Preparing for Multicultural Schools:
Teacher Candidates Dialogue Online with Teachers from Egypt, Japan, Ghana, and the U.S.

By Jan Guidry Lacina & Patience Sowa

The divergence between a predominately White teacher education population and a diverse public school system poses this question: how do universities best prepare teacher candidates to teach children of racially and linguistically different backgrounds than their own? Teacher education programs have been struggling with this issue for several years. In her article "Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness," Christine Sleeter (2001) raises this issue, pointing out the growing cultural gap between public school children and their teachers.

Teacher education programs have addressed this issue in a variety of ways, such as requiring multicultural coursework and/or requiring placements in urban schools (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998; Seidl & Friend, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). States, too, vary with respect to their requirements for diversity. In many states, students are tested on their development of a multicultural perspective on a standardized test. A

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test, immersion placements, stand-alone multicultural education courses may all be one forms of teacher preparation and accountability in many states, but what are the ways to develop a critical understanding of diversity in order for students to not only pass a standardized teacher's test, but more importantly, to integrate culturally responsive teaching strategies into their public school classroom? The purpose of this article is to describe how online discussions between diverse ethnically and linguistic groups of teachers, over a one-year period, allowed teacher candidates and teachers to openly discuss issues of race, culture, and language.

As students in the United States become more racially and linguistically diverse, the pool of prospective teachers remains primarily White, female, and middle class (Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Zeichner, 1996). Even though we live in a very multicultural world, most of us, especially Whites, tend to live an essentially monocultural life (Seidl & Friend, 2002). Many people of all backgrounds tend to associate with others who have the same racial, linguistic, or socioeconomic background. In many teacher education programs, White middle-class professors teach White teacher candidates about how to best teach children of color (Ducharme & Agne, 1989; Villegas, 1993; Sleeter, 2001). Even though many of these professors may do an exceptional job discussing the profound multicultural literature, voices of difference may not be heard. Or voices may be stifled. Furthermore, discussing issues of diversity are often fraught with conflict as students move out of their comfort zones and encounter conflicting beliefs and values.

To address the issue of how to best prepare White teacher candidates for multicultural schools, many universities develop multicultural classes and field-work placement in urban schools (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998). At times, this does help White middle-class teacher candidates realize how very different their lives are than the children they observe in the urban classrooms, and in some cases, the teacher candidates decide not to teach based on being immersed in an environment that is so very different than their own educational experiences. Most multicultural college classes focus on curriculum and teaching methods (Whitaker et al., 2002).

Many multicultural college classes include small-group and whole-group discussions, critical readings, and paper and journal assignments (Sheets & Chew, 2002), but few programs offer on-going dialogue between teacher candidates and students or teachers from diverse backgrounds. Sleeter (2001) suggests that preservice education needs to be linked with "community-based learning and with ongoing professional development and school reform"(p.10). This research project does exactly that. It moves beyond the margins and into ways that teacher candidates actually integrate what they learn from a college class into their classroom. By mentoring college students and by providing a safe environment in which critical dialogue between diverse groups of people occurs over an extended period of time, only then are we truly on the way to preparing teacher candidates to becoming multicultural educators.

Setting

This project took place at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU). SFASU was founded in 1923 as a teachers college, and the it maintains a strong presence within the state of Texas for preparing teachers since one in five teachers in Texas are graduates of the College of Education at SFASU (Hallman, 2001). During the 1990s, Texas universities were granted funds to develop professional development schools. SFASU was one of the first universities within the state to receive such funds, and as a result, the Center for Professional Development of Teachers (CPDT) was developed. The CPDT board members were comprised of school district representatives, community members, and university representatives. As part of the CPDT's mission, a field based teacher education program was collaboratively designed in 1993. Partnerships between local public schools were forged, and monies were allocated to house university classes on elementary and secondary campuses throughout east Texas. This program received state approval in 1995 and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approval beginning in 1996 (http://www.education.sfasu.edu/coe/cep/CenterEdPartner.htm).

