Engaging in a Reflective Examination about Diversity:
Interviews with Three Preservice Teachers

Seungyoun Lee & Mary Ellen Dallman

Introduction

Diversity and Multicultural Education

Diversity and multicultural education is fast becoming the norm. Race, gender, ethnicity, ability, language, culture, socioeconomic class, family configurations, interests, or combinations of these produce enormous diversity issues. The reflection of this huge sociocultural diversity—children coming from different ethnic backgrounds—has significantly increased in the United States in recent years. Miller, Miller, and Schroth (1997) reported that 25% of children in the typical K-12 classroom in the U.S. are currently ethnic minorities and the number of ethnic minority children will grow to 39% by the year 2020. Approximately 9.9 million of the 45 million school-age children are living in a family speaking a non-English language (Waggoner, 1994).

More and more, diverse children from various sociocultural groups enter early childhood education programs experiencing feelings of difficulty, loss, insecurity, alienation, isolation, and depression (Congress & Lynne, 1994) in struggling to adapt to multiple languages, knowledge expectations, traditions, attitudes, values, and beliefs which differ from their family and educational settings (NAEYC, 1996). Each sociocultural group's patterns of behaviors, thinking, values, ideas, and symbols that are transmitted by their cultures and that are different from other groups (NCSS, 1992) may cause difficulty in communicating with people from other sociocultural groups.

Definitions of Diversity and Multicultural Education

"A major goal of multicultural education is to reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality" (Banks, 1995a, p. 3). Multicultural education is "a way to help students of different backgrounds communicate, get along better with each other, and feel good about themselves" (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, p. 426).

According to Manning and Baruth (1996), multicultural education "is designed to teach learners to recognize, accept, and appreciate cultural, ethnic, social class, religious, and gender differences and to instill in learners during these crucial developmental years a sense of responsibility and a commitment to work toward the democratic ideals of justice, equality, and democracy" (p. 3).

Diversity and multiculturalism are frequently used interchangeably, with valuing differences of culture, morality, multiple needs, inclusion of diverse groups of people, and equal educational opportunities and responsibilities (Miller & Tanners, 1995). According to Baker (1994), understanding is the most important thing in diversity. If people did not stereotype particular cultural groups, they could better understand, accept, and trust diversity, appreciating differences and similarities about different cultures.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the dynamics of three preservice teacher's beliefs and practical knowledge of diversity and multicultural education. This study aimed to develop a portrait of preservice teachers' epistemological stances with the focus of "How do the preservice teachers perceive diversity and understand multicultural education in their teacher education program?"

Research Method

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the theoretical framework of social constructivism which was pioneered by Vygotsky and Bakhtin, arguing for "the importance of culture and context in forming understanding" (McMachon, 1997, p. 3), with respect to teacher beliefs and practical knowledge about diversity and multicultural education. Social constructivism helps frame the phenomena of interest in this study as it assumes that knowledge is socioculturally mediated and that there may exist multiple realities in teaching and learning.

Teachers' belief systems, a subset of their practical knowledge, are not developed separately from the sociocultural context. Therefore, making voices and listening to others' experiences and thoughts about diversity and multicultural education are important aspects of teachers' knowledge constructions, letting them make sense socially. This is a far cry from the typical isolation of teaching.

Research Participants

The research participants of this study were three preservice teachers—Kate, Lisa, and Shazia. The three participants were seniors in their early twenties majoring in early childhood education. One of the reasons they wish to be an early childhood teacher is their love of young children. "I love being around the younger children. I love seeing their eyes brighten up when they all of a sudden get something. I forget about everything else and concentrate on the children." As Seefeldt (1980) indicates, the three participants of this study demonstrated the importance of love and emotional affections toward children, flexibility, and non-prejudicial attitudes towards humans and the world.

They considered the importance of finding multiple ways to get through to different children, the importance of be-

Seungyoun Lee is an assistant professor and Mary Ellen Dallman is an associate professor, both in the Department of Early Childhood and Special Education of the College of Education at Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia.

ing aware of and sensitive to individual children's learning needs and interests, the importance of a teacher being a nurturer for children's emotional support, the importance of in-depth time for children's learning, the importance of knowing children's personal background, the importance of motivation to children's learning, and the importance of creating a learning community.

Research Procedures

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study. From among the three types of case studies—descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative—(Merriam, 1998, 1988), this study is a descriptive/interpretive qualitative case study of teachers' beliefs and practical knowledge of diversity and multicultural education. A descriptive case study is useful to present basic and rich information in educational areas where little is known. It focuses on thick description but not on theorization. Interpretive case study is interested in "developing conceptual categories or in illustrating, supporting, or challenging theoretical assumptions" (Merriam, 1988, p. 28) in order to interpret or theorize about the human experience being studied.

"Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Two face-to-face in-depth interviews with each participant were conducted. The interviews were focused on each participant's perceptions and practical knowledge of diversity, including their personal beliefs, values, and knowledge regarding diversity stemming from their personal experiences in the school, university, community, and the larger sociocultural context.

The interviews were semi-structured in order to have conversation with participants exploring the research interests broadly. Each interview session lasted approximately one to one-and-one-half hours. The interviews were audiotaped in order to accurately record the language of the interviewees.

Data Analysis

Data analysis typically seeks to make sense out of data. Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what participants have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is a process of making meaning. Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretations (Merriam, 1998, p. 178).

Analysis commenced immediately with the initial gathering of interviews. All interviews were fully transcribed. All the data were analyzed to look for patterns and themes relative to the literature of diversity and multicultural education.

Research Findings

This section aims to provide in-depth understandings about and to make sense of the three preservice teachers' experiences with diversity. The three preservice teachers' views of experiencing diversity are discussed with respect to the subcategories of "feelings of being a minority and about minorities," "experiencing ESL children," and "experiencing different races, cultures, and genders." Then, each preservice teacher's "thoughts about teacher education programs for diversity" are followed with the aspect of "seeing a need for a more practical approach of teacher education."

Feelings of Being a Minority and about Minorities

Feeling alienated and isolated after moving. "I'm from Seattle. It was kind of culture shock going into a very small Southern country town. I just didn't feel like I fit in." After graduating from high school, Kate moved to the Southeastern United States for her university education. Kate always felt that she was in the majority until she attended this Southern university. For her, being from Seattle and moving to the Southern region of the country was a culture shock.

> I didn't understand Southern dialect at all. It was almost like hearing a completely different language, like hearing Spanish. I felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb. I felt like I was the only person there that didn't know how to say "Ya'll." I was definitely a minority here.

Kate states that it was a good experience to understand how it feels to be a minority and how it feels to be different. Nevertheless, she notes that it was very hard and at times lonely, to be the "odd one."

During her preservice teacher education courses, Kate recalls how one of her professors said, "You aren't a minority! Because the professors and the administration here are all White." That made her think, "Well, yeah, but, I still feel like I am a minority," because her life experiences were not limited to inside the walls of the university.

Recognizing diversity as a world-wide issue. Initially, Lisa thought that diversity was just an issue unique to the U.S. When she went to Italy, at first, she felt that there was a lot less diversity evident than in the U.S. "I never saw a Black person in the whole country of Italy when I was there."

But gradually she began to notice that within the last 20 years Italy has received an influx of Pakistani, Afghanistani, and Indian immigrants. She felt that the traditionally homogenous society and community of Italy actually produced a great amount of racism and prejudice toward other people. She recognized that diversity is an issue all over the world.

Not fitting the norm. "My parents are from Pakistan." Shazia reflects often about the norm in a group and society. "I am someone who is not the norm most places. In most places there is no diversity except me." Shazia notes that her confident personality prevents her from being attacked by others in relation to aspects of her culture.

Developing open-mindedness about culture. Kate believes that being interested in people and asking questions about their culture has contributed to her development of open-mindedness. She emphasizes that people should be able to learn about and appreciate other people's cultures. At the same time, she stresses the importance of expressing pride in one's own culture. For Kate, it is equally important to be aware of one's own culture and that of others.

> I had never ever thought about any of these different cultures as being a big deal. I thought of them the same difference as my sister having blue eyes and me having brown eyes, or her having freckles and me having moles. We should all be able to get together and celebrate all together.

Learning from diverse cultures. Shazia believes that it is "good luck" for people to learn from each other's differences. "I think I have a lot to offer to people that I meet and I think they have a lot to offer, too. If you show respect to someone they will show it back to you." She notes that if someone is not willing to listen to her or hurts her feelings, it would really be their loss. They would miss out on what she could offer.

Reflecting on her own situation in the U.S. as an American and Pakistani, she believes that when she has children of

different cultures in her classrooms, she will create opportunities for them to share with the class. "Because they not only know about the general American life, but they also know something else."

While Shazia does not feel that she fits the norm of the groups she belongs to in the U.S., she poses questions regarding the meaning of majority and minority, focusing on the point that every person should be respected regardless of his/her sociocultural background. She questions whether "majority" simply means a large number of people or the norm of a dominant group.

Experiencing ESL Children

Feeling frustrations and difficulties as a language minority. From her experiences in Italy, Lisa brings up the issues of language, particularly as a minority in a foreign country. "I was thrown into a completely different culture and completely different language that was not my own." She expresses feelings of frustration and difficulty with living, even for a short time, in a foreign country.

> A lot of people think that when someone moves to a new country, they need to learn our language because they live here, and it is so difficult. I didn't know how to say he, she, or it. It made me feel dumb because I couldn't speak to them.

Lisa indicated that she believes submersion is the best way to learn about other cultures; however, she admitted that learning through submersion was frustrating and hard.

Interacting with ESL children and their families. Kate met three Hispanic children in a kindergarten class where she participated in an internship during the Fall semester of her junior year. The children either spoke no English or very little English. Kate was interested in seeing the children's progress of language development.

> It was interesting to see how quickly they would catch on to the language as they started grouping up. At first they stayed very close. They all would talk together in Spanish, and wouldn't really branch out to the other children. They slowly would start to go and hang out with other children and pick up English.

Kate identifies with the problems of children whose parents who do not speak English. She observes how the parents are scared to come into the school. She also notices how difficult it is for teachers to get in touch with the parents. At this point, Kate emphasizes the importance of finding ways to get to know children who do not speak English as a first language. She utilizes the expression 'trying the sink-or-swim methods' suggesting that teachers should not be afraid to get in there and interact with these children.

> I sat at lunch with them. They just got a kick out me because I tried to pull out the little Spanish that I remember. They were just loving it because I just wasn't saying anything right. I would want teachers just to jump in there, just not be afraid to get their hands wet, and learn and talk about the cultures, but of course doing it in a positive manner.

As a role model, Kate recalls a teacher who had an ESL class on Saturdays for the parents. The parents spoke only Spanish, and the teacher did not really speak much Spanish. The teacher and the parents simply got together over a period of Saturdays, got closer and closer, and learned each other's languages. Kate believes that this was a good strategy to show the ESL children and parents the same attribute of vulnerability that they may experience.

Incorporating multiple languages into classrooms. Shazia focuses on the need to help the non-English speaking children learn and understand English. In working with second language learners, Shazia observes how different classroom teachers construct learning environments which take into account the various languages spoken by children in the class. She finds that it is good for teachers to have the extra knowledge of multiple languages, even if applied only to something as simple as counting from one to ten.

In addition to her attention to foreign languages, Shazia points out that a multicultural learning environment should include the language of children with special needs such as sign language for the deaf. Shazia emphasizes, "What's normal to me isn't for them and what I am used to isn't what they are used to. That's his thing. It's not that he can't do it." For her as a future teacher, it is important to incorporate different kinds of languages from major cultures into the classroom.

Caring for and being open-minded about ESL children. Through her experiences with ESL children, Lisa believes that teachers have to be sensitive to children's culture, avoiding any stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes. Lisa thinks that every cultural group that is different from the main culture should not be ignored or excluded from any lessons or activities in schools. She feels that teachers should care for and be open-minded about every child and his or her family, community, and culture.

Experiencing Different Races and Cultures

Having positive understandings and attitudes toward different cultures. During a teaching internship experience in a fourth grade class, Kate experienced a fight between children of different races and cultures.

> There was a White child that said something about a Black child's mother. The Black child would hear it wrong, and proceeded [to start the flight]. Then another child, who was actually multi-racial, tried to break up the fight, and then [there were] those jumping on him for saying he didn't have the right because he wasn't either White or Black.

Kate feels that this kind of experience is emotionally harmful for many of the children. She thinks that all fights of this nature start with a misunderstanding about other cultures. She implicitly articulates that classroom teacher's personal beliefs influence children's attitudes and thoughts about diversity.

At this point, in order to help children develop understandings about racial differences, Crary (1992) suggests guidelines such as acknowledging children's fears, misconceptions, and rejections about differences, prompt response when conflicts occur, teachers' verbal and nonverbal behaviors to model respect, meaningful activities using literature to address the issues, and opportunities to share about experiences with real people. Classroom teachers' awareness and tolerance about discriminatory thoughts and attitudes should be extended to challenge their own and their students' beliefs and values about diversity.

Appreciating each child's similarities and differences. During her teaching internship in a kindergarten classroom, Kate's mentor teacher posed the question "Who is the same as this child?" The teacher singled out one child to illustrate the concept of same-and-different through the lens of race and gender. Kate observed that "There was a child that was part White and part Black. When this child was not chosen, the children were all like, 'Well, nobody's like her.'"

Kate implies that the similarities and differences of children from diverse sociocultural contexts should be discussed in more various ways and at deeper levels.

On this point, Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1989) assert, "the colorblind position results in denial of young children's awareness of differences and to nonconfrontation of children's misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviors, be they about race, culture, gender, or different physical abilities" (p. 7).

As these authors suggest, children's similarities and differences should be appreciated; it is important for children to have the opportunities to be aware of and comfortably discover the differences and similarities of themselves and others. "It is not differences in themselves that cause the problems, but how people respond to differences" (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989, p. 6).

The generation gap in beliefs about racism. "I think the new generations are more open-minded—just because the color of your skin is different doesn't make you inherently a bad person or a less worthy person in any way." Lisa's grandfather was raised on a farm in the South in a very rural area. She perceives that her grandfather had a lot of racist views growing up and throughout his life. Lisa thinks that he never put himself in situations where his beliefs would be challenged. Lisa's mother grew up more in a city environment. Lisa feels that her mother had fewer racist beliefs than her grandfather, but still held a residue of prejudicial attitudes.

Lisa, however, thinks that her generation holds fewer racist beliefs and is more optimistic and open to diversity. She feels that with each successive generation there will be less and less racism. "I thought that it was silly—I didn't think that there was any difference."

Positive attitudes about diverse cultures in younger children. Depending on the age of children, Lisa notices that behaviors and reactions to people from different cultural groups are likely to change. Lisa compares young children's social behaviors and peer friendships with the attitudes and behaviors of children at other stages of schooling.

> When we went from middle school, everybody was friends with everybody, and maybe it's a high school thing to become cliques. My friends that were African-American when we got to high school, they just wouldn't really hang out with me—they only would hang out with the other African-American children. It wasn't that they were, "I'm not going to be your friend," but it was more people got into their own cliques.

In contrast to her high school experience, Lisa sees that young children have a tendency to play together with anyone. She noted that younger children seem to have less prejudices and biases about people from diverse cultural groups than older children.

> This Pre-K class, they all just play together and it's so nice, what an ideal world. If everyone stayed as childlike, wasn't influenced by 'you live in a trailer and I live in a house, so I can't be friends with you' and that sort of thing.

Teacher's equal attitudes towards all children. Observing a teacher who was biased toward minority children, Lisa considers children's self-esteem and emphasizes the importance of treating all children equally regardless of their race, ethnicity, or learning ability.

> My teacher placed all the minority children in the lower reading group, and the Caucasian children, even the ones that did not appear to be qualified in the upper reading group. I don't want to give them an impression at such a young age that they can't read. I felt very bad for them, and tried to make up for it and playing with them, giving affection towards the children that she ignored and spend more time with them so that they felt they had equal time. If you treat them just like they're the rest of the group, then there's a better chance that they won't feel that way about themselves.

Knowing oneself and others. "Not everyone is the same. Everyone is unique and different in one's own way. Everyone is special. Everyone has one's own thing. Everyone is equal." Shazia focuses on the point that children should experience various perspectives that surround different learning concepts. She feels that it is extremely important to provide children with opportunities to connect with diverse societies and cultures.

> I do believe multicultural learning and the perspective is very important. It's not just Caucasian people everywhere…. For me it's not just Pakistani people everywhere…. I don't have a problem with teaching about Islam. I am not going to preach to them that they need to be Muslim. But I am gonna tell them this is what they do, this is their culture, this is their religion.

She thinks that no child or cultural group should be ignored by other, more dominant cultural groups of people. Emphasizing on equal learning environment, she feels that lack of knowledge about other sociocultural groups may contribute to misunderstandings, prejudices, privileges, exclusive attitudes, etc.

Appreciating diversity. Shazia desires to teach children that everyone is special and unique. "Maybe you are good at one thing and someone else is good at another. It doesn't make you better than him or him better than you." She wants children to know who they are and their uniqueness. Similar to this, Shazia wants the children in her classes to accept people for who they are. She asserts that children should know that there is no hierarchy or status associated with different cultures.

> You have to accept culture and race and things for what they are. If something is different from your own, it doesn't make yours any better than theirs and you may reflect that's just not what we are to do.

"There is nothing you can do where you won't encounter diversity, diversity in ability, diversity as far as color, race, religion, sex, anything." She emphasizes, however, that all of these differences can not be equated with lesser values and morals. "Everything is so diverse and that's what makes the group." Therefore, Shazia notes that she wants her children to be open to other people so that they can learn and benefit from each other.

> I want them to know that there is a lot that a person could be bringing to the scenario, to a situation and I should let that person tell me what it is that he knows. I should be open to that person and open to what he has to say about diversity in thought. You can learn from me and I can learn from you.

Thoughts about Teacher Education Programs for Diversity

Seeing a Need for a More Practical Approach to Teacher Education

Being careful with holidays. Kate states emphatically that the teacher education program at her university helps to prepare her for diversity as it relates to teaching and learning even though she feels that she pretty much already had an open mind. "We were basically told not to be prejudiced and not to just focus on the stereotypical, to try to bring up as many things as possible."

Through her coursework, Kate learned the importance of providing a fair voice for every culture, including religion and cultural holidays. She has been taught that if she is going to celebrate Christmas, she should include all other religious holidays or cultural celebration such as Kwanza

and Hanukkah in order not to offend any of the families.

