Pre-Service Teachers Confronting Issues of Diversity Through a Radical Field Experience

Paul Chamness Miller & Erin A. Mikulec

Introduction

One of the major challenges in preparing pre-service teachers for the 21st-century classroom, as well as for an increasingly competitive job market, is providing the necessary skills and background to effectively educate diverse populations of students (Sleeter, 2001). Multicultural education courses are a staple in teacher preparation programs, where the differences in learners is superficially examined. However, as Goggins II and Dowcett (2011) point out, those basic multicultural education courses do not go into the depth of specific populations required to truly gain an understanding of issues related to power, privilege, and professional practice. Coffey (2010) asserts that the best way to authentically examine these issues is through cross-cultural, community-based field experiences.

This study will advance our understanding of how to develop culturally responsive teachers through a critical examination of an immersion field experience in a particularly unique school environment where issues of sexual, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic diversity are addressed through progressive approaches.

Even more significant is the fact that these pre-service teachers will be immersed in an educational context that is radically different from what they have known in their own schooling. This immersion experience will compel these pre-service teachers to come face-to-face with social injustices that they have read about in isolated readings, but that they will now encounter collectively in a single school setting.

Paul Chamness Miller is an associate professor of English at Akita International University, Yuma, Akita-city, Akita, Japan.
Erin A. Mikulec is an assistant professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois.

Literature Review

Cultural Responsiveness

The literature in the field of multicultural education calls for teachers to develop not only an appreciation for and an understanding of the diverse populations with whom they will work, but also to foster the same within themselves (Gallavan, 2005). Being engaged in mindful explorations affords pre-service teachers the opportunity to begin "dismantling constructs such as privilege and power while overcoming some of the barriers and resistance to using effective multicultural education practices" (Gallavan, 2005, p. 36). The challenge is, as Hill-Jackson (2007) points out, not in providing pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills, but in developing their dispositions and practices in terms of cultural responsiveness.

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching, from the educator's perspective, as "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29). Meanwhile, Ladson-Billings (1995), with an emphasis on learner outcomes, asserts that culturally relevant teaching requires that the student be academically successful, culturally competent, and critically conscious. When teachers commit to culturally responsive teaching, not only do they become effective content teachers, but they also take on the responsibility of developing the learners' happiness and well-being (Kim & Kim, 2009).

In order to achieve culturally responsive teaching, the educator must have an understanding of cultural capital and its impact on the education of under-represented learners. Goggins II and Dowcett (2011) state that the American educational system is designed to benefit learners with perceived "White" cultural capital. Classroom teachers and administrators are often not aware of their own role in the disenfranchisement of diverse learners, which may be largely due to the cultural capital that they enjoy as members of the dominant group.

Although, "[a]ll families possess cultural capital, … not all cultural capital is valued equally in a particular setting" (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010, p. 7). This lack of awareness is at least in part due to the advantages that go unnoticed by members of the dominant group, when there is congruence between cultural backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1986). This capital affords its members privileges, shared by the members of the dominant culture, that are valued in the school setting (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, as cited in Wegman & Bowen, 2010).

In the context of teacher education, it is imperative that pre-service teachers be guided towards the understanding that both the definition and impact of education extend beyond the dominant socio-political structure of schools. That is to say, cultural capital promotes a natural home-school connection for some families, but poses significant barriers to such relationships with other families (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). There are a number of factors that can determine cultural capital, for example, family members' level of education, understanding of the educational system, level of social confidence in communicating with the school, and the sense of entitlement or rejection of their role in the family-school relationship (see Reay, 1998, as cited in Wegmann & Bowen, 2010).

How then can teacher educators cultivate cultural responsiveness in pre-service teachers? In a review of literature, Akiba (2011) found four characteristics of teacher education programs that help to develop cultural responsiveness in pre-service teachers. These include classrooms as learning communities, instructors modeling constructivist and culturally responsive teaching, field experiences for understanding diverse students, and opportunity for

reflection. Of these characteristics, she only found a significant impact on professional diversity beliefs with the first three characteristics.

