

## **The Impact of Home Visit in Students' Perception of Teaching**

**By Claudia Peralta-Nash**

After my first semester teaching at the university, I began to ponder the lack of emphasis placed on the relationships among school, community and home within my students' practicum experience. I realized that I was following an information-centered model of teaching (Murrell & Diez, 1997). Through lectures, readings, and audio visuals, I shared the importance of including parents in the educational decision making process and in honoring their voices, but I was not giving the preservice teachers a chance to dialog with parents themselves. I had not provided them with opportunities to learn about the educational inequalities experienced by children created as a result of the exclusion of parents' voices. Preservice teachers

hadn't heard how excluding the parents' voices in the decision making process can affect their children's access to enrichment and athletic programs, access to primary language in academic programs, access to scholarships and inclusion of family culture just to name a few. Because the preservice teachers only *read about* but did not *talk with* parents, they only had minimal understanding of the powerful role that parents play in their children's education. Preservice teachers had very little knowledge about how parents

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perceived their role as educators and how their role might not fit expectations set up by schools (Nakagawa, 2000).

While reading theoretical literature is necessary, the lack of field-based experiences exploring the out-of-school lives of children often pushes preservice teachers to question the validity of involving the parents in conversation. This is especially true for Anglo American middle-class preservice teachers (Wolf, Hill, & Ballentine, 2000). In this paper I will show the impact that preservice teachers' participation in home visits had on their view of home-school-community relationship. Next, I will present the theoretical framework. Then I will briefly introduce the participants and describe the revised classes and the year-long assignment which was key in supporting preservice teachers' growth in understanding the importance of knowing the students' families.

In order to improve the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is fundamental that teachers understand the relationship between pupils' home culture and school learning. The adjustment to a new language, culture and way of life can be overwhelming for children, and it is in the home that parents can provide meaningful assistance and alternative perspectives (Lapp, Flood, Tinajero, Lungen, & Nagel, 1996). Yet, unless the values presented by parents are supported by schools, students may sense disagreement between the home and school. Teachers may recognize the importance of incorporating into the curriculum the knowledge, interests, and experiences students bring into the classroom, however, both children and their parents need to participate in the process (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lapp et. al., 1996; McCaleb, 1997; Valdés, 1996). The capacity for effective teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse communities requires multiple opportunities for exposure to the lives and points of views of children (Kailin, 1994; Sleeter, 1992; Veléz-Ibañez-Greenberg, 1992). This exposure includes a deep understanding of the teaching practices in the children's homes and communities.

As Cochran (1993) strongly argues, teacher education programs should help preservice teachers take a look at the contexts in which they will be working and comprehend the communities from an insider perspective. He points out that we need to find ways for preservice teachers to learn how to be learners who confront and evaluate their personal assumptions, understand the values and practices of families and communities that are different from their own, and create pedagogy that honors and respects those cultures. Unless the knowledge presented in university courses is also experienced in the context where it has its meaning, it will not likely become pedagogical knowledge that preservice teachers will draw upon in their practice (Murrell & Diez, 1997).

Every child's home is an instructional setting where the "main function is to transmit knowledge that enhances the survival of its dependents" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 320). Parents create social interactions for the exchange of cultural knowledge, and we know that children learn best when instruction incorporates and

supports the ways of knowing of the students. According to Vygostky (1978) the learning that takes place in this social interaction creates a zone of proximal development, the zone a child enters when he/she has partially mastered a skill and can more fully master it with the help of a more knowledgeable other. In order to provide the support needed for the child to master the skill, one must know the child. Home visits provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to learn more about the child and “ways of knowing” of the household.

Building on this knowledge and my previous experience as a bilingual teacher, I developed a year-long assignment that was carried out across two semester courses, (1) Pedagogy for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students and (2) Methods/Strategies for 2<sup>nd</sup> Language Acquisition and Academic Development for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students. As the assignment is introduced, I shared my own personal experiences of home visits as a former center director of Migrant Head Start in Northern California, a federally funded program. Indeed, home visits — a prerequisite before starting the program — have shaped many of my beliefs about the importance of parent involvement. Years ago, as a newcomer in the teaching profession and with little experience in the lives of migrant workers, home visits allowed me to hear the parents’ voices. I vividly remember conducting a home visit out in the country and having the mother share her deep concern about her husband’s health. At the time he was the only dairy worker at a large dairy, so he was sleeping an average of 3-4 hours a day. Because she was working in the fields, her husband picked up the children from the center and took care of them during the day. In a raspy voice she shared her physical pain and guilt about not being home more, but hoped that their effort would allow her children to gain an education so “they wouldn’t have to work in the fields.” This type of experience had a tremendous impact in shaping my involvement with parents. At the beginning of each academic year, I sent letters to the families of my students seeking permission to visit them in their homes, emphasizing the fact that I saw the parents as the child’s first teachers.

### **Participants**

The study’s subjects were 20 elementary preservice teachers who enrolled in the Field Based Teacher Preparation Program at the university in 2000. All preservice teachers participated in university classes and school placements for a 10-week period. All elementary schools included culturally and linguistically diverse students. Fourteen of the preservice teachers were Caucasian and middle class, six of them were males. Of the other six students, one was an African American female, and the rest were Latino students, two males and three females, for whom Spanish was their primary language.

### **Course Background**

The courses in the study were centered on the investigation and exploration

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of institutional discrimination in schooling of students from non-English and non-mainstream backgrounds. The courses provided a multicultural curriculum that academically challenged all students and supported social justice. As a partial fulfillment of the courses, students were required to participate in a year-long assignment that consisted of a three-part action research project in the first semester, and home visits in the second semester. The assignments were designed to encourage preservice teachers to develop new ways of thinking about parent involvement rich in more local cultures and values.

In the first course, preservice teachers participated in an action research project with a student from their practicum for whom English was his/her second language, and who belonged to a culture different from the preservice teachers' (i.e., in religion, ethnicity, family makeup, etc). The action research project consisted of three components: (a) school observation, (b) community event, and (c) home visit. Preservice teachers were asked to keep an ongoing journal and keep a record of their interactions, observations and visits.

For the first component — school observation — preservice teachers were asked to observe the child's interaction and language use in two contexts, the classroom and playground. They were also responsible for interviewing the child using the 'Emerging reader and writer interview' (Rhodes, 1993). Preservice teachers informally interviewed the classroom teachers and asked about the student's language classification, overall performance and participation in special programs.

The second component of the project was the community event. Preservice teachers participated in an event of their choice arranged with the family of the student. The community event could include a community/holiday celebration or meeting, sport activity, family celebration, etc. Preservice teachers informally interviewed the child to gain an understanding of his/her feelings about the event and family participation.

The third component was the home visit. During this event preservice teachers engaged the children's parent(s) or guardian(s) in a conversation about the family background, community background, child's background, and the parents' view of school. Below is a sample question per category suggested to preservice teachers prior to the interview:

*Family background:*

- ◆ How did your life in your community or country differ from your life here?

*Community background:*

- ◆ When you need information (e.g., about health, jobs), who do you talk to or where do you go?

*Child's background:*

- ◆ How do you involve your child at home? What things do you teach him/her?

*Parent's view of schooling:*

- ◆ What does 'best educated' mean to you?

The goals for the assignment were: (a) to develop understandings of the social, cultural, political and economic contexts of the child and how those contexts relate to and impact on the school context, and (b) to learn about the ways of knowing existing at the child's home and how they were transmitted to the child.

Each one of these components was carefully documented with reflective fieldnotes. Preservice teachers submitted their fieldnotes three times during the semester for my commentaries, and they used the fieldnotes, comments and input from their peers through class discussions to support their final paper. This final paper served as a place for the preservice teachers to reflect on the knowledge gained from the child, and on how the experience had impacted their views on home, school and community. Because I wanted these experiences to be meaningful and engaging, I also asked preservice teachers to reflect on how their involvement in the project would impact their future practices.