Our online dialogue project was a course requirement in a social studies methods course taught on site at a professional development school at Brandon Elementary in Lufkin, Texas. Grades three through five were taught at Brandon Elementary. The teacher candidates spent one hour in the university classroom, two hours in the elementary classroom, and then the students returned to the university classroom to debrief. While the candidates were in the elementary classroom, university professors observed and evaluated their work. University professors were encouraged to become active within the public school setting by participating in volunteer work and by connecting field-based assignments with the university course work.

Methodology

Our goals for this project were twofold: we wanted our primarily White, middle-class students to learn strategies for working with diverse students (English language learners and children of color), and we wanted our students to learn about such strategies from multiple voices, instead of merely hearing monocultural voices. Thus, we began to search for teachers of diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds to participate in an active discussion of teaching and social studies. First, we went to the Internet to Dave's ESL Café (http://www.eslcafe.com/) to post a call for international teachers to participate in weekly discussions with our students. After much searching and corresponding with various teachers, we found three international teachers who agreed to participate in an ongoing dialogue with our teacher candidates.

Once the international relationship developed, we considered the many options of how we could integrate such a dialogue within our university course. Much

research describes technology partnerships between teacher candidates dialoguing with other teacher candidates about multicultural education (Marshall, 2001; Merryfield, 2001; Ramirez, 2002; Sernak, &Wolfe, 1998); however, there is little research describing teacher candidates dialoguing online with teachers from international backgrounds.

We decided to create a webct web-enhanced course for the professional development school site for several reasons. First, and foremost, we wanted our students to feel safe in dialoguing about personal beliefs, and one aspect of feeling safe on the Internet is to restrict who may have access to the website. Since the webct course designer feature controls access to the course, outside people who we do not know cannot post on the site. Secondly, we sought a system that allowed us to easily manage a very active long-term discussion. The webct discussion board allows course designers to create topics for ongoing discussion, and these topics are easily managed since they may be organized by topic.

Most importantly, participants on the discussion board can create their own discussion topic(s), and in this way, the dialogue can be student centered instead of being strictly guided by the course designers' topic discussions. There are numerous benefits to threaded discussions. For example, Merryfield (2001) noted in her description of an online multicultural class that threaded discussions "offered more choices and allowed for more diverse points of view than do face-to-face discussions because the teachers can respond to any message posted, and they can initiate a new topic at any time" (pg. 287-288). Likewise, Ramirez (2002) found that students who participated in a discussion board session were more likely to voice their viewpoints than they would in a face-to-face course. The traditionally quiet student often felt more comfortable to participate in an online discussion, and this was a direct contrast to their behavior face-to-face since they remained quite and reserved.

As we designed our webct course page, we integrated multicultural literature and websites, teaching strategies, and lesson plans that promoted culturally respon-sive teaching. Likewise, we posted pictures and descriptions of our ongoing projects at the professional development school site. In this way, our website became more than just a place to meet online to discuss diversity; it became a resource and teaching site.

Participants

The participants for this project were diverse in background and included international teachers, professors, and teacher candidates. The international teach-ers were computer literate and fluent in academic English. In order to protect the identity of our participants, a pseudonym was used in the place of each person's name. One of the first teachers to post a response to our call was Lily. Lily was an Egyptian elementary school teacher living outside of Cairo. She stated that she had a master's degree in social studies, and she desired to move to the USA to pursue

an additional graduate degree in education. Lily was chosen to participate in this project based on her academic background and her knowledge of technology, social studies methods, and academic English. Lily invited a teacher from Japan to contact Jan about participating in the project. Keiko was a high school English teacher in Japan who was working on a master's degree through an online program in Australia. Keiko was invited to participate in this project because she had more than ten years of experience teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and she was fluent in academic English. Lastly, an American ESL teacher was selected to participate in the project since she offered important insight into teaching ESL in the U.S. public schools. Amy was a middle school ESL teacher in North Carolina and taught ESL overseas for several years. All of the teachers were world travelers and were very diverse in nationality, race, and religion.

The two of us, the professors, took on the role of facilitators. Both of us have Ph.Ds in the area of Curriculum and Instruction/TESOL from a Research I university in the Midwest. Jan, a white Texan, taught ESL for many years to diverse groups of students. She was the ESL Coordinator at SFASU. She likewise served as the Coordinator for the professional development school at Brandon Elementary, where she observed and evaluated all of the teacher candidates as they taught social studies lessons. Patience was from Ghana, and she taught ESL and foreign language methods courses at Rockhurst University. Patience also taught ESL to varied populations for many years and had experience living in several countries. Patience offered an international perspective to the dialogue, and she connected personal experiences from Ghana to the ongoing online discussion.

There were 22 teacher candidates who were enrolled in the professional development school-site program at Brandon Elementary. The teacher candidates were primarily White and middle class, and had little experience with diversity. Two of the students were Mexican American and two were African American. All of the students were female. The teacher candidates' ages ranged from the 20s to the 40s.

Data Analysis

The data from this project were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All discussion board responses and field notes were analyzed using a categorical coding method. These categories were developed through data analysis; however, they were guided by the purposes of this study (Merriam, 1998). We used the work of Guba and Lincoln (1985) to code the data into text segments. These segments were : perspectives of or responses given by participants to a particular topic (note: the topics were set by the researchers), teaching strategies recommended by participants, noticeable changes in perspectives by participants, and the number of respondents who mentioned a topic. Then, we reduced the codes to determine themes or categories and sub themes which were: (a) the value

of education, (b) language and diversity, and (c) teacher candidates' reaction to the course on webct/ changes in beliefs.

Our findings in this study were validated through triangulation. Multiple respondents and researchers participated in this project. The credibility of the categories increased as multiple respondents addressed the same topics, and as the two researchers collected and analyzed the data to support a theme. In addition, member checking is very easily done through webct. The program enables users to read all the responses given by participants. The researchers were engaged in the setting over an extended period of time, and thus, the credibility of the study increased. Finally, the results of the research were corroborated with the research literature with respect to students being more likely to voice their opinions in a safe environment, (Merryfield, 2000), and the need for teacher education programs to provide education that goes beyond a single multicultural education class to ongoing professional development (Sleeter, 2001).

Results

The narrative that follows describes the themes and sub-themes found through this study, and each of them topics are reviewed and discussed.

Value of Education

Initially, the teacher candidates, in general, viewed western and technologically advanced nations as holding a higher standard for education. People from developing countries were viewed as valuing hard work as a survival necessity, and many of the teacher candidates stated that oppression and lack of education in third world countries was normal and accepted as part of some cultures. The teacher candidates discussed their views openly, and they sought the international teachers' perspective to learn more about other countries and cultures, in order to more fully understand other perspectives. Along the same lines, the teacher candidates viewed those people of higher socioeconomic status as more likely to seek a higher education. For example, Stacy, described her view on other cultures and education:

> In most countries and cultures, is education important in society? What about Africa, Mexico or even some parts of the Middle East? In some cultures it is not valuable to have an education. Most people must work and help support their families especially in the poor countries. I believe the term that I am relating to is called cultural barriers (please correct me if I am wrong). As teachers we must understand these things in order to be effective teachers.

Stacy's viewpoint was similar to most of the other teacher candidates. There was an overwhelming unfamiliarity with other cultures and countries. Laura held a similar view:

> I would like to learn more about the role education has in other countries. I think

education is very important, for the most part, in the U.S. There are so many different cultures within the U.S., and some cultures stress education more than others. I think that culture affects the education process in countries because different cultures hold different standards. If education is an important standard, then most of the people will strive to be educated. The resources available to different countries also affect the importance and quality of education.

Throughout this discussion and all other discussions, the two researchers' role was to facilitate the discussion and to discuss any areas that needed further explanation or clarification. Similarly, we often posted discussion responses that allowed other perspectives to be voiced, and we encouraged the international teachers to tell their personal stories. In response to Stacy and Laura's posting, Jan responded:

In the USA, we often view the western way of thinking as the only valid way of thinking. This does cause conflict politically for us. How can we recognize other ways of thinking or should we?

Jan's open-ended question was designed to encourage critical thinking; and she wanted the students to reflect on the readings from the class. For this reason, she encouraged the students to reflect on their own beliefs, while connecting the course readings to their own viewpoints. Katie responded to Jan's question by expressing her viewpoints:

I agree a lot with Stacy. I feel that the culture we live in has placed such a big spotlight on education and that everyone should have a right to receive a good one. In other countries, however, people are merely trying to merely survive. They end up having to work and support a family and that is more important than having a college degree. Some countries do place an emphasis on education such as Japan and other high-tech places. We as teachers need to remember that students in our classroom might not have come from the same educational background as others and therefore their drive for gaining knowledge might not be as important to them as other students.

At this point in the discussion, Jan thought it would be helpful for someone who held an international perspective to post a response to both Stacy's and Katie's postings, and she sent an email to Patience asking her to respond. Patience responded to the discussion board, using her personal experiences in Ghana as an example. Patience explained that in Ghana, education means a better means of life, and parents in Ghana, and other developing countries value education.

However, Patience stated that parents may not be able to afford to send their children to school and that we as educators must not assume that such cultures do not value an education. Soon after Patience posted her response, the other international teachers began connecting their experiences with education to the discussion. Keiko posted a response and described that in Japan, many children worked in the paddy fields to earn money for their families, and education was not available to all people; however parents did value education. Lily connected her personal story with Patience and Keiko's life experiences and described education in Egypt.

> I understand [sic] that sending children to harvest the crops in my country [Egypt] doesn't mean that my country doesn't value education. In fact, we have this problem in Egypt, in the Egyptian countryside, the children there help their parents in farms and fields but they go to their schools too. In Egypt we appreciate and value education, all Egyptian families believe it is important for their children to be well education. I'd like to discuss with all of you the role of culture in education, for example in Egypt we focus on the role of religion in education.

Through this discussion, students developed an awareness of education in other countries, and for most, this was the first time they interacted with people from outside the USA. The international perspective allowed the teacher candidates to reflect on their own viewpoints about education in other countries. They learned that people in third world countries also appreciate education, even though parents may not be able to afford to send their children to school.

The two researchers did not want to dominate the board, and so their postings were limited and intentional. The researchers' comments kept the dialogue on task, and when there were comments that were stereotypical, or when the discussions lagged, the researchers posted responses or questions on the discussion board to promote critical reflection. The online dialogue about how other cultures and countries view education then, was a learning experience for all the participants. We listened to each other and by doing so gained valuable insights into cultural values and how they influence education. We respectfully challenged each other's beliefs and struggled to break down stereotypes as we worked through the knotty issues of language diversity and the teaching of language-minority children.

Language and Diversity

The discussion on language and dialect produced the most hits to the website and a passionate discussion developed. Prior to that week's discussion, Jan posted a scenario from Lisa Delpit's (1995) book, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, in which a Mississippi preschool teacher drilled a young child on how to respond correctly to a morning greeting. The teacher greeted the student:

> Teacher: Good morning, Tony, how are you?
> Tony: I be's fine.
> Teacher: Tony, I said, How *are* you?
> Tony: (with raised voice) I be's *fine*.
> Teacher: No, Tony, I said *how are you*?
> Tony: (angrily) I done told you I *be's fine* and I ain't telling you no more! (p. 51).

Primarily, the teacher candidates stated that the teacher was unfair in correcting the child's grammar, and a few students connected such a discourse to increasing the stress placed on language learning or to linguistic/language diversity within the classroom (Delpit, 1995; Krashen, 1982). For example, Maria, a first generation Mexican American teacher candidate, explained that the teacher needed to state why she was not accepting Tony's responses:

> I think there is some serious miscommunication going on here, especially on the teacher's behalf. She asked a simple question and Tony just simply answered. I know that the teacher wanted him to respond in a manner that she was more familiar with, but somehow, Tony was not aware of what she was really after, because to him, there wasn't anything wrong with his response. Tony's response go the message across but if the teacher wanted to correct his grammar, then I think SHE should have explained herself in an effective manner and helped Tony understand why she was not accepting his reply.

Other students made connections to what they learned in prior literacy courses. For example, Amy, a young mother in her twenties, connected the scenario to what she learned about descriptive grammar and teaching, and she was one of the few students that made the connection between the linguistic discourse and the teaching scenario. She stated:

> This teacher has obviously never heard of Descriptive Grammar! I studied this in my grammar/linguistics course. Descriptive grammar is what this student was using . . . it gets to the roots of language. It deals with language as it is naturally spoken and learned. There are actually some linguists who believe that grammar should be taught through this descriptive manner because it involves Prior Knowledge and makes language Real for students! . . . We just had a long discussion about teachers being able to teach different cultures/races without prejudice . . . this is a culture that the teacher should respect.

Like Amy, other teacher candidates began citing what they learned from other courses, textbooks, personal experiences, and connections between other online postings. For example, Lorrie, a traditional White student in her early twenties, connected the discussion on language and dialect to what she learned from the text *Learning To Teach* by Arrends (2001). She quoted Arrend's description of the importance of not suppressing students' language since this may produce both emotional and cognitive consequences (pg. 121). Lorrie likewise described how an effective teacher would respond to Tony by modeling the desired response, instead of correcting his grammar. Lorrie ended her posting by giving a personal connection to the language issue by stating "After all, many of us don't always speak in proper English (I've been known to say 'ain't' a time or two!)." Personal connections to language and dialect continued with Keiko from Japan connecting her experiences with modeling correct English questioning skills and intonation.

The importance of valuing home languages and dialects was a part of the discussion that the two researchers initiated. We wanted the teacher candidates to realize the importance of language varieties, and that no one language is better than the other. Donna, a nontraditional student and mother of four, emphasized the importance of the teacher's modeling correct English, and Patience brought up her own experiences of speaking her mother tongue at home by stating

> I think one of the main points Lisa Delpit tries to put across is that minority languages, whether it be ebonics or Spanish, should be validated by teachers, they are not wrong or bad. She [Delpit] also emphasizes that students must understand that in order to negotiate in the dominant society, they do need to have the tools and skills with which to do so, which in this case would be "standard English."

Patience described the importance of giving students the tools necessary to negotiate in a world that may be very different from their world. The personal experiences connected to the discussion appeared to impact the teacher candidates more than merely reading and discussing the topics in class. Overall, the role language plays in schools was a prevalent theme that the teacher candidates connected to their professional-development school experience, class readings, and life experiences.

Teacher Candidates' Reactions to the Course on Webct/ Changes in Student Beliefs

Primarily, the candidates viewed education as a life long process. After reflecting on this project and her teaching experiences, Becky stated that as a teacher, one makes mistakes, and then must move on and learn from those experiences. Her advice to her peers was, "Keep an open mind (yes! Make your words sweet, because one day YOU will eat them!)." Becky stated at the end of the project that she was "eating her words": now that she is in the public school classroom, she better understands the importance of valuing multiple perspectives. She likewise recognized the importance of being familiar with strategies to challenge students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom.

Other students felt that the international teachers' perspectives helped them to begin to better understand diversity. Like most of the teacher candidates, Rachel stated that the discussions allowed her to better understand multiple viewpoints. She stated:

> This semester has really opened my eyes up to what a diverse world we have. SFA has done a great job on giving us opportunities to experience this. The discussions have been the main factor. My small mindedness has really started to open. I'm so proud of that. Getting to discuss different issues with different people from all over has been a great experience. Thanks Dr. L!!!

Rachel and her peers recognized that universities must do much more to prepare teachers for multicultural schools. At our university, there is no course on diversity or multiculturalism required for undergraduate teacher candidates. The teacher candidates viewed a required diversity course as a very basic requirement, and one that was not met in their undergraduate experience. Likewise, the teacher candidates recognized the importance of developing friends from culturally different backgrounds. Tammy connected her experiences to the discussion:

> I think having discussions and input with people of other cultures in the only way to learn about diversity. We can read all the books about culture we want, but until

we actually experience the culture, we cannot fully understand it. However, by talking with people from that culture, we can come very close to knowing how those cultures are.

Similarly, Betsy, a traditional twenty-two year old student, stated:

I found it helpful. Helpful in many ways—I was able to see different points of view and understand where their opinions come from. I like to hear about world events—and the discussion board allowed me to experience different issues and understand "world" experiences better.

Many of the teacher candidates stated that they liked the dialogue since both teachers and teacher candidates discussed important classroom issues. And, most important, the teacher candidates overwhelmingly voiced the importance of hearing diverse voices and life experiences in the dialogue.

The online dialogue during the spring 2002 semester focused on the teacher candidates' interests, such as, the issue of separate school wings for gifted-and-talented classes, family involvement in school, and ESL instruction. The teacher candidates connected the previous semester's dialogue of culturally responsive teaching and multiculturalism to their student teaching experience. Primarily, there was much critical discussion in relation to classroom situations, and the teacher candidates sought guidance and advice. For example, Becky stated that she "sees multiculturalism in full force," and she connected what she learned about language last semester to her current students' language backgrounds. In like manner, Doreen connected what she learned about incorporating visuals to better teach ESL students. Doreen stated:

. . . There is a little boy in my class that only speaks Spanish. He is in an ESL class for most of the day and comes back to our class for 90 minutes. Since I do not know how to speak Spanish I find it very difficult to communicate with him. I know he must get frustrated because he doesn't understand everything that is going on . . . so I'm planning to teach many of my lessons with a lot of visual aides and manipulatives. I hope that this will help him to become more involved in our class learning.

Language and students' successes and failures in the public school classroom continued to be a focus beginning with our online dialogue during the fall semester and then continuing as the teacher candidates connected the dialogue with their student teaching experiences. Similar to Doreen, Donna connected the struggles that ESL students face in the classroom to what she learned through her coursework:

They [ESL students] struggle and most of the time do not make passing grades, even with a modification of assignment. To me it seems like they have to deal with a lot of failure, before they GET IT. No wonder there is such a high rate of dropouts among minorities. It would frustrate me if I had to be in the same situation. Most of us teachers have never felt that kind of despair, so I really think we need to inspire success in these students. I will make it a goal in my classroom to assess these students on how much they learn, not how much they know.

Donna, and many of the other teacher candidates began to recognize, as they spent more time in the classroom, the unfair expectations placed on English language learners in the classroom. Donna connected her personal experience learning a second language to the ESL children's struggles to pass their classes. Being able to make a personal connection, enabled Donna to realize that she needed to modify her classroom instruction and assessment to meet the individual needs of each student. The online dialogue with teachers from diverse backgrounds, coupled with experiences in the public school classroom, added to the teacher candidates' understanding of the importance of becoming a culturally responsive educator.

Discussion

Students in our College of Education tend to be primarily White, middle class students. And, most have little or no experience with cultures other than their own. In this study, the teacher candidates tended to be isolated within their own cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. The discussion about race, class, and language benefited the teacher candidates since their view of the world had been limited to their own isolated experiences. Throughout the year the teacher candidates expressed a great need to learn about other cultures. They connected such an experience as essential to their future success in the classroom. In her study of White teachers and racial awareness, Johnson (2002) described just how important it is for White teacher candidates to dialogue about race. She found that by narrating their life histories about race, many White teachers were able to clarify both their views on race and to better understand their own racial identity. Johnson warned that teacher education professors must be wary of focusing on race curriculum when there is no presence of racially diverse viewpoints since such a dialogue may become a dialogue of power and privilege. Johnson's advice was particularly relevant to our discussion. The multiple voices within our discussion allowed the teacher candidates to better understand others' perspectives.

There are many positive outcomes from implementing an online component to a multicultural education class. For example, Sernak and Wolfe (1998) found in their study of secondary and elementary education majors that students developed a conceptual understanding of the topics discussed online through dialoguing with a partner. Through such a dialogue with a partner, students were able to critically examine various issues, and many students felt less inhibited through such an online dialogue. One weakness in such email partnerships were that when professors required paper or e-copies of such dialogue. Another weakness was that the dialogue was not necessarily ongoing and as well managed as it would be through a threaded discussion. Sernak and Wolfe stated that their students often found difficulty in printing out the messages, and students also faced other technology related difficulties regarding access and assistance. Overall, the researchers found that a community of inquiry developed from their email exchange in which students

disclosed personal information as they conversed about power and culture (Sernak & Wolfe, 1998).

Numerous studies find that teacher candidates tend to view cultural diversity as a problem, and the "problem" student in such a classroom is often the child that speaks a second language or a child of color (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Paine, 1990; Tatto, 1996; Zeichner, 1993). This particular research was especially relevant to the theme of how other countries/cultures value education. The teacher candidates originally viewed other cultures as not valuing education. By reading the international teachers' discussion, the teacher candidates stated that they better understand others' backgrounds and ways in which a student's background influences his or her viewpoints. When teacher educators generalize about children or schools, school often becomes an agency of assimilation (Florio-Ruane, 2001), and in such an environment, the school loses its role as a nurturer. The school becomes a place where difference is stifled. Ideally, teacher candidates need field experiences working within linguistically and culturally diverse communities and schools. Within such an experience, teacher candidates would be able to better understand the importance living in a multicultural environment (Johnson, 2002). However, such a field-based experience is not the only answer. Teacher candidates must be involved in continuous dialogue throughout their education program in which linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity are addressed and critical reflection is ongoing.

How do we best prepare teacher candidates for teaching in the public schools? Schools of education need to prepare preservice teachers for multicultural schools. By encouraging teacher candidates to examine their beliefs early in college, stereotypes of diverse cultures may be questioned or even dispelled. In the college classroom, culture is best discussed when diverse groups of students are able to converse about their personal stories. Instead of a college professor presenting a video addressing diversity or assigning reading assignment in which an author tells his or her story, culture must be presented in a way that is interesting and relevant to the lives of the teacher candidates. In comparison, some researchers have found that in-service curriculum on diversity may promote stereotypes when it is based on expository texts (McDiarmid & Price, 1990).

When diversity trainers report on a student's culture, the student's voice and story is often diminished as it is read or told second hand. Florio-Ruane (2001) clearly states that culture is not merely food, costumes, or festivals, but culture includes "family stories echoing across people and generations, neighborhoods, churches, and peer groups" (pg. 42). Schools of education must go beyond teaching such a holiday-and-heroes approach to multiculturalism: instead schools of education should strive to create reflective educators. In college classrooms, multiple voices and stories of culture should be part of the curricula. Instead of labeling others who as culturally different, possibly teacher candidates, and experienced teachers, will uncover culture as something all people hold (Florio-Ruane, 2001).

By including voices and stories from multiple perspectives, we are on our way to preparing multiculturally competent teachers.

Final Thoughts

The students, international teachers, and university professors in this study, participated in an ongoing critical dialogue about multicultural issues in a safe environment in which all opinions were recognized. We learned from one another, teachers and students. Instruction was created through the interaction of all the participants, and it was created over time as student's engagement interests increased and decreased. The interