

## Fostering Positive Dispositions toward Diversity: Dialogical Explorations of a Moral Dilemma

**By Elza Magalhães Major & Cynthia H. Brock**

*We pay attention to what we expect to see, we hear what we can place in our understanding, and we act according to our world views. (Wenger, 1998, p. 8)*

At present, numbers of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in U. S. schools continue to increase exponentially. For example, between 1991 and 2000 the population of English as a Second Language (ESL) students in U.S. schools (PreK-12) more than doubled (NABE Clearinghouse, 2000). While the numbers of students from diverse backgrounds are increasing, the U.S. teaching force consists primarily of monolingual middle- to lower-middle class European American women who may lack the requisite background knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach effectively children from sociolinguistically diverse backgrounds (Cummins, 1994; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 1996, 1999). Given the population of preservice teachers entering teacher preparation programs, this mismatch between teachers' and students' sociolinguistic backgrounds is unlikely to change in the future (August & Hakuta, 1997; Garcia, 1996).

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Many teacher educators (e.g., Florio-Ruane, 2001; Zeichner, 1996) have struggled with the complex challenge of preparing prospective teachers from the dominant culture to teach students whose backgrounds differ from theirs. Scholars argue that monolingual European American teachers must understand that their values, beliefs, and cultural practices can vary tremendously from the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of the children in their classrooms (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant, 1994; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). When preservice teachers enter teacher education programs without this understanding, teacher educators must help them to develop it (Howard, 1999; Shulz, Keyhart, & Reck, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Unexamined mismatches between prospective teachers' worldviews and the worldviews and life experiences of their students can be devastating for children (Cummins, 1989, 1994; Garcia, 1996; Giroux, 1997; Zeichner, 1996).

In this manuscript, we frame some of the most significant problems that we face as teacher educators striving to help preservice teachers in our courses examine their world views and the impact that their world views can have on their work with children whose backgrounds are different from their own. In the following sections, we draw on scholarly literature to explore what our colleagues have learned about teaching others to develop positive dispositions about diversity. We also explore the persistent problems scholars identify as we continue to struggle with educating preservice teachers for diversity. Then, using a dialogue format, we discuss our experiences with one problematic student (pseudonym, Shanna) who was enrolled in each of our courses during a recent semester. Our goal is to use this article to explore ways to improve our own teaching so that our students will learn to serve effectively children from diverse backgrounds in their future classrooms.

### **Educating Preservice Teachers for Diversity:**

#### *Lessons Learned from the Literature*

Empirical studies indicate that effective teachers of diverse learners share a common core of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. This includes knowledge of second-language-acquisition theory and pedagogy, use of culturally-relevant curricula, the propensity to validate the students' home language and culture, engagement in reflectivity and professional growth, a clear sense of their own ethnicity, and a commitment to student advocacy (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Garcia, 1996; Grant, 1994; Ladson Billings, 1994). While the aforementioned dispositions, knowledge, and practices are essential, Wiggins and Follo (1999) argue that, perhaps most importantly, teacher candidates need to demonstrate empathy and positive dispositions towards ethnolinguistically diverse students.

In their study of the development of knowledge and attitudes that are conducive to effective teaching, Wiggins and Follo (1999) identify a plethora of approaches within teacher education designed to help preservice teachers learn to address the needs of diverse students. These include, but are not limited to, modeling modified

pedagogical strategies, providing cross-cultural field experiences, providing placements in community agencies coupled with systematic reflective assignments, selecting master teachers who are effective educators of minority students, and seeking out life experiences in diverse communities to gain insight into being in a minority position. Wiggins and Follo caution, however, that teacher educators ought to be concerned with transforming attitudes and dispositions beyond surface-level pedagogical practices, cross-cultural awareness and field experiences with diverse learners. Otherwise, teacher educators could be “reinforcing the negative stereotypes we intend to eradicate” (1999, p. 102).

Some teacher educators (e.g. Cabello & Burnstein, 1995 and Major & Celedon-Pattichis, 2001) have explored specific ways to work with preservice teachers to bring about the important conceptual transformations to which Wiggins and Follo (1999) refer. Cabello and Burnstein (1995) examined the beliefs and practices of novice teachers in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms and concluded that change can only be achieved gradually and longitudinally through continuous reflection about theory and practice in conjunction with knowledge about and experiences with diverse learners.

Major and Celedon-Pattichis (2001) propose that developing critical social consciousness through preservice teachers’ engagement in public awareness forums enhances opportunities for European-American monolingual preservice teachers to confront personal and public misconceptions about the education of ethnolinguistically diverse students. The authors report that their teacher candidates led public forums addressing common misconceptions about the education of language minority students. Through this process, the teacher candidates became aware of the power of their own knowledge and convictions as advocates of quality education for all students. New teachers, according to Major and Celedon-Pattichis, must realize that through their beliefs and actions they either maintain the status quo and perpetuate educational inequities or they choose to engage in social change.

As teacher educators, we have made significant progress identifying some of the promising practices that help to bring about transformations in preservice teachers’ dispositions. However, we still fall short in our efforts to incorporate effective ways to help preservice teachers really see and understand cultural and linguistic differences so that children from diverse backgrounds are seen as children of promise rather than children with deficits (Zeichner, 1996). In the following section, we explore some of the persistent problems that we face as teacher educators.

## **Educating Preservice Teachers for Diversity:**

### ***Persistent Problems***

One persistent problem is that teacher candidates often enter teacher preparation programs with beliefs and dispositions that mitigate against fostering the educational success of children from diverse backgrounds (Shutz et al., 1996). For

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example, they believe that lack of proficiency in English signifies a lack of cognitive ability (Samway & McKeon, 1999). Another challenge is attending to the serious mismatch in attitudes and dispositions that may arise between teacher educators and teacher candidates (Pajares, 1993). Teacher candidates often enter education programs with life-long preconceived notions about schooling (as transmission of knowledge) and expectations about teacher preparation (a set of skills to be learned) that do not fit constructivist and reflective teacher education philosophies. This clash may be manifested as student resistance towards reflectivity, critical thinking, sociopolitical awareness, and discussions about social justice and student empowerment.

In a study of resistance to engagement and lack of reflectivity among preservice teachers, Burch (1999) concluded, “reflection is a quality of intellectual life” (p. 166) and one of the factors that may inhibit reflection is an inability to understand academic discourse. She also posits that teachers with low self-concept and low self-efficacy tend to focus on their own performance and challenges *rather than on the learning of the students*. Like Pajares, Burch concluded that if the interests of the preservice teacher do not match those of a reflective, constructivist teacher-education environment, the preservice teacher is perceived as a poor thinker unable to demonstrate critical reflectivity and effective teaching.

The work of these scholars raises important issues for consideration. First, if teacher educators often — or even sometimes — face philosophical mismatches between their thinking about schooling and diversity and their students’ thinking about these issues, what should teacher educators do to foster more effective attitudes about diversity? Second, what should be done if teacher educators are not successful in helping preservice teachers appropriate more effective dispositions towards children from diverse backgrounds? We explore tentative answers to these questions in the sections that follow.

### **Framing the Dialogue:**

#### *Our Moral Dilemma*

While we both strive to make a positive difference in our work with teacher candidates, there are times when we are unsuccessful. We are excited about our success stories, but we feel that a careful examination of our ineffective attempts to promote self-reflectivity and shape students’ dispositions may be educative and help us to better reach resistant students in the future. In order to provide a context for our discussion about Shanna, a problematic student with whom we both worked, we provide background information about the college in which we work and ourselves. Although Shanna is not the only problematic student we have encountered in our respective courses, we chose her as the centerpiece for this discussion because of her negative dispositions towards diversity and our inability to reach her. Our discussion of Shanna serves as an opportunity for us to engage in the same

reflexive practice we invite our preservice teachers to engage in relative to their own teaching.

### ***Our Institutional Context***

Located in a medium-size urban area in a large but sparsely populated western state, our college is part of a land-grant state university with about 15,000 students, most of them state residents. The institution is one of two state universities that offer undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees in education. The NCATE accredited teacher education program enrolls about 1,000 undergraduate students majoring in elementary, secondary, and special education, and about 400 graduate and professional students (masters, doctorate, and licensure candidates). The majority of our students (88.5 percent) are European-American. Among the 11.5% of minority students, 7% are Hispanics, 3% are Native-Americans, 1% are Asian-Pacific, and 5% are African-Americans. Eighty-two percent of our students are female and 18% are male. The contrast between the backgrounds of our university teacher candidates and the K-12 student population is dramatic. Between 1991 and 2000, our state had a 445% increase in the number of English language learners in K-12 that far outpaced the national growth rate of 89 % for the same period (Nevada Educational Equity Report, 2001).

### ***Our Personal and Professional Backgrounds***

Elza is a bilingual, bicultural Latina immigrant. She taught ESL for more than two decades in a variety of school settings prior to earning a Ph.D. in education with emphasis in ESL and bilingual education. She has been a teacher educator since 1997 at two different institutions. She teaches courses in bilingual education, second language acquisition, ESL theory and methods, and language assessment to graduate and undergraduate education majors. Her professional endeavors reflect her commitment to the development of critical social consciousness for student empowerment and social justice among teacher candidates.

Cindy comes from a European-American lower-middle-class background. She taught in public elementary and high schools for nine years before earning her Ph.D. in 1997 in educational psychology with an emphasis in literacy. Her professional interest in the education of English language learners led her to a dissertation exploring the literacy learning of a Hmong child in an English-speaking fifth-grade classroom. Raised as a monolingual English-speaker, her cross-cultural experiences include frequent travels and second-language studies in Spanish-speaking countries. Cindy's teaching and research reflects her engagement in issues of literacy, diversity and equity.

While the focus of our respective courses is not identical, our undergraduate methods courses share many commonalities with respect to (1) the attitudes and dispositions we wish to foster among our undergraduate students, as well as (2) the ways in which we foster those attitudes and dispositions. For example, we use

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similar types of texts and assignments in our methods courses. We use course textbooks and children's stories written by authors from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Au, Igoa, Nieto, Soto, etc.). We require our students to write autobiographies, on-going reflective journals and papers and to engage in class discussions that document their growth and thinking about diversity across the semester. We each require our students to do fieldwork that involves observations, tutoring, teaching, and interviewing children from diverse backgrounds. Finally, we address sociopolitical issues, first- and second-language acquisition, bilingualism and biliteracy, and appropriate instructional strategies for English language learners — albeit to different degrees — in our respective courses.

We want our teacher candidates to know about and practice student advocacy and understand the importance of incorporating and validating the home languages and cultures of English language learners in every mainstream classroom. We become alarmed when these and other characteristics of effective instruction for diverse students are not evident in our preservice teachers' performance in our courses. When our teacher candidates fail to demonstrate the dispositions and actions we strive to foster in our courses, we believe that we have failed to reach them. This was the case with Shanna.

#### *Introducing Shanna*

A monolingual English speaker of European-American and Middle-Eastern background, Shanna has been a state resident all her life and attended local schools. She alluded to vague memories of non-English-speaking grandparents in her sociolinguistic autobiography. In her written reflections about self-awareness and ethnic identity, she did not identify any cultural, ethnic, or linguistic vestiges of her ethnolinguistic background. Her autobiography revealed a lack of interest in the immigrant experiences of her grandparents. She does not consider herself an ethnic minority. In this respect, she represents the typical second or third generation descendant of U.S. immigrants who is socialized into the monocultural educational practices of the dominant European-American society and assimilates into the dominant culture. In our view, Shanna is a product of an ethnocentric, monocultural school curriculum based on mainstream European-American values, beliefs, history, and cultural heritage. Her ethnic minority background appears irrelevant to her, and she views the world from the perspective of the dominant culture.

Shanna aspires to be an elementary teacher. Her written work as well as her verbal comments in our courses indicated that she believed she had the necessary skills, knowledge, and disposition to be a good teacher of majority and minority students. However, our assessments of her work and her interactions revealed a problematic disposition that prevented personal growth beyond her prior frames of reference and world views. She did not engage effectively in reflective practices; in that respect, we would echo Burch's (1999) assertion that a teacher candidate's lack of reflectivity and inability to engage in the academic discourse lead to the

teacher educator's evaluation of the student's coursework as poor or below average. Furthermore, with Shanna we witnessed the mismatch postulated by Pajares (1993) between our expectations as educators who espouse social constructivist theories of learning and Shanna's demonstrated beliefs about her abilities, the teaching profession, and seeing and understanding ethnolinguistically diverse students.

### **Engaging in a Dialogue**

In this section, we explore three questions with which we have struggled. First, what do we expect to see amongst teacher candidates that indicates appropriate reflective dispositions towards diversity? Our second question asks what inappropriate dispositions look like, and why we see Shanna's disposition as inappropriate. Finally, we ask ourselves what we should do as teacher educators when teacher candidates fail to appropriate and display the dispositions that we expect of them. Drawing on our experiences with Shanna, we address these questions using a dialogical format (see Shor & Freire, 1988) that mirrors the conceptual nature of the conversations between us over a period of time.

#### ***Our First Question:***

#### ***What Attitudes and Dispositions***

#### ***Do We Expect To See amongst Teacher Candidates?***

*Elza:* For me, here is what it looks like: In class discussions, group projects, and on reflective journals, previously uninformed students usually display *surprise*, *frustration*, and sometimes *anger* at past or current K-12 school practices that represent the challenges faced by English language learners in American schools. Most teacher candidates can engage in insightful and critical interpretations of theories of learning and pedagogical practices; they document their interactions with children from diverse backgrounds in ways that reveal appropriate and careful consideration of newly-acquired knowledge of first and second language acquisition, sociocultural factors in schooling, and the need for multicultural literacy. They synthesize and construct new knowledge, demonstrate a sensitive disposition to children of diverse cultural backgrounds, and interact skillfully with diverse learners during the field experience in schools. They identify ineffective or harmful K-12 school practices that they witness in their field experiences. I see some level of growth. I see some critical social consciousness.

*Cindy:* Like you, Elza, I want to see that students are *questioning*, *wondering*, and *critiquing* their experiences and the experiences of others. I also look for words and actions that demonstrate positive attitudes towards difference. That is, in written and oral discussions, and in classroom-based interactions with children from diverse backgrounds, I want to see words and actions that value the unique backgrounds, experiences, and languages that all children bring to classroom contexts. I also want to see that preservice teachers demonstrate an understanding

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of, as well as an acceptance of, the different beliefs and practices that are often associated with different cultures and languages.

*Summary:* We expect our teacher candidates to have positive attitudes and dispositions towards diversity. Teacher candidates enter our respective classes with a wide range of dispositions and attitudes towards diversity in our schools and society. If our students do not enter our classes with an understanding of difference, white privilege, and the serious problems with using deficit discourses and deficit lenses to view ethnolinguistically diverse children, we expect that they will begin to develop understandings of these important issues in our courses. Developing these understandings initially, or developing deeper understandings of these issues, requires that students adopt a questioning and critiquing stance. This stance should be illustrated by each student's words and actions and should be directed towards themselves as individuals, the institutions of which they are a part, and the society in which we all live.

#### ***Our Second Question:***

#### ***What Does Resistance Look Like with Respect to Shanna?***

*Elza:* Through my written comments on Shanna's reflective journals, my journal entries on observations of her performance in small-group work, her individual interactions with me and reports from peers, I saw Shanna as uncooperative, negative, and uncompromising. She usually stated that she contributed a lot more to group projects than what her teammates suggested that she had contributed. I saw a mismatch between her oftentimes rude and snappy classroom behavior towards me and her peers and her written affirmations of how she would promote a caring and respectful environment in her classroom. For example, she wrote about her future role as a teacher, "My classroom will be fun and safe for all children" without substantiating specifically how she would achieve that. While her social skills were certainly lacking, it was her inability to take ownership of her learning and her growth that troubled me.

Shanna also displayed a lack of commitment to learning about diversity. For example, instead of engaging in thoughtful discussions about the content of the readings and videos, she frequently and loudly complained in class about the amount of reading, assignment deadlines, and time spent out of class observing & interacting with ESL teachers and students. Compared to most of her peers, her written and oral comments were superficial and did not indicate careful thinking about course issues. I structured a variety of different class activities such as individual and group work, class discussions, video demonstrations of strategies, but nothing seemed to engage Shanna. She frequently appeared unfocused, uninterested, inattentive, sometimes even dozing off during class activities. Her behavior was atypical compared to most of my students, and it was visibly noticeable to her peers and to me. I got the sense that she didn't see her class behavior or work as unacceptable.

She also seemed more concerned about earning high grades than attending to the



conceptual content of the course. She rarely heeded my written or oral suggestions to revise the content of her written work. In responding to a request for clarification and substantiation of her written assertions she turned defensive. For example, when asked to provide evidence for a statement she wrote that contradicted the evidence presented in the course (i.e., she wrote that “mainstreaming [meaning submersion] is the best instructional approach to teach second language learners”), she wrote back, “You may disagree, but several other professors have told me that I have a strong view of how a classroom should be run and I have had a lot of experience in multicultural classrooms” without providing any evidence to support her original statement. This incident, and myriad others like it, demonstrated unwillingness to explore new points of view and an inability to substantiate her claims based on pedagogical concepts of second language instruction that were addressed in the course.

*Cindy:* For the most part, I saw similar behaviors in my class, Elza. For example, it appeared to me that Shanna wasn’t very committed to learning about literacy instruction for diverse learners. With me, it mostly felt like she was going through the motions just trying to get the assignments completed without devoting attention to how she could use course ideas and concepts in her practicum with English language learners. For example, her assignments were often incomplete. She worked with a small group of peers to design and conduct a 7-lesson thematic unit in a local elementary school with a diverse student population. Several times, Shanna’s peers complained to me that she stepped back and expected them to do most of the work. Moreover, the work that she did complete (e.g., lesson plans, etc.) was of poor quality. When Shanna’s peer partners and I talked with her about her contributions to the group, she was argumentative and confrontational. She denied their assertions and stated that she felt her peers were judging her unfairly.

*Elza:* I saw similar problems in my class, Cindy. Through her written journals and in-class discussions, Shanna demonstrated very superficial attempts at self-reflection. For example, she often made statements about course topics based on emotional responses (“ I enjoyed the personal articles that focused on emotions rather than the cognitive achievement of language acquisition [sic]”). She also failed to explore multiple perspectives critically as presented and modeled in the course. In her final reflection paper she simply stated, “from this course comes the realization that there are no right or wrong answers, there are just different ones.” Another significant problem was that she often made overgeneralizations and did not illustrate her points with concrete examples from her field experience or from the course materials. For example, in a final role-play mock interview for a teaching position in a hypothetical school with 85% language minority students, when asked to identify the foundations of her teaching philosophy and design a suitable curriculum for such diverse student population, she wrote, “my theory is the theory of nature and nurture. . .based on the idea of individual expression and achievement.” I had no idea what she was talking about. Her peers in the course responded to the same prompt by referring to curricula for second language learners (such as

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sheltered instruction, content-based language learning, dual-language immersion, and culturally-relevant practices), based on solid empirical evidence or pedagogical frameworks such as Vygotsky's social constructivism, Krashen's natural approach, or Cummins' framework for student empowerment. Sadly, by the end of the course, Shanna continued to hold on to her earlier beliefs about teaching without being able to articulate why she held those beliefs.

*Cindy:* When I asked her to reflect on her practicum teaching, Shanna mostly produced a list of the order of events of her lesson. Essentially, I saw the same kinds of things you saw, Elza. Shanna did not critique her teaching of diverse learners as exemplified by the class models provided and discussed. Rather, the written reflections of her work were shallow. As well, her discussions with classmates after each practicum experience also lacked depth and a real effort to think carefully and critically about her work with diverse learners. For example, she frequently made comments such as the following: "My children liked my lesson and had fun." To be honest, Elza, I find myself in a serious moral dilemma when I consider my work with Shanna and other students like her. I think that we need to discuss what we should actually do when we don't reach preservice teachers like Shanna and they remain resistant to self-awareness and critical thinking about their work as teachers.

*Summary: What Shanna's Resistance Looked Like.* We characterize Shanna as resistant in both of our classes. First, she did not enter either of our classes with the attitudes and dispositions we expect. That is, she did not demonstrate an understanding of difference, privilege, or the problems with deficit discourses. Despite her ethnolinguistic minority heritage, she did not reveal a personal frame of reference for diversity or empathy for the ethnolinguistically diverse students in K-12. Most importantly, she did not demonstrate ability to critique and question course issues reflectively so that her thinking could move beyond the superficial and surface-level.

We could speculate that Shanna's earlier schooling had not prepared her for reflectivity and shaped her focus on grades instead of critical thinking. We can also ponder whether her inadequate social skills (e.g., rudeness, defensiveness, uncooperativeness) interfered with her ability to get along with peers and instructors and might even be related to poor self-esteem and inadequate academic preparedness. Nevertheless, many of her peers came from similar backgrounds and had similar personal and academic shortcomings as university students. What sets Shanna apart (and other resistant students like her) is that, unlike most of her peers, she did not take the opportunities presented in our courses to expand her horizons, to open up to new ways of thinking, seeing, and behaving.

In short, while we realize that not all students enter our classes with understandings of difference, white privilege, and the problems with deficit discourses, we do expect that they work with us to explore and develop these attitudes and understandings across the semester. Much of our frustration with ourselves in our work with Shanna was that we could not get her to engage in reflective behavior with respect

to issues of diversity, equity, and opportunity. Shanna resisted our efforts to engage with her critically and intellectually throughout each of our respective classes.

***Our Third Question:***

***How Should We, Teacher Educators, Prepare Preservice Teachers To Work Effectively with Ethnolinguistically Diverse Learners?***

*Cindy:* Many of the students in my class start out as collaborative, reflective, critical thinkers. Typically, as the course proceeds throughout the semester, they become even more reflective and critical. For example, most students are willing to question themselves and others regarding their beliefs and best instructional practices in literacy. Specifically, during the practicum component of my course, when students write their reflections on lessons they have taught, they often ponder carefully what worked and what didn't work. They also pose alternative ideas for improving their work with children in the future. Not only did Shanna not start out this way in my class, she made very little progress towards becoming reflective as a result of the class. For me, this raises all sorts of questions about my role and responsibilities as a teacher educator and Shanna's role and responsibilities as a preservice teacher. A question with which I struggle as a teacher educator is what I should do in situations such as the one with Shanna where she clearly didn't come to the program with the kinds of dispositions that are most useful for working with diverse students, but, in addition, she didn't make much progress in my class either.

*Elza:* Cindy, you said that students typically enter your class with a willingness to be reflective and critical. Are you implying that teaching is an art, a natural talent that can't be taught, and teacher candidates either come to us this way, or we shouldn't admit them to our programs?

*Cindy:* Personally, I think that learning to become a better teacher is a life long endeavor that we, as teachers, should all engage in. So, I do think that it is a craft, or maybe an art form — I'm not sure what else to call it — that all of us can learn and learn to do better all of the time. I think that central components of the craft are self-awareness and reflectivity. I'm not suggesting that teacher candidates either possess these dispositions or we don't allow them into our programs. I do, however, think that it is problematic when we admit teacher candidates whose dispositions are troubling and we allow them to continue through our classes and program unchecked.

*Elza:* The work of Wiggins and Follo (1999) suggests that changing beliefs and dispositions is a difficult proposition that takes time and must involve thoughtfully designed curricular experiences. If we believe that becoming an effective teacher is a life-long endeavor, how much impact can we expect to have on teacher candidates during the short time that they are in our programs and in our classrooms? I think that we need to look for some sort of "indicators" of potentiality for appropriate dispositions among our teacher candidates. Shanna did not give me any indications that she will be open to insightful reflectivity any time soon. This worries me.

*Cindy:* I share your concerns, but I honestly have to believe that dispositions

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can be changed. The problem for me is how to do so effectively — especially in cases such as Shanna's.

*Elza:* I believe that life-long learners and critical thinkers are constantly reexamining their beliefs and dispositions towards the world. New knowledge often shakes up our beliefs. If it doesn't, there is no growth. Howard's (1999) work clearly indicates that effective teachers engage in this reevaluation process. In the schools where we work with our preservice teachers, we encounter veteran teachers who are open to new concepts and seriously reconsider their own prejudices and misconceptions about diverse cultures and the role of teachers in diverse classrooms. They are willing to unlearn and re-learn. Others refuse to look beyond the lesson plans they have been using for the past ten or twenty years. In our teacher education program, it is one thing to structure opportunities for naïve, sheltered teacher candidates from the dominant culture to become self-aware and to develop critical social consciousness. It is another to be faced with resistant students like Shanna. Shanna seems impervious to reflection even though there were many opportunities for her to do so in our courses, as we discussed earlier. Instead, she became defensive when the tasks before her asked her to confront her ideas and attitudes that seemed to indicate a less than acceptable disposition. If Shanna cannot become seriously self-reflective and willing to critically examine her previous frames of reference and worldviews, how is she going to be able to do it after she leaves our teacher education program?

*Cindy:* While I agree with everything you said, I'm not sure what to do about it. What could I do differently as a teacher to reach her? Of course, one possible solution is just to not accept students into our teacher education program unless they have appropriate dispositions towards diversity from the onset. Another, of course, is to have a system of checks and balances whereby students are not allowed to progress through the program unless they are making sufficient progress.

*Elza:* On the other hand, we tell our teacher candidates that they need to see and understand the needs of their students and adjust their teaching to accommodate sociocultural and linguistic diversity. Are we not "blaming the victim" by dismissing teacher candidates who are unable to fit in our program? Aren't we the ones unable to reach our students? How are we meeting the needs of teacher candidates who can't see the negative impact of inappropriate beliefs and dispositions on the education of children from diverse backgrounds? I tend to agree with Carl Grant (1994) that maybe it is a larger issue than just what happens in one or two courses or even within one area of study, say literacy or ESL.

*Cindy:* Elza, are you suggesting that solutions to the problems we have been discussing must extend beyond our individual classes? That is, maybe we need to create an overall framework in the department and college that systematically addresses the issues we've been raising. Perhaps this system should focus on constructive ways to bring about positive changes in prospective teachers' beliefs and dispositions rather than primarily be a punitive system.

*Elza:* There are certainly programmatic issues within teacher preparation

programs. Our own faculty can't agree whether we should (a) deny admission into teacher education to applicants who display negative dispositions (resistance to reflectivity, prejudicial beliefs, negative attitudes or insensitivity towards diversity); (b) dismiss those candidates prior to student teaching if their performance remains inadequate after a certain amount of coursework; (c) set up a system of checks and balances whereby teacher candidates do not pass through the teacher education program unchecked; or (d) let them become licensed and enter the profession regardless of shortcomings during teacher education, hoping that, like wine, they will improve with time. I think that your comment opens an additional avenue — systematically building thoughtful critique and reflection about diversity throughout our entire program. My fear is that if we don't intervene and candidates like Shanna become licensed and certified to teach, many future children could receive less than effective instruction.

*Cindy:* I agree. My concern rests with the potential harmful effects that teacher candidates like Shanna can have on their future students. Preservice teachers like Shanna could potentially harm a lot of children from diverse backgrounds if we, as individual instructors and as programs, don't do our jobs more effectively.

*Elza:* According to critics of the current state of teacher education in the U.S. (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2000; Grant, 1994; Zeichner, 1996), those programs that are truly concerned with social justice and effective instruction of diverse students in Pre-K-12 schools should infuse — systemically — critical social consciousness and effective pedagogical practices designed for diverse learners into the entire teacher education curriculum, not as a brief course topic here and there, or as an add-on course like the one that I teach. Zeichner (1996) refers to this type of teacher education curriculum as the segregated approach that perpetuates an ideology of marginalization of diversity. Prospective teachers then infer that diversity is meant to be an appendage to their lesson plans and diverse learners are to be “treated” through remediation. Of course, if critical pedagogy and multiculturalism are to be infused in the teacher education curriculum, then all teacher educators in all specialty areas need to engage in rigorous and systematic reflective teaching and re-examine their own beliefs and practices in every course. That means we ought to engage in collaboration across disciplines to bring about significant changes in teacher education curricula.

Grant (1994) has argued that most of us in teacher education have not yet approached the issue of working with diverse learners systematically and coherently in our teacher preparation programs. I interpret this to mean that we are not currently discussing the importance of dispositions and beliefs openly amongst ourselves or with our teacher candidates, perhaps for fear of hurting or challenging people's feelings or fostering antagonism or retaliation. Teacher educators sometimes address ethnic and linguistic diversity in K-12 schools as a matter of making pedagogical choices (e.g. the use of multicultural literature, or engaging school children in multi-lingual greetings). Instead, we need to find ways to uncover and

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shed light on attitudinal and dispositional shortcomings through long-term interventions with resistant teacher candidates consistently and systematically throughout the entire duration of the teacher education program and beyond. I wonder if the use of individual developmental portfolios could be one venue for documentation of growth or resistance to a point that, if unacceptable, the candidate may opt out or be counseled towards other career options besides teaching.

*Cindy:* Elza, I like the suggestions and ideas you just presented. For one thing, it merges — for me, at least — programmatic or departmental responsibilities with responsibilities that each of us has as individuals and within our own courses. As well, it emphasizes that we, as teacher educators, ought to engage in the same kinds of reflexive practices — individually and collectively — that we ask our students to engage in. I think we need to sort out how we might try to bring about some of the changes you're suggesting in our own classes, programs, and department at our university.

*Summary:* *How should teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to work effectively with ethnolinguistically diverse students?* Clearly, as our dialogue in this sub-section illustrates, we do not see simple, clear-cut answers to this complex question. In a sense, our dialogue has raised, for us, at least, some of the important complexities that we must consider relative to our question. For example, some of our students come to our classes as critical and reflective thinkers. This raises the question as to whether or not we should only admit students with this disposition to our teacher education programs, assuming, of course, that we can actually discern dispositions effectively. This approach, of course, poses other problems. There are students who can develop positive and productive dispositions towards diversity when given the opportunity to participate in co-construction of new knowledge in our classes. If we only admit students to our teacher education programs that already have the dispositions we are seeking, are we discounting the role that we, as teacher educators, can, and perhaps should, play in fostering positive and appropriate dispositions towards diversity?

These questions and issues still fall short of the dilemma we experienced with Shanna, however. When such students are admitted to our programs and classes and they do not show the progress towards positive conceptual growth that we think that they should show, what do we do? Do we “weed them out” of our programs? If we have a “weeding out” mechanism in place, how can we be sure that teacher candidates are not merely using politically correct writing and speaking so that they can remain in the program? If we don't have a “weeding out” mechanism, do we allow the students to remain in our programs hoping that they will “get it” at some point before they graduate? What is the responsibility of the institution in holding candidates accountable for their dispositions in addition to demonstrable knowledge and skills? To what extent does the problem rest with teacher educators who just have not figured out how to reach all of their students? That is, what happens when we have a student like Shanna whom we fail to reach? We continue to explore this, and related, questions in the next section of this manuscript.

## **Reflecting on the Challenges and Possibilities**

The importance of teacher candidates' appropriate dispositions and beliefs towards issues of diversity cannot be overstated. Accreditation agencies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) expect — and rightly so, we believe — teacher education institutions to demonstrate that their teacher candidates possess appropriate dispositions and can address directly and effectively the educational, linguistic, social, cultural, emotional, and cognitive needs of ethnolinguistically diverse students. Children in U.S. schools deserve nothing less.

If we consider the role of preservice teacher education as a crucial phase in the development of teachers as life-long learners and reflective practitioners who value diversity, we need to consider realistic expectations about what should be accomplished during preservice teacher education. From our dialogical reflections about our own moral dilemma working with Shanna and students like her, we present three ideas that we think merit consideration: (a) our need to grow, question, and challenge ourselves as individual instructors, (b) our need to explore different approaches within our individual classes, and (c) our need to explore changes across our courses at the programmatic level in our departments and colleges. Some of the suggestions that follow are the result of our combined thinking in our search for new paths towards reaching all of our students. We are currently attempting to implement some of these ideas in our own classrooms.

### ***Reflecting Upon and Examining Our Own Beliefs and Practices as Individual Instructors***

We believe that as individual instructors we should:

- ◆ Engage in systematic examinations of our own teaching practices and our students' learning styles. That is, engage in teacher research in our university classrooms to explore, with our students, ways that we can more effectively work with them to promote understanding of linguistic and cultural differences and ways to provide effective instruction for all children.
- ◆ Engage in co-constructing new knowledge by meeting regularly with teacher education colleagues to explore problems of practice and ways to deal effectively with them. Combine these regular meetings with book clubs whereby we read and discuss current scholarly work to explore ways in which other teacher educators have dealt with similar problems of practice.
- ◆ Model through our words and actions that we see ourselves continually striving to learn to be more effective instructors. One way we can do this is to invite teacher candidates to make presentations with us at state and national conferences.

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### ***Exploring Alternative Approaches to Learning within Our Own Classes***

Perhaps we, as teacher educators, have grown too comfortable with the typical sets of strategies commonly used in teacher education to engage teacher candidates in reflectivity and discussions of diversity and social justice. The literature we reviewed identifies some of these common practices. Thus, we looked for alternative practices in other professional preparation fields such as counseling psychology, law, and business administration. In this section, we sketch some tentative ideas for consideration, which we are currently attempting to explore in our own teaching:

◆ From the work of our colleagues in counseling education comes the idea that we can stimulate discussions in our classes using alternative ways to engage resistant, unreflective, or academically challenged teacher candidates whose dispositions concern us. One approach is to engage in professional role-playing with the resistant teacher candidate during private conferencing in order to confront how the student's responses would be perceived by (a) a potential colleague (another teacher in the same school), (b) the principal of the school, and (c) the parent of a language minority student. For example, the teacher educator could say, "If I were a teacher/principal/parent in your school, this is how I would see what you just said/ did/ suggested/ wrote/demonstrated." This type of therapeutic confrontation is a model used in counseling psychology and can bring about an understanding of the need to question personal beliefs and assumptions (Bowman, 1996; Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett, 2001). Of course, teacher educators are not trained counselors, so care must be taken not to overstep our own professional training.

◆ Although teacher education courses focus on the learning and instruction of children and adolescents, the teacher candidates themselves are adult students in our courses, as are students of law, medicine, or business administration. In those fields, the use of case studies depicting appropriate and inappropriate diagnostics, interactions, and decision-making of practitioners in the field, are common practice. With that premise in mind, the use of case studies portraying resistant teacher candidates in a teacher education program would encourage self-awareness among the less reflective candidates. The case study, not the instructor, demonstrates what resistance looks like and why it is undesirable. By using case studies to characterize the types of interactions and behaviors that illustrate both desirable and undesirable dispositions, we can avoid direct criticism or negative feedback by the instructor. As a component of teacher education courses, this activity would speak to the teacher candidate as an adult learner and elevate the discussion to the realm of desirable professional and ethical behavior expected of all teachers, veteran and novices alike.



***Modifying Current Practices in Teacher Education Programs***

We agree with Wiggins and Follo's (1999) proposition that our efforts as teacher educators must provide a variety of opportunities for teacher candidates to experience cross-cultural and linguistic challenges personally and vicariously in order to see, feel and understand the challenges of diverse students in K-12 schools. Below we list some programmatic recommendations to help achieve these objectives. Some of these ideas may already be in place in some programs. We hope to engage our colleagues in conversations towards implementing some of them in our college:

- ◆ Implement systemic changes within the teacher education program in order to achieve a cohesive philosophy of teaching prospective teachers to learn to teach. This requires an examination of the traditional role of teacher educators as independent experts within self-contained content-areas. Teacher educators would need to work collaboratively across subject areas to share ideas and knowledge about learning to teach. It also means that teacher educators would need to become a community of learners themselves, deconstructing former frames of reference and co-constructing new models of teaching teachers across disciplines.
- ◆ Require entrance, mid-program, and exit conferencing for each teacher candidate in order to clarify program expectations and professional goals of teacher education (skills, knowledge, and dispositions) and to help preservice teachers set personal goals towards meeting those expectations and goals. These individual conferences could be incorporated into regular courses in the program and be monitored by instructors in the program. The resulting documentation might become a required component for assessment of the performance-based portfolios or it can be entered in the student's advisement file. When enough red flags are raised at any point, the candidate should not be allowed to continue to the next level. We believe that obtaining a teaching license cannot be equated with receiving an undergraduate degree in an academic field (e.g. English or biology). In other professional fields, such as medicine or law, not all candidates get to the finish line (medical license or board certification). The teaching profession should be just as discriminating. It seems that the responsibility for documenting the preparedness of new teachers or lack of it rests on the shoulders of the teacher education program that grants their degrees.
- ◆ Require that all teacher candidates take course work in a second language for a minimum of one year. Additionally, encourage (and perhaps provide incentives for) teacher candidates to engage in international study abroad experiences for a portion of their undergraduate educational experience for credit.
- ◆ Require that teacher candidates participate in thoughtfully designed and

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supervised practicum experiences with children from diverse backgrounds. In this way, teacher candidates will experience *praxis*, that is, reflecting on the theories of learning behind the good teaching practices they observe in order to develop their own theories about teaching diverse learners (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gadotti, 1996). One possibility is to replace the traditional university-based classroom instruction of teacher candidates with clinical site-based programs at carefully selected schools that are recognized for their effectiveness in educating diverse students to achieve academically. On-site class sessions facilitate interactions, observations, discussions and collaborative projects among mentor schoolteachers, teacher educators, and teacher candidates.

◆ Set up a mentoring program for novice teachers with mentor practitioners for the first two years of teaching after the licensure. This experience would link the teacher education program, the local schools, and the state teacher-licensing agency, and provide opportunities for experienced teachers to interact with new graduates, and for novice teachers to receive mentoring. Both have an opportunity to receive graduate credits towards re-certification or additional endorsements through the state licensing agency. Furthermore, teacher educators would have the opportunity to collaborate with veteran and novice teachers, pursue participatory action research or longitudinal studies with novice teachers in an environment that interconnects theory, practice, and reflectivity.

### **Concluding Comments**

We have spoken here about viewing learning to teach as a developmental process. We are aware that preservice teacher education is the beginning stage of this process. We are wary of attempting to draw conclusions about the potential of a teacher candidate to develop into a competent, thoughtful, reflective, knowledgeable and caring teacher across an entire career based on work in one, or perhaps even several, courses in a teacher education program. However, we are also mindful of the fact that while preservice teacher education is only a small portion of the developmental journey to becoming a seasoned professional educator, it is nonetheless, an important phase in that process. We believe that teacher educators must constantly strive to discern ways to reach, or remove from their programs, resistant teacher candidates like Shanna. Additionally, teacher education programs need to develop a system of checks and balances for monitoring the progress of teacher candidates and provide interventions when candidates' progress is worrisome. The system of checks and balances within specific courses as well as within programs should include specific progress indicators (i.e., red flags) for helping teacher educators to determine when teacher candidates' dispositions and actions merit thoughtful critique and potential action.

In conclusion, we believe that we owe it to our teacher candidates to provide opportunities and guidance to develop the skills and dispositions that they need to be effective teachers of children from diverse backgrounds. However, we also owe it to their future students to make sure that teacher candidates are well on their way to developing these skills and dispositions before they graduate from their teacher preparation programs.

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