In the second course, Methods/Strategies for 2<sup>nd</sup> Language Acquisition, preservice teachers were once more asked to visit the home of not just one, but two students for whom English is the second language and/or who belong to a culture different from that of the preservice teacher. Whereas in the first home visit the conversation was open-ended, encouraging parents to lead the conversation and share their thoughts and ideas about their child and school, the second home visit interview was more structured. Rather than simply asking the preservice teachers to design their own interviews, we spent time in class constructing questions and discussing their appropriateness. We decided on questions that encouraged the parents to share their educational experiences and to describe the impact that these had had on their educational expectations for their children. We also wanted to explore what literacy activities were carried out at home and use this information to support students' learning in the classroom. Below is a sample of questions developed by preservice teachers. It is important to note that all of them had decided to interview parents of students for whom English is the second language because they were interested to learn about the local perspective on bilingual education and the impact of proposition 227.<sup>1</sup>

◆ What is your opinion about bilingual education? *¿Qué piensa usted acerca de la educación bilingüe?*

◆ What do you think about proposition 227 (the elimination of bilingual education)? *¿Qué piensa usted sobre la proposición 227 (la eliminación de la educación bilingüe)?*

◆ What barriers have been erected at the home when your child learns English and doesn't use Spanish? *¿Que barreras se han levantado en el ambiente familiar cuando su hijo/a aprende el inglés y deja de usar el español?*

◆ In what way, if any, is the school your child is attending different from the school you attended? *¿De qué forma se diferencia la escuela a la que su niño/a asiste a la que usted asistió?*

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The goal was to encourage parents to discuss education outside the sometimes intimidating setting of school and the relationships among culture, language, and school. Afterwards, the preservice teachers used the information they had collected in a final paper in which they analyzed their findings and came to informed conclusions about the parents' educational views and practices modeled for reading, writing and speaking at home. Finally, I asked the preservice teachers to reflect on their experiences, draw connections among the three microsystems (home, community, and school), as well as discuss the role that social, political, and economic structures played in the preservice teachers' interactions with parents.

Thus, the assignment in the second course had three main purposes: (a) to expand the preservice teachers' understanding of the role that parents perceived themselves playing or not playing in the educational system, (b) to enhance the preservice teachers' understanding of the unofficial teaching practices and informal communication systems of the student, and (c) to enable the preservice teachers to explore how the experience would impact their own beliefs and practice. In the two courses preservice teachers engaged in a dialogue with parents so they would come to understand at least a part of the child's ways of knowing, and parents' perspective and role in their educational vision for the child. Preservice teachers were *encouraged* to understand that common views held by society about the lack of parental involvement are embedded in the social, political and historical experiences of the people defining "parent involvement" (Nakagawa, 2000). Furthermore, they were encouraged to analyze and understand their own complicity in institutionalized beliefs that students who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are often perceived as the problem. In order for teachers to develop curriculum that honors and respects the knowledge, interests and experiences that students bring into the classroom, parents, students and teachers need to be engaged in a dialogue.

Learning about the home-school contexts, exploring previous assumptions and understanding how these influence teaching were all powerful experiences that informed preservice teachers' educational practices. To understand why involvement with families matters and to understand preservice teachers' experiences, I must first turn to the data collection and analysis to provide insight into the narratives both written and oral shared by them.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data for this study were collected at the end of each semester and included the preservice teachers' fieldnotes, final papers and oral presentations. Each data segment presented here was taken verbatim from the written work and presentations, and marked with the preservice teacher's pseudonym (no actual names were used) and date of the entry.

I began by analyzing the journal entries that revealed the preservice teachers'

interactions with the students. At the end of each semester I analyzed the final papers and notes taken during their oral presentations. Specifically, the data were reviewed to identify evidence of preservice teachers' engagement in the three contexts (home, school, community). As I read the data, several analytical categories were evident:

- (a) Insights into how previous personal and professional experiences influenced their thinking, (e.g., "After volunteering in the schools while raising my children, I thought I knew a lot about teaching children, until I began my credential program. The new knowledge that I gained was what I really wanted and needed to experience to become that extraordinary, exceptional teacher").
- (b) Insights into how academic readings influenced their thinking (e.g., "To summarize what I have learned I must address the model put forth by Collier. I finally realized the full gamut of socio-cultural processes that children like Hugo have to encounter").
- (c) Understandings of how children live and learn in their community (e.g., "Rudi's father speaks English at home and, and the mom speaks Spanish. Her mom said that she likes practicing her English, and likes teaching her husband some Spanish as well. She said they speak both languages about 50-50").
- (d) Features of language that indicated cultural understanding (e.g., "Overall I found that all parents I interviewed value an education. Education is a top priority, but what is even more important is maintaining their native language and culture. I've learned how important is to honor and respect different cultures and to incorporate their culture in the curriculum so both students and parents feel acknowledged").