> We've been programmed to think no religious preaching in the classroom, but bring as much multicultural issues into the classroom as we can. Teachers need to keep an open mind, not only on encouraging talking about diversity, but also not overstepping any boundaries, like with holidays, that might offend people.

At this point, Lisa and Shazia perceive that it is vital for teachers to know where the children in their classes are coming from in terms of their lifeworlds outside of school. They view that teachers' teaching can never be meaningful without understanding each child's own cultural background. In order to facilitate an equal education for all of groups of children and families, they feel that teachers should be "culture-wise" and know children in classrooms, schools, homes, communities, and larger cultural groups.

> If you come in one day and say like "today we are gonna learn about Kwanzaa" the child's gonna think you are dumb and not prepared because he doesn't celebrate Kwanzaa and you just assumed that he does.

Lisa stresses the importance of human rights and equality. She thinks that every person should be judged by what is on the inside. She feels that cultural understanding is necessary in order to prevent pre-judgment and prejudice on the part of the teacher. Lisa concurs with the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover."

> On the outside someone might have darker skin or something like that. Part of their culture does make them who they are. It does not mean you should pre-judge them on that because you don't necessarily know that—you might assume their culture is one thing when it's really something completely different, and you don't know that and you shouldn't have prejudices towards people.

Learning more practical teaching methods. Kate and Shazia suggest that there is a need for a more practical approach in teacher education programs related to diversity. They believe that it would be a good idea to bring the books of different cultures into classrooms for children who are in a major cultural group as well as children who have different cultures in order to understand and incorporate all cultures. They feel that teachers' teaching approaches can go a long way towards boosting children's interest in diversity.

> There are a plethora of books and children love to read them. Don't think that you can put out a book about Kenya or Bangladesh and the children won't wanna pick it up and read it. It is important to incorporate many book activities for the benefits and fun for children.

However, Kate maintains that just learning each activity about diversity is not enough to prepare teachers to teach children of other cultures. This point is supported by Neuharth-Pritchett, Reiff, and Pearson (2001) who contend that teacher education programs "should foster approaches that assist preservice students in developing a repertoire of culturally responsive or learner-sensitive strategies that focus on integration of events and materials" (p. 268)

Experiencing more issues and in-depth learning about diversity. "We really have not done anything very multicultural. We haven't really done anything with it….really. It does not prepare me to do it." Shazia perceives that her teacher education program does not satisfy her needs for multicultural education. She explains that the only thing she has learned from her multicultural classes is the standard lecture on the importance of multiculturalism.

Pointing out the limitations of their teacher education programs for diversity, Shazia and Lisa suggest that such programs should deal with a more diverse set of topics and cultures beyond African-American issues and provide preservice teachers with more in-depth learning about diversity. For them, multicultural education does not simply imply education about African American culture. They emphasize the importance of learning about a variety of diverse cultures and events from different perspectives. They feel that the class on diversity that they took was more like a history lesson with multiculturalism mixed into it.

> I took a class on diversity. It was supposed to be foundations of education across the board, but it was very much a foundation of African–American education. It didn't end up being multicultural, it ended up being African–American, which there's plenty to talk about; It doesn't make sense to me to have one whole month dedicated to black history month and what about one whole month dedicated to Asian Americans or something like that. Every day in the month of February they talk about a certain black history person or whatever ….kids don't even listen. They are not benefiting from it.

In addition, using an example of Irish people in the 1900s, Lisa emphasizes the importance of recognizing prejudices and biases. Lisa believes that awareness and recognition of problems of diversity will be the starting point for educational reform. Lisa believes it is important to identify whose perspective is considered and whose voice is concealed in the curriculum in discussions that take place in the teacher education program.

> Even back in like the early nineteen hundreds, the Irish people were treated as second class citizens because there was a huge influx of Irish immigration at that point, and some were denied public school entrance. Every different culture in America has had biases at some point against them.

Lisa argues, "It is important to teach future teachers multi-culture." At this point, she recommends improvement and additions to the courses on diversity and multicultural education in the teacher education program. "You couldn't do every single different culture, but more needs to be discussed on many different cultures in the U.S."

Prior experiences and attitudes about diversity. Lisa thinks that her teacher education program, with respect to diversity, has not benefited her or her future students because she was already open-minded to the issues. She shares how she has been raised to examine the opinions which contrast with her own beliefs, and this has contributed to the development of her spirit of open-mindedness.

> My parents have always done a good job as far as trying to make us see both sides to each case. My mom's very much the devil's advocate, if you're arguing one side of the case, she'll find the opposite side and argue back to you even if she doesn't believe it. She wants you to see that there are two sides that that other side does have valid points as well as your side, so I think that I do that, too.

Implications: Experiencing Diversity

Feelings of Being a Minority and about Minorities

Who and what is minority? All three preservice teachers express feelings of being a minority. Upon moving to another region in the country, Kate feels culture shock. When traveling to other countries, Lisa and Shazia feel frustration, difficulties, alienation, and isolation. When these preservice teachers are positioned in a

sociocultural context that is unfamiliar to them, they feel like minorities.

In this sense, the concept of "minority" is situated. Identifying herself as both an American and a Pakistani, Shazia feels that she does not fit the norm in the United States or in Pakistan, and expresses confusion about her identity. Even though the preservice teachers indicate that people from other sociocultural groups never directly hurt their feelings, they still find it hard to be "different."

In relating their experiences of being minorities, the preservice teachers reveal their practical knowledge about diversity: Diversity is a world-wide issue even in a traditionally homogenous society; teachers need to have children learn, share, appreciate, and celebrate their own and others' cultures; misconceptions about other cultures can contribute to feelings of fear or negative thoughts; and every person should be respected regardless of his/her sociocultural background.

One of the preservice teachers—Shazia—questions the hidden meaning of "majority" and "minority" in society. Her questioning brings to light issues of norm, power, and privilege in a group and in society. In contrast to Shazia's more critical view of the power relationship between "majority" and "minority," describing the United States as a "melting pot," another preservice teacher—Lisa—argues that "submersion" is the best way to learn about other cultures.

Discussing the points raised by this group of preservice teachers, Essed (2002) criticizes the approach of "cultural cloning" that produces inequalities by assimilating various groups of people to "normative standards." According to Essed, cultural cloning is a process where immigrant minority people are expected to adapt and be absorbed into the mainstream culture. In this sense, cultural differences are interpreted as deviant from the dominant sociocultural "norm." The cultural difference of non-dominant groups also means having less power within the mainstream culture. Essed emphasizes the importance of appreciating and valuing the cultural differences of diverse groups of people. The preservice teachers positively recall personal life experiences with diversity within their family and educational backgrounds.

In the current "multicultural era," preservice teachers have many more opportunities to experience different cultures firsthand. The preservice teachers' trips to other countries and experiences relating to people of other cultures, seems to help them "stand in another's shoes."

Experiencing English-as-a-Second-Language Children

Inclusion or sociocultural empowerment in the education of ESL children. The preservice teachers indicate the ultimate importance of discussing ESL issues, recognizing the increasing number of linguistically diverse populations in schools.

The preservice teachers emphasize the importance of acknowledging and valuing the language children bring to school. With respect to this point, one of the preservice teachers—Lisa—recalls a mentor teacher in her student internship, whom she perceived as very careless, prejudicial, and stereotypical in her actions towards ESL children. When the mentor teacher says, "Don't worry about them. They never know what we're saying anyway. It's not a big deal," the preservice teacher thinks: "In the meantime the child is frustrated and you're giving him bad grades and it's not a measure of his intelligence, it's a measure of your intelligence because you're not trying to help and make him understand."

Another preservice teacher—Shazia—indicates that language should be acknowledged as one's own, not as a lack of ability. Ogbu (1992) maintains that teachers should be responsible for minority children's language education by focusing on their potential difficulties rather than lowering expectations for their academic performance. The preservice teachers believe that ESL children should not be considered "learning disabled" and need equitable learning opportunities.

The preservice teachers also feel that teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of ESL children and parents cause them to incorrectly label students as "learning disabled." The preservice teachers' firsthand experiences with feelings of being a minority, as well as relating to diverse groups of friends, provide them with more opportunities to be sensitive to and empathize with ESL children's emotions of being in a different culture.

Strategies to develop ESL children's language and a sense of English "culture." In terms of strategies needed to work with ESL children, the preservice teachers suggest that multiple languages, including sign language, should be a part of their teacher education programs. One of them—Kate—also points out the importance of teachers learning the children's language. The preservice teachers focus on developing the efficiency of teachers themselves, primarily in terms of acquiring multiple language skills.

Experiencing Different Races and Cultures

"Race" as a social construct. "Race" is a big issue that permeates the preservice teachers' discussions about diversity. What is meant by "race"? What makes humans categorize using "race"? What is racial identity? The preservice teachers wrestle with these questions. During their student internship, the preservice teachers notice conflicts and fights among different races, especially between Blacks and Whites. The preservice teachers, however, do not express any real tensions in defining "race" as a biological construct. The preservice teachers discuss race in ways similar to earlier conceptions of the construct:

> In the mid-to late 1800s, "race was conceptualized in a way that designated specific groups with clearly defined, biologically inherited physical and behavioral characteristics." (Banks, 1996, pp. 68-69, see Dilg, 2003, p. 132)

It is surprising that while preservice teachers have had more exposure to multicultural experiences, including multicultural classes, they hold a more narrow view of race, failing to consider sensitively hidden assumptions of "race" as a construct. Recalling their student internships, they usually recognize and criticize their White mentor teachers' biased attitudes, including "playing favorites" towards "Black" children. The preservice teachers feel that people's lack of understanding or misconceptions is the root cause of prejudice about cultural groups, and they emphasize the need for teachers to take into account individual children's personal backgrounds.

