inadequate understanding of the relationship between healthful environments and optimal learning conditions, and thus an inadequate understanding of what it means to teach multiculturally. This is to say the advantage of eco-narrative construction is that it allows supervisors to problematize what student teachers don't know about multicultural teaching, while at the same time asking what they might know (Vygotsky 1978), if helped to rewrite their own initial narratives of ignorance or inexperience. Further, the findings suggest that student teachers are open to participating in the process of becoming a fair and equitable pedagogue when discussion focuses on very explicit and situated problems from their own student teaching stories. Charles' willingness to see the loss of opportunity in not connecting his students' Bronx neighborhood with literature or the potential harm in downgrading a vendor's job is a case in point.

The third conclusion speaks plainly to the need for both course work and field supervision to be more proactive around the first two tenets of Banks & Banks' (2010) typology for multicultural education, content integration and knowledge

construction. In particular, student teachers appear to need more specific support for what this looks like in practice, as well as how to anticipate and handle sensitive issues, and potentially negative consequences.

In sum, responding to Castro's (2010) call for research on specific field-based practices in preparing multicultural educators, a narrative approach to supervision offers an explicit way for field supervisors to develop student teachers' abilities to revisit, rethink, and re-see their day-to-day experiences through a multicultural lens, despite their initial limitations. As the findings revealed, eco-narrative constructions, infused by the temporal, social, and place-based aspects of experience per Clandinin and Connelly's description of narrative inquiry as "stories lived and stories told" (2000, p. 20), helped the student teachers' fashion new or revised endings to experience over and against what might have been multicultural dead ends.

Charles' journal entry regarding my story-based feedback around an observed lesson captured the inherent possibilities in this type of supervisory scaffolding. "Being able to read [about] exchanges that I had with kids, having someone talk to me about my language and seeing what I might have unconsciously implied helps me to be a better teacher."

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are linked to the personalized nature of narrative studies, and the difficulties in generalizing from a small sample. In addition, as described in the findings, eco-narratives constructions and co-constructions do not follow a prescribed script. To employ this approach towards the goal of preparing multicultural educators, field supervisors must be both grounded in the tenets of multicultural education and proficient at interpreting for and with student teachers the significance of events, large and small.

### **Implications**

As the student teachers' stories attest, becoming a multicultural educator is fraught with challenges that by extension threaten student academic achievement. Thus, even in an age of teacher evaluation systems, teacher education programs cannot afford to lose sight of the need to prepare multicultural educators, with special attention paid to the effects of field supervision. Moreover, as the absence of data on content integration and knowledge construction makes clear, both field supervisors and course instructors must work to help degree candidates and student teachers become more skilled in addressing these issues directly or risk undermining their ability to become true multicultural educators in the long run.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> I choose to use Banks and Banks' (2010) term "multicultural educator" over Ladson-Billings' (2000) popular "culturally responsible pedagogue," or other like descriptors,

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because I find its five criteria (p. 20) slightly more clear cut in helping student teachers and beginning teachers apply multicultural theory to practice.

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