Moving from the analysis of individual preservice teachers to the whole group I then asked: How do the individual stories fit into a larger pattern of all preservice teachers as they learned about the school-home-community relationships?

### **What We Learned**

Yet challenging preservice teachers to shift their teaching philosophies often comes with a strong political stands that tend to polarize pedagogical theorists. . . If anything, new knowledge is *uncomfortable*; it takes assumptions, biases, and understandings that changes them [preservice teachers], making learners face what they have not see before. (Wolf, Ballentine, & Hill, 1999, p. 136-137)

When the assignment of the more open-ended interview in the first semester was initially given, preservice teachers provided me with little or no feedback, and it was difficult to get a sense of their feelings. However, I quickly learned that the assignment created a certain level of anxiety, and many of the preservice teachers

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began to question its purpose. All too often, they voiced their concerns by talking to their cooperating master teachers in their children's schools and in class discussions:

- ◆ "How will this class assignment help me when I am in the classroom?"
- ◆ "I talked to my Master Teacher about the assignment, and he doesn't think it's appropriate for me to visit the student's home as a representative of the school."
- ◆ "I don't see what this assignment has to do with becoming a teacher. I'm not even sure I know how to approach the situation or what questions to ask."

Thus, although the seeds I had sown were now developing into small plants shooting from the ground, their growth was marked by skepticism.

Indeed, their skeptical attitude was shared by several of the master teachers and principals in the schools where preservice teachers worked. They, too, felt that the assignment did not coincide with their views of the role of preservice teachers in the classroom. Master teachers felt threatened by the fact that our preservice teachers would be representing them and viewed the assignment as premature. With all of these negative views, it was not surprising that many of the preservice teachers shared in their fieldnotes their anxiety over completing the first step in the assignment:

I became concerned that I may be putting the parents on the spot. I spoke to my Master Teacher about my concerns and she agreed that she would not even invite herself to their homes because of today's circumstances. (Tim, first semester)

Not only does this comment reflect the master teacher's concern about preservice teachers visiting students' homes, but it adds the master teacher's perception that some neighborhoods are unsafe.

When I spoke to principals, they shared similar views, explaining the danger in visiting certain neighborhoods. However, the preservice teachers not only felt intimidated by having to visit "certain" neighborhoods, but they also perceived themselves as outside players who did not have a dramatic influence in children's social and academic lives. This was clearly shared in Annette's final paper for the first semester class:

When I first entered this Pedagogy and Linguistic Diversity Course and was presented with the home-school-community partnership assignments, I — along with many of my colleagues — was skeptical and even a bit hesitant to complete this coursework. Due to the fact I am a student teacher and not the main educator in the classroom, I did not feel that it was my role to interact with parents in their home or follow them to a community event. Seeing as I will only be in the classroom until December, I did not feel right getting involved in their lives and then saying goodbye in the middle of the school year.

In Annette's eyes, being involved in the classroom did not mean being involved in children's home lives. Somehow, teaching within the "school's walls" meant that



students' home lives were to be left at the school gate. Yet, this example also illustrates the perception that many practicing teachers have about the relationships among school, home, and community. What happens in the classroom does not have any connection to what students experience in their "unofficial" worlds (Dyson, 1994).