One of the challenges as a teacher educator lies in the fact that many of our pre-service teachers do not enter into our programs with shared values and beliefs about diversity and cultural responsiveness. Many pre-service teachers enter preparation programs with dreams of returning to their own hometowns or similar communities to teach in schools that are homogeneous; therefore they may not find the principles of culturally responsive teaching immediately relevant to them.

Despite teacher educators' best efforts to impart the necessary skills and resources for being culturally responsive, if the pre-service teacher is not open to diversity, then these efforts may fall on deaf ears (Banks & Banks, 1993). As Unruh and McCord (2010) point out, "what many training programs fail to fully consider is that initial differences among preservice teachers in beliefs about diversity may reflect core individual differences in basic dispositions, and that efforts to impact attitudes toward diversity are likely to be more effective in some individuals than in others" (pp. 1-2).

Although teacher educators may face difficulties in fostering culturally responsive attitudes in their pre-service teachers, research has found several possible means of supporting positive changes in such attitudes. In a study of teacher education examining issues of homophobia, classicism, racism, and sexism, Pattee and Lo Guidice (2011) found that being deliberate in the way one instructs has a significant impact on how pre-service teachers respond to discrimination in the classroom. Additionally, it is important that teacher educators model the behaviors they wish to instill in their pre-service teachers, including showing an interest in their individual backgrounds, as well as being open to sharing their own personal experiences with diversity and facilitating meaningful discourse (Akiba, 2011).

Teacher educators can further these interactions with pre-service teachers by actively participating in clinical field experiences with their students and making meaningful connections between theory and practice (Hughes, 2006). Such opportunities to work in the field provide these connections, where pre-service teachers witness firsthand culturally responsive teaching in action in culturally authentic educational settings, and "challenge us to reconsider what we mean by 'good' teaching, to look for it in some unlikely places, and to challenge those who suggest it cannot be made available to all children" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163).

Meaningful Field Experiences

Research has shown that field experiences are an important means for achieving the goal of culturally responsive teaching (Lee, Eckrich, Lackey, & Showalter, 2010). However, in order to lead pre-service teachers to this goal, it is important that teacher educators facilitate meaningful dialogue that examines pre-service teachers' existing dispositions and beliefs, as well as opportunities to apply knowledge to practice (He & Cooper, 2009). It is this self-examination of the pre-service teacher's own experiences and beliefs that will help them develop an understanding of what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher (Cochran-Smith, 1995).

An integral part of any teacher education program is the early field experience component. For many pre-service teachers, this represents their first experience in observing and participating in a classroom from the perspective of the teacher rather than that of the student. This can be a difficult shift in identity. As Scherff and Singer (2012) note, pre-service teachers often face a sense of imbalance, where they desire to demonstrate their independence and competence as educators, while still having to rely on veteran teachers' assistance.

Therefore, these early field experiences must be meaningful and conducive to instilling confidence rather than simply fulfilling another requirement. This may be best achieved through structured field experiences that also require pre-service teachers to reflect on their experiences and the impact they have on their development as teachers (Caprano, Caprano, & Helfledt, 2010).

Furthermore, as Darling-Hammond (2006) points out,

> . . . it is impossible to teach people how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest they "do the opposite" of what they have observed in the classroom. No amount of coursework can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do. (p. 308)

It is with this understanding of the power of the field experience that Montecinos, Walker, Rittershaussen, Nuñez, Contreras, and Solís (2011) found that pre-service teachers demonstrated a deeper understanding of what the teacher must know and do through active participation in the classroom. Unfortunately, many early field experiences focus solely on observations by pre-service teachers.

While observing what takes place in a classroom certainly has its merit, it is essential that pre-service teachers also be engaged in the classroom with students as early in their preparation as possible, so that their first interaction of this type is not during student teaching. Instead, observation must be paired with formal training and reflection that includes a significant amount of direct interaction with learners (Akiba, 2011; Hughes, 2009; Tuchman & Isaacs, 2011). Such interactions not only provide meaningful experience, but can also impact how pre-service teachers imagine their future classrooms and the types of schools in which they might like to work.

With this in mind, teacher educators must develop field experiences that challenge pre-service teachers to begin to think more about the needs and nature of their students in lieu of their own. As Darling-Hammond (2006) states,

> . . . schools of education must design programs that help prospective teachers to understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students. (p. 302)

Therefore, early field experiences must also be meaningful in the sense that they provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with diverse populations of students. Teacher educators can do this by working with a variety of non-traditional educational settings, agencies or service-learning projects.

For example, Lawrence and Butler (2010) found that participants in a service-learning experience began to understand that effective teaching goes hand in hand with responding to the needs of students. However, what makes these experiences even more meaningful is when there is a working relationship between the field experience site and the institution.

By fostering and developing such a relationship, the field experiences can become an integral part of the classroom discourse, delving into and connecting theory and practice. As Coffey (2010) states, "by observing and reflecting on alternative models of schooling, pre-service teachers might be more likely to develop curriculum around the needs and interests of their future students" (p. 341). It is through these

types of rich experiences that pre-service teachers can begin to construct, rather than imagine, their future classrooms.

Given the challenges previously discussed and the quest for pre-service teachers to engage in meaningful experiences that challenge them reconsider what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher, this paper aims to address the following guiding question: To what extent will a radical field experience challenge the beliefs and attitudes of pre-service teachers toward diverse populations and non-traditional models of education?

Methods

Framework

This study is grounded in phenomenology, which enables the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the individuals studied and to "captur[e] the stories and experiences of teachers through their descriptions …" (Agnello, 2008, p. 109). In particular, this approach to viewing the data affords the researchers the opportunity to "search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its fundamental nature" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 53).

From this material, we are able to make connections between the lived experiences of the participants as pre-service teachers and citizens of the world (Nussbaum, 1997), to understand to what extent these lived experiences in an atypical clinical site may challenge the pre-service teacher's understanding of and commitment to being a culturally responsive teacher.

A radical field experience will challenge these pre-service teachers and their instructors to engage in dialogue that "helps them to explore their world, not the teacher's world but the world as the students see it out there" (Vandenberg, 2009, p. 163). This type of engagement results in "teacher and students hav[ing] their being in the world together because they consciously focus their attention on the same thing or phenomenon in the world" (p. 163).

The Setting

The clinical site for this study was an urban, Midwestern, non-traditional charter school serving grades 6-12. The school was founded in 2005 by a public school teacher and designed to be a safe space for all students who have felt unsafe in their previous school environments. The demographics of the students in this school include 50% who self-identify as LGBT, 25% who are homeless or in foster homes, 80% who receive free or reduced lunch. Approximately two-thirds of the students are non-White, including Black, Latino/a, and multi-racial.

Although the school is very diverse in its demographics, what really contributes to the non-traditional image is their innovative approach to daily operations. For instance, the school follows a model similar to that of the A.S. Neill Summerhill School (see Cassebaum, 2003; Stronach & Piper, 2008) in that there is flexible scheduling, the absence of a bell system, students are free to come and go as they please, they call teachers by their first names, and students and teachers meet together weekly as one body during "community" in order to discuss and vote on issues within the school.

The school is also committed to being an active part of the larger community through service learning projects such as a community food drive and restorative justice outreach to other schools interested in implementing a similar program. Furthermore, the school is committed to social justice for all members of its community and both teachers and students engage in peace circles (see Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001; Coates, Umbreit, & Vos, 2003) to resolve issues ranging from interpersonal conflict to event planning.

Peace circles serve as one component of the larger approach to classroom management and school disciplinary policies, restorative justice, the basic premise of which is that in lieu of merely punishing the offender for having broken a rule, a system is in place to restore the relationships that were damaged as a result of one's actions (see Maccready, 2009; McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, Riddell, Stead, & Weedon, 2008).

Compared with the typical clinical sites that are available to students throughout their teacher preparation program, as well as their own personal schooling experiences, this particular setting is a radical departure from what they have previously known. It is for this reason that the researchers have chosen this site for this learning opportunity for our pre-service teachers.

The Participants

The participants were 60 pre-service teachers enrolled in the researchers' secondary education courses of which this field experience was a part. One of the universities is a large, Midwestern institution with a large teacher education program in a small urban setting. The other university is a smaller, regional campus in the Midwest, serving several rural communities.

Some of the students were in their first course of the program, so this was their first field experience in a classroom. The other participants were a year from student teaching, having already completed at least two field experiences and other education courses. The majority of the participants came from largely homogenous communities, both rural and suburban, from a mix of White, upper-middle class families, while others were White, first generation college students.

There were four participants who self-identitfied as members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community, and two of the participants were non-White. The majority of the participants were in their early 20s, while a small number were older, seeking teaching credentials as a second career.

At one university all students were required to go to this school site as part of the course, while at the other, the trip was voluntary and could be used to satisfy hours towards field experience requirements for their program. The participants were enrolled in a variety of content areas, including art, physical education, the sciences, mathematics, modern languages, language arts, music, theatre, and social studies.

Data Sources

In order to ensure the robustness of the study, we used a variety of data sources to implement this study. We developed a questionnaire with open-ended self-reflective questions that were administered prior to and upon completion of the experience. Additional data, for the purpose of triangulation, came from field experience reflective journals and reflective papers at the end of the semester, as well as classroom discussions that occurred throughout the semester.

In these reflective journals and papers, students were prompted to write about those experiences that were most significant to them in terms of their professional growth and development, honest reactions to what they observed as strengths and challenges within the school. We chose these types of data sources because as Marshall (1998) and McIntyre (1997) found, meaningful reflection has a positive influence on the learners' beliefs towards diversity.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over three iterations: once in the fall semester with two separate groups visiting the school

on two separate days, and a third group visiting the school in the spring semester. The researchers collected a portion of the questionnaire data on the day of the trip, prior to arriving at the school site, and the remaining questionnaire data on the return trip from the school site.

The researchers collected the reflective paper approximately one week after the field experience in class, and the reflective journal at the end of the semester. Collecting data from three groups of students at different points in the academic year, coupled with the variety of data sources, contributes to the robustness of the study by providing multiple measures of both short- and long-term responses.

Data Analysis

Following Charamaz (2006), the researchers implemented theoretical sampling to develop themes as they emerged in the analysis, which began as soon as data were collected. Additionally, the researchers returned to the data in an effort revise and refine the themes that emerged. This process afforded the researchers the opportunity to give a critical eye to the data collected and to organize and construct meaning from the themes.

As the researchers interpreted the experiences of the participants, they followed the data coding procedures of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which provided a more profound examination of the pre-service teachers' experiences (Patton, 2002). Throughout the analysis, the researchers employed Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-level coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

First, in the open coding process, the researchers each reviewed word by word all of the data, multiple times, looking for particular words or phrases that spoke as possible themes. In the axial coding process, the researchers shared the words and phrases that were found to be significant or relevant and began to categorize these words and phrases into clusters and continued to make meaning of the data (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). At this point the researchers identified seven possible themes.

In the final stage of selective coding, the researchers identified and named the four themes that emerged from the previous phases of analysis. During this process, the researchers also continued to compare the coding categories in an effort to understand how each category related to the others, determining the potential for producing descriptive data. As a result of this process, the researchers established four final themes.

Member Checking

Given that the participants were students enrolled in their classes afforded the researchers the opportunity to further validate their interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. This clinical, as noted earlier, was part of a course, which leant to the ability of extending the learning from this experience to classroom discourse. For instance, upon returning from the clinical visit, the researchers used data from the questionnaire to facilitate class discussions in order to clarify, expand, develop and explore more profoundly the responses gathered in that data set.

Furthermore, this enabled the researchers to gauge the longitudinal impact of the experience on the participants throughout the semester. Through this process, the researchers were able to substantiate the accuracy of their interpretations of the participants' experiences, and thus contribute to the robustness of this study.

Discussion

The researchers identified four themes from the data collected. These themes include Relating to Students, Demystifying Diversity, Finding Value in a Safe Space for Marginalized Youth, and School Structure. Each of these themes points to the significance of this kind of experience in which pre-service teachers are immersed in clinical sites radically different from what they already know and have lived. Furthermore, these themes revealed that the significance of the experience varies, depending on the stage of cultural responsiveness that the individual has achieved.

For instance, while some of the participants were very open to what they observed during their experience, others were more apprehensive or even closed to seeing the value of it, as the result of being overwhelmed by such a radically different educational setting. Additional illustrations pertaining to the responsiveness of the participants are discussed in each theme.

Relating to the Students

In this first theme, the pre-service teachers reported how their interactions with the students at the clinical site had a powerful impact on their time there. Since one of the requirements of this clinical experience was active participation in the school community, rather than simply observing, the pre-service teacher participants had a unique opportunity to engage first-hand with the students at the school through class activities and meaningful discussions.

It was through these interactions and discussions that the pre-service teachers found that they were able to connect to the students at the school. From the researchers' perspective, the participants initially appeared unsure of their ability to relate to the students, given what they knew about students they were about to meet. However, as the day progressed, the pre-service teachers appeared to develop more and more confidence and found that they had more in common with these students than they had originally believed.

For example one pre-service teacher noted that the students at this school "*are the same as other students, they just present themselves in a more unique, individualistic way.*" This student's comment is indicative of the preconceived ideas that many of the pre-service teachers had, where they assumed that these student would somehow be so different that they would not be able to relate to them the way that they imagined teachers should.

Other participants commented on the benefit of having interaction, both one-on-one and in a larger classroom setting. For example, one participant reported:

> Talking one on one with the students about their experiences and opinions of The School was the most rewarding moment for me because I hear a variety of reasons why students attend The School … and how The School has helped them achieve what they couldn't achieve elsewhere.

And yet another aspect of the experience was how the diversity of the students in the school was an asset and clearly the foundation of sense of community that is evident throughout the school. During a post-experience class discussion, one participant recalled how during her time in gym class, where the lesson was line dancing, she stopped for a moment and observed all of the different kinds of students and how they not only got along with one another, but also welcomed the pre-service teachers into their community. She says, "*When I danced in the gym with the students, everyone was laughing and talking and it was great to see everyone getting along and enjoying themselves*."

This is consistent with Goggins II and Dowcett (2011), who assert that, "identifying and framing the specific population may require some courage

given that discussions about the ignored and underserved often unpacks uncomfortable feelings about power, privilege and professional effectiveness" (p. 71). In other words, the participants, while not specifically discussing power and privilege, demonstrated their initial uneasiness in working with disenfranchised learners. As pre-service teachers, however, this experience gave them confidence in their sense of professional effectiveness, despite the power and privilege they may enjoy.

Demystifying Diversity

Diversity is often viewed by pre-service teachers as an intangible concept that is talked about in their teacher education courses and seems simple enough in its definition, but is something with which many pre-service teachers have no direct experience. This can lead to the idea of teaching diverse learners to be deceptively simple in the sense that a culturally responsive teacher needs only to include information on the quintessential heroes and holidays of different cultures in their lessons. This simplicity can lead to a false sense of security about true diversity among learners which can be frustrating and daunting (Premier & Miller, 2010) when experienced in the actual classroom.

Compounding this is the fact that oftentimes issues of diversity are presented and discussed in isolated chunks, for instance, one week the course topic may be racially diverse students, the next may be sexual orientation of students and the next students with special needs. However, in the context of this clinical experience, the student population of the school brings together many of these groups of students into one community.

This obvious coming together of many groups of students served as a catalyst for demystifying diversity for the pre-service teachers. Su (1996, 1997) found that ethnic minority students had a stronger multicultural awareness than their white counterparts. Such findings suggest that White students have a bigger challenge in developing their multicultural awareness, and given that the majority of teachers in the United States are members of the dominant group this is particularly important in the present study as all but two (i.e., 58) of the pre-service teacher participants were White.

This became particularly salient to one participant, who stated, "*I learned that although students come from completely diverse backgrounds, they all still share common interests … No matter how different people may seem to be, there is always something you share in common with them*." This comment demonstrates that this pre-service teacher has begun to both recognize and reconcile that despite the different characteristics that learners have, they are still human beings and share commonalities with all learners.

This was echoed by another participant who said, "*I learned that every student has their story, also, all students can be appreciative of diversity and can value the differences. They also need different forms of attention*." And yet a third pre-service teacher revealed, "*I learned about their [the students'] different family situations … In all honesty, though, they really didn't seem different than students I've encountered in my own high school experiences*." Once these participants saw past the labels that make these learners "diverse," they recognized that they are simply students like any others who want to come to school, feel safe, be valued and learn.

Finding Value in a Safe Space for Marginalized Youth

One of the tenets of the clinical experience site that was a part of this study is the commitment to providing a safe place for all students, regardless of race, sexual orientation, religion or socioeconomic status. Since the clinical experience site is a charter school, the students must apply to go there. For many of the students, this school represents the one place where they can go to feel safe, as many had experienced bullying, abusive family situations, or some other form of rejection by society (Goggins II & Dowcett, 2011; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010).

In order for the school to realize its commitment to the personal, physical and emotional safety of all students, there is a sense of responsibility of all school community members, teachers and students alike, to protect one another and maintain the values the school seeks to uphold and foster. For many of the students, this space is their last hope, as many had previously dropped out of the mainstream school or were in the process of doing so.

For the majority of the pre-service teacher participants, the concept of not feeling safe at school or at home is one with which they cannot easily identify. However, the clinical experience in this study provided the pre-service teacher participants with an opportunity to not only come face to face with these issues, but also to observe the power that schools have to provide a sense of safety for students whose needs had not been met by traditional schools. As one participant stated, "*I thought the students wouldn't be excited about school because of bad experiences they've had in the past … but all the students were passionate about the subjects they were in*."

Another aspect of safety that was new to the pre-service teacher participants was that simply because students are told that they are in a safe place and can rely on adults, it does not happen overnight for children who have been bullied or abused. There may be a period of "testing the boundaries" and adjustment to a new environment before there is trust that the school will provide safety and caring members of a community.

As the pre-service teacher participants interacted with the students and learned their stories, they also came to understand how the school had helped the students to meet their basic needs and were therefore able to have a positive school experience. Despite the negative experiences that these students had had before coming to this school, they were able to overcome the challenges that they faced and interact positively with other students and adults. One participant noted, "*Seeing the students interact was the most rewarding. I never knew students could be so close and accepting, especially seeing how close they were with the teachers*."

School Structure

The pre-service teacher participants had preconceived ideas of how a school and a classroom should be structured. With the privilege and power from which they have benefitted throughout their lives, they have come to expect that there are rules and procedures to be followed, that these rules and procedures make sense to everyone, that there are consequences for breaking those rules, and that they are to be followed without question.

However, as discussed in previous sections, the school site for this experience does not adhere to these expectations of a "traditional" school. In fact, this school challenges the traditional models of school structure in an effort to place the onus of learning and personal behavior on the students themselves, in order to prepare them to become productive members of society.

Of all the unique qualities of this particular site, this is the one with which the pre-service teacher participants struggled the most. The difficulty in accepting this non-traditional model speaks to how deeply ingrained ideas about what schools and

education look like in practice. However, Stewart (2008) found that the "educational ills commonly associated with large, urban, minority schools are mitigated by a cohesive school environment" (p. 198).

An example of such a non-traditional model would be this clinical site which fosters a more collectivist approach to school community through commitment to restorative justice and safety, as opposed to traditional schools that attempt to do the same through pep rallies and superficial attempts at character education.

The pre-service teacher participants demonstrated varying levels of openness to this school structure. This variation may be explained by the fact that the majority of the pre-service teachers come from schools that cater to the white, upper-middle class, and that the power structure within these schools rewards those who understand the expectations of that structure.

This type of structure is all that that the pre-service teacher participants knew. The fact that the participants had chosen to become teachers, means that they liked school, were successful in school, and were clearly part of the dominant group. However, this mainstream structure of schooling does not make sense for or has failed some learners, the very learners that this school site serves.

Some participants were unable to embrace this model of education. For example, one participant expressed, "*Honestly, I thought the classes would have been more structured and managed. But … they were a mess*." Yet another reported, "*I was expecting more academic work to be done. While sitting in on an English class, the students had about two hours to finish making a character sheet and setting up a story, and many of them did hardly anything with it*." Such sentiments were corroborated in classroom discussions and reflections where many of the participants claimed that they were not comfortable with the non-traditional structure of this school, especially when considering the type of school in which they may be teaching in the near future.

On the other hand, some participants responded with more cautious optimism that such a model could be effective. For example, one participant stated, "*I learned that there are a lot of ways for kids to learn*." Another admitted, "*I did not expect the school to be so 'free and open,' the teachers give students a lot of freedom throughout the day*." Also in classroom discussions and reflections, the pre-service teacher participants confessed that they saw the benefit in such a non-traditional approach to learning, but that perhaps this type of schooling was ultimately not the right place for them as teachers.

Nonetheless, many also reported that while they did not believe they could teach in a school like the one in which they spent the day, they did acknowledge that they had seen several things that they would take with them into their future classrooms, such as creating a sense of community within the classroom.

Conclusion

This article has aimed at answering the following research question: To what extent will a radical field experience challenge the beliefs and attitudes of pre-service teachers toward diverse populations and non-traditional models of education? The analysis of data led to four primary themes based on participant responses to open-ended survey questions, reflections and classroom discussions.

In terms of relating to the students, the researchers found that the pre-service teacher participants were initially hesitant and lacked confidence in their ability as future teachers to interact with and relate to students in an urban setting. In demystifying diversity, this clinical experience provided pre-service teachers with a demonstration of diversity in practice, which led to the understanding that "diverse" students have more in common with their peers than meets the eye.

As for creating a safe space for marginalized youth, perhaps most important is that the pre-service teacher participants came face to face with the realization that not all learners come to school feeling safe, where outside influences such as bullying and abuse can have detrimental effects on the learner's academic success. The pre-service teachers saw an example of how a school might make a commitment to mitigating the negative effects of the real world.

Finally, the theme of school structure was met with mixed reactions from the participants. Whereas some were not able to see past their own biases of what a school should look like and how a classroom should function, others were more open to the example set forth by the school, that there is no single model that works for everyone.

Clearly one of the main goals in preparing teacher candidates for the 21st century is ensuring that they are equipped for culturally responsive teaching. Achieving this level of competency is no easy task, especially when a teacher education program finds itself in a community that is very homogenous and where local schools cannot provide the necessary exposure to diverse learners in field clinical experiences.

Additionally, given that the majority of those who enter teacher education are from the dominant group (see Cooper, 2003; Miller & Endo, 2005), they may or may not be in tune with the plight of those who do not have access to the same cultural capital (Su, 1996, 1997). Therefore, teacher educators must seek out unique clinical experience sites that will challenge pre-service teachers to redefine their definition of diversity and teaching.

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