Because the preservice teachers perceive themselves as having appropriate and democratic thoughts and attitudes about "race," they indicate that they consider all children as "equal" regardless of their 'skin colors' or their cultures. However, reflecting on the 'color-blind' approach, Irvine (2003) and Lewis (2001) suggest that teachers' attempt to treat all children the same may hinder the expression of values, norms, and beliefs of different cultures and blind them from realizing their preexisting assumptions or prejudices towards other cultural groups of people.

Irvine (2003) states that "Whites truly believe that color blindness is consistent with notions of fairness and nondiscrimination. However, a color-blind approach is fiction because it ignores the realities

of racism in this country" (p. xvi). In this sense, the preservice teachers tend not to challenge their beliefs about race because they are "innocent" about "other kinds of skin colors."

However, living through the historical struggles of racial discrimination, the experienced teachers have constructed stereotypic perceptions for people of color, particularly African-Americans. Now that they work at private Christian schools and see African-Americans from a higher socioeconomic status, the experienced teachers feel conflicts and challenges regarding their preexisting conceptions about race. The experienced teachers look back at their history, at their present environment, their knowledge and beliefs about race, and 'ultimately' label 'race' on the basis of socioeconomic status. For the experienced teachers, the power of race is legitimized by the socioeconomic status rather than biological characteristics.

Knowledge and attitudes towards diversity are related to student learning. The preservice teachers believe that children's misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about other people contributes to their prejudicial actions toward individuals from other cultures. Piatt (1997) claims, "Prejudice hardens in the absence of experience that contradicts it" (p. 75). Accordingly, the preservice teachers feel it is important to expose children to various beliefs and perspectives, rather than focusing on specifics of a single group or culture.

The preservice teachers stress the importance of being aware of children's personal background. Noting that teachers' personal beliefs influence children's attitudes and thoughts about diversity, the preservice teachers emphasize that teachers should be "culture-wise"—aware of and sensitive to each child's characteristics and taking care not to generalize according to large categories of culture.

The preservice teachers' emphasis on the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about children's personal backgrounds is based much more on their personal experiences beyond their roles as "teachers." From their experiences of being situated in unfamiliar sociocultural contexts and being an immigrant, the preservice teachers empathize more with the difficulties of children's alienation in 'different' cultural contexts from their own.

Rather than being assimilated into a mainstream culture, they believe teachers should find ways to help students experience success in foreign cultures while still maintaining their own cultures. They take into account the importance of social interactions as a means for people to share and learn from each other's cultural experiences. One of them—Shazia—in particular is influenced by her parents in terms of her beliefs regarding the importance of considering children's uniqueness. She feels that she is proud of her heritage as both an American and a Pakistani and wants to equally maintain both cultures.

From the preservice teachers' memories about their childhood, they have developed an image of "good teachers"—teachers who care about individual children's personal backgrounds, including their learning needs and difficulties. They have the belief that all learning should be based on students' pace and interests rather than conforming to a set pattern of instruction for all children in a class.

The preservice teachers feel that educators should be open-minded, respectful, appreciative, and accepting of children for who they are. They think that prejudicial attitudes, stereotypical remarks, victimization, and discrimination have no place in classrooms. They believe that teachers' modeling of positive attitudes about diversity will help children know themselves and others. As near future teachers, the preservice teachers feel it is important to provide multiple opportunities for children to know and share their original culture, to facilitate sense of belonging.

The importance of understanding both artifacts and ideologies in multicultural curriculum. During their student internships, the preservice teachers observe how classroom teachers deal with the issues of diverse societies and cultures. One of the preservice teachers—Kate—however, is not satisfied with the way a kindergarten teacher singles out one child during a lesson illustrating the concept of same-and-different. Another preservice teacher—Lisa—is critical of a teacher who appears to play "favorites," exhibiting prejudicial attitudes. The preservice teachers are particularly sensitive to issues of equality and fairness as they play out in the curriculum. Regarding multicultural curriculum, the preservice teachers believe that: Every norm is socioculturally situated; everyone learns from one another; no cultural groups should be excluded from the school curriculum; no one should be offended by the school curriculum.

The preservice teachers are highly influenced by the multicultural education courses in their teacher education program. The goal of multicultural education is to provide children with equal educational opportunities and teach all children, caring for each of their academic, emotional, and social needs (Lin, 2001). The preservice teachers state that they are "programmed" by their teacher education courses to emphasize "equal opportunities, positive human relations, and appreciation of individual uniqueness" (Banks, 1995a; Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

They think that they understand the purposes of multicultural education "very well" and they often take knowledge of diversity for granted. However, the preservice teachers also show gaps in the multicultural understandings they have constructed from their university program and teaching practice. It is apparent that preservice teachers need opportunities to incorporate their formal multicultural theories with teaching practice.

Thoughts about Teacher Education Programs for Diversity

The importance of considering various diversity issues from multiple perspectives. Neuharth-Pritchett, Reiff, and Pearson (2001) indicate that classes in preservice teacher education programs are important resources for preservice teachers' knowledge and information regarding diversity. They maintain that preservice teachers' coursework in teacher education programs makes a significant impact on their fluent knowledge about diversity and multicultural education.

In this study, however, only one preservice teacher agrees with the researchers (2001) in terms of seeing a derived benefit in preservice multicultural education as it is currently framed. Even the one teacher who saw some value in her preservice multicultural education program feels that it did not effectively prepare her to work practically with diverse groups of children in real school settings. She sees a contradiction between the ideas of her teacher education program and actual practice during her teaching internship experience.

"We really have not done anything very multicultural." Criticizing their preservice teacher education program, the preservice teachers make suggestions for improving teacher education programs in terms of diversity. All of them agree that their multicultural education programs should deal with more in-depth issues that go far beyond issues of African-American cultures. They feel that the huge focus on

only one culture is not fair and continuously point out the need to learn about the beliefs and practices of many cultures in their multicultural coursework. They stress the importance of being prepared to critically analyze whose perspective and whose voice is concealed in the school curriculum. The preservice teachers argue for a more "critical" approach to multicultural education in their university coursework or professional development.

The importance of constructing knowledge and practical teaching of diversity. "If all children are to learn effectively, teachers must be prepared to address the substantial diversity in experiences students bring with them to school—the wide range of languages, cultures, home conditions, learning styles, exceptionalities, abilities, and intelligences" (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995, p. 2). How then can preservice teachers be teachers for "all" children from diverse cultural groups? How can preservice teachers make appropriate decisions considering every complex classroom situation regarding diversity?

Speaking to this point, the preservice teachers feel that their preservice multicultural education simply consists of history classes, unconnected to teaching and learning. They feel that academic subject knowledge and multicultural education should not be separated; rather, they suggest the need for subject matter and issues of diversity to be naturally integrated across disciplines.

Supporting this point, Nieto (2000) argues that multicultural education should be central and mandatory in teacher education programs by being integrated with course curriculum and teaching experiences in school settings, rather than being presented as a single optional course. The preservice teachers point out that their university courses on diversity should focus more on practical teaching methods that will be useful to them in working with diverse populations.

The importance of considering personal experiences with diversity in teacher preparation. Most of the preservice teachers feel that they are already open-minded about diversity, and consider simple historic or theoretical courses as not beneficial in preparing them to be culturally competent teachers. They feel that their multicultural teacher preparation did not take into account their own knowledge and experiences with diversity.

Rather, they note that multicultural education was presented as a decontextualized history, without connections to their own stories. This is an important point for, as Dilg (2003) notes, "Students' multiple histories affect how they approach materials in a course and how they are affected by them….Students 'tired of hearing about' particular events or histories or about circumstances not tied to their own lives may be reluctant to explore a work or may reject a work knowing no more than its focus" (p. 47). Dilg feels that opportunities to share personal backgrounds and experiences with peers will help teachers develop open-minded attitudes and closely examine their own beliefs about diversity in light of the beliefs of others.

The importance of field experience with culturally diverse children. The preservice teachers indicate the significance of teaching experiences with diverse children in real classrooms. The preservice teachers feel that awareness and knowledge about diversity are not sufficient for teaching diverse learners. They concur that actual teaching experiences are best for developing genuine understandings about diversity in classrooms. They value "real" teaching which allows for experimenting with different approaches and applying their knowledge of diversity to complex teaching contexts.

Capella-Santana (2003), arguing for the importance of field experience, points out that preservice teachers' fieldwork experiences can facilitate change in their knowledge and attitudes about diversity. As Phillips (2003) contends, teacher education programs for diversity should reflect both conceptual and practical issues. Phillips (2003) notes that changing preservice knowledge and attitudes about diversity requires continuous reflection on their own teaching and learning. Even though practical ways to teach diversity should be stressed, they should not be "one-workshop formats" or "one-time-lectures" (p. 181).

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