The assignment made preservice teachers confront new realities, causing them to question not only the assignment, but also their own understanding of what it means to be a teacher of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Asking preservice teachers to initiate home visits and participate in community events shifted them into unfamiliar territory, which created disequilibrium in their learning. In fact, preservice teachers were confronted with *several* realities. For many, this was the first time they had interacted with parents that were linguistically and culturally different from themselves, and this clearly created some anxiety. Ironically, they were faced with the realities that these students and parents confront every day as they try to clearly communicate when they don't speak the language of the addressee, but still want to honor their contextual customs. An example is the anxiety felt by Jay and shared in his final paper:

Talking to parents is an area where I feel uncomfortable. Though I get along well with people, I think the uneasiness comes from being a beginning teacher with some feelings of inadequacy. Also there is a language barrier. I tried to speak Spanish, but I am very slow and not too good at it. I fumble through my words quite a bit. (First semester)

Still, as the first semester moved forward and ultimately gave way to the second and I persisted in my emphasis on the need for parent and community involvement, the preservice teachers' first fumbling attempts gave way to more open attitudes and adept approaches. With the opportunity to discuss interview questions in class and openly reveal and resolve their hesitations, the preservice teachers' skeptical attitudes developed into informed discussions. Participation in the home visits provided them with powerful knowledge about students' home culture, unique learning history and goals parents had for their children. Ultimately, they recognized that parents had the same goals for their children as they had for their students.

### **Cross Cultural Learning**

Can an adult look into a child's world and see what it is like? I believe I have come to know a student well by numerous observations, assignments and time. I believe if you take time, you can somewhat fit into someone else's shoes to see the world from their point-of-view. (Elizabeth, final paper, second semester)

Once preservice teachers had the opportunity to observe their child in the first semester work, meet the parents and participate in the community event, their outlook on the assignments changed considerably. As shared by Elizabeth, to "fit into someone else's shoes" and understand a child's point of view, one needs to immerse him or herself into the child's life. Over the course of the semester preservice

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teachers came to realize that learning about a child meant learning about and from not only the school, *but about other*, the family and community contexts as well. Each preservice teacher experienced different opportunities, but all of them shared special and unforgettable moments and conversations with students and parents.

Take Laurine, for example, an Anglo American preservice teacher. She decided to interview the parents of a student who was “struggling academically,” and to her surprise when she called to set up the home visit, the mother invited her to the child’s birthday party. Laurine recognized this as a “great opportunity to learn more about the Mexican culture,” which many of her students share, but she was nervous about “her Spanish abilities” and about this being “her first home visit.” Still, after the visit she wrote:

All of my worries at the beginning were unnecessary. I had no trouble understanding anyone. I communicated really well with everyone and even had some fun and interesting conversations. I felt welcome and comfortable in their home. The other guests thought it was really neat that I was [his] teacher. Furthermore, the home visit turned out to be a ‘cross-cultural’ experience. (Final paper, first semester)

The notions that this was a ‘cross cultural’ experience stems from the fact that Laurine learned a lot about the Mexican culture by attending the birthday party. Quite different from the parties she had experienced in her own culture, she realized a birthday party entailed a whole day of celebration. Furthermore, a child’s birthday party was not exclusively planned for children but it included whole families, neighbors, and even distant relatives. She was further surprised to see that once they arrived, they “went around the room and personally greeted each person with a kiss on the cheek and a handshake.” She was also taken by the cultural difference experienced when the food was served. The family formally served six guests at a time at the dining-room table. And when Laurine’s turn came to eat, there were even more surprises: “I wasn’t sure how to eat the large round tortillas chips [that were served with the posole] but I observed the others breaking them into pieces and dipping them into the stew.”

Laurine’s new and positive experience not only helped strengthen her confidence about including the parent in the academic dialogue, but also provided her with an incredible opportunity to learn about her student’s culture. “This experience has definitely increased my confidence to make other home visits, especially ones that will be more difficult when they concern academic or behavior problems.”

### **Understanding Children’s Unique Learning Histories**

Not all of the preservice teachers were able to participate in such extraordinary celebrations and gain such cultural knowledge. However, each visit provided preservice teachers with a learning opportunity. For example, Christina, a preservice teacher who at the end of the semester viewed the home visit as the *most valuable* component of the assignment wrote:

If I had to choose one activity that I did that was most helpful in working with [Juan Miguel], I would say that it was the parent interview. (Final paper)

Christina's positive outlook was supported by the opportunity she had to observe the interaction between the mother and her son, Juan Miguel. To her surprise she noticed that the mother "allows him to speak anytime because there are no other children at home." This observation forced Christina to reflect on her earlier judgments on Juan Miguel's behavior.

Once I knew about Juan Miguel's family, I realized that he is not trying to be rude in class by speaking out of turn. Instead, he is simply trying to explain his thoughts, which he is used to doing more frequently at home. (Final paper)

Another preservice teacher, Michelle, also felt overwhelmed by the assignment at first. In her final paper she 'confessed' that "after working as an instructional aide in a school for ten years and raising three children, I thought I knew quite a bit about teaching and children." As she reflected back on when she started and where she is now, she explained, "it truly amazes me that I am ready to face a classroom with English Language Learners with so much confidence." She attributes much of her growth to her personal experiences with the family of one of her students, Emilio.

The process of stepping outside the classroom and into Emilio's world through the home visit and the community event created a special connection between the teacher, student and parents, allowing the student to feel important and valued. The home opened my eyes to see some of the reasons why a child is the way he or she is. Emilio is a shy, quiet boy and spending a few hour with his parents made me realized that both his parents are also quiet and private, they told me that they don't socialize much outside the home. (Final paper)

Michelle took exceptional risks in her community assignment, a risk that did not reflect her apprehensions: "I began to have second thoughts about being a teacher. There was so much that my narrow mind had not been exposed to and now all of this information was hitting me like a title wave." For the community assignment she met the family at the YMCA where Emilio took swimming classes. "We mainly focused on Emilio's performance. We just waved at Emilio every time he looked up." Michelle described this experience as an unforgettable one because she realized then and there, how powerful it was for Emilio to have both his teacher and parents 'applauding' at every accomplishment. Michelle mentioned that this first encounter in a neutral territory opened the doors for a much more comfortable home visit later on in the semester.

Emily, a second semester student, was overwhelmed but how much she learned about her student Mario and his mother. Mario, a recent Philippine immigrant, spoke little English. His mother felt that learning English was the key to her son's success, however, she clearly understood that this was something he had to do on his own because she didn't know English. She pointed out that in many ways Mario was responsible for a lot more than just learning English. He was also responsible

for getting ready and walking to school every morning, since she left for work before dawn. After school, he was given strict orders to come straight home and wait for her phone call. This information helped Emily understand Mario's sometimes uneasy attitude and reluctance to participate in the after-school program and homework club. Emily understood that at a young age Mario was responsible for much more than his school life.

### **Recognition of Shared Goals between Parents and Preservice Teachers**

Preservice teachers were also able to hear the importance that parents placed on their children's education, and how they viewed the relationship between the school and home. In his final paper, Mike shared how one of the mothers he interviewed "believes that there needs to be a partnership between the school and home; since... the school serves as a second home to her child" (First semester). Alice also heard the reasons given by a Latina mother of three whom she interviewed:

She does not visit [her son's] class because she does not feel well represented at the school. She says she feels welcome, and is never treated badly but she still feels hesitant due to her language barrier. (First semester)

These conversations offered preservice teachers the opportunity to hear about the linguistic realities faced by many parents, as well as the value placed on the relationship with the school. They began to realize the importance of including the parents in the educational decision making process.

Preservice teachers' understanding of the role that families played in the education of their children blossomed in the second semester. This was shown by the conversations held in class when they were asked to present to their peers the analysis of the two interviews conducted with linguistically and culturally diverse parents. Their experiences provided preservice teachers with the opportunity to see how ultimately parents had the same goals and concerns for their children as the teachers had for their students. During her presentation, Grace commented that both parents felt that learning English was essential to being successful in the United States, while recognizing the importance of maintaining their culture and their native language. The first parent lamented that she couldn't help her children much but she stated that she was learning English along with her children. Both parents asked Grace for recommendation on the best way to help.

Emily visited Guadalupe, a Spanish speaking Latina mother of three, and Mary, a Tagalog-English speaking mother of one. Emily recognized these women as extremely dedicated to their children's academic success. Even though both parents had only reached a high school education, they expected their children to do very well at school. "I dream for them to go to college and make a future for themselves. I hope that my sons also learn to use social skills (of both cultures) and become

bilingual and bicultural individuals in society” was the message shared by Guadalupe. Both parents supported the school at home by having their children complete their homework every night, but they confessed that they couldn’t help them because they couldn’t read English. Guadalupe said, “I feel like my hands are tied because I can’t read his English homework and neither can his brothers since they are younger.” Mary said that her language skills were so bad that it was not possible to offer sound help.

In her oral report, Francis shared that a commonality found among the parents she interviewed was the value they placed on their children’s education. Even though the parents were not fluent in English, they recognized the importance of learning English as quickly as possible but *not at the expense* of their first language, Spanish.

As they presented the data, preservice teachers showed a deeper understanding of how parents viewed themselves as their children’s first educators. Michelle shared that when she asked one of the parents what does “best educated mean to you”, the parent, after a few minutes of silence, responded by stating: “Best is what we want for our children.” Inspired by this answer, Michelle shared that that is exactly what she wanted for her students. At this moment, several preservice teachers joined in the conversation by stressing the importance of supporting and strengthening the goals of the parents. Ultimately, the preservice teachers came to realize that the parents were their students’ first teachers.

## **Reflections**

While I can learn a significant amount about students through observation, I will be able to gather more information as I get to know the people who know my students best. Through interaction with parents, I will discover the special attributes of each of my students. At the beginning of the semester, I was a small seed hiding under the soil just waiting to flourish. Now, toward the end, I have blossomed into a multidimensional flower who is open to many of the ideas that surround me.  
(Anabelle, Final paper, second semester)

Returning to this metaphor of “multidimensional flowers” offered by one of the preservice teachers, I must close with a few concluding thoughts on my role in helping young preservice teachers grow in their understandings of linguistic and cultural diversity. The home and community assignments were a particularly challenging experience for two reasons. First, the assignments demanded that preservice teachers move against the social structures in place at most schools. Second, the assignments asked them to expose their personal reservations and apprehensions about other cultures and languages. Basically, I had called on them to shift their positions from being knowledgeable experts to being unknowledgeable novices, to place themselves as the *seekers* of information, not the *deliverers*. Teacher preparation programs are faced with the need to prepare preservice teachers to work in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, but unless preservice teachers engage in reflection, little will be accomplished. It is well known that once

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they join the workforce, they will most likely rely on their own comfort zone, using the same strategies and models of teaching used by their teachers (O'Loughlin, 1995). Thus, unless we engage preservice teachers in reflecting how those practices have influenced their behaviors and likes, dislikes and learning opportunities, we have accomplished little. This is why I encouraged educators to reflect on my learning experience with this curriculum and design a year-long assignment that gives preservice teachers the opportunity to connect classroom learning with community-based and parent-based learning. Furthermore, I believe that the relationship between the university and the schools needs to be strengthened deepening the collaboration process. I propose that universities offer master teachers university credits for their participation in seminars where they would meet with university colleagues and preservice teachers in an effort to link the latter's training to the reality of the classroom, school and community.

Reflecting back on preservice teachers' comments through the assignments and oral presentations, I have been reminded that the critical literacy perspective in my classes helped the students move beyond the simple understanding of the readings and lectures and jolted them into questioning the validity of the assignment. Perhaps as a professor, my first reaction was to defend the assignment because it was dear to my heart and as an educator I had seen its benefits. However, the uneasiness with which my preservice teachers reacted made me understand the importance of honoring social justice from their point of view. I came to understand that providing preservice teachers with a space to share and voice opinions and feelings about the assignment was essential, and as a result, I encouraged them to converse with peers, educators, principals and parents. From those conversations they themselves found support, and they came to the realization that in order to support children's learning, collaboration among its participants is a must.

When the preservice teachers visited the homes in the first semester, they learned the importance of building a partnership between the home-community and school. In the second semester they had an incredible opportunity to talk to the children's first educators, the parents, about their thoughts on education, and the preservice teachers learned that ultimately both parents and teachers want the same for their students.

### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Proposition 227, the dismantling of bilingual education in California, was approved by California voters in 1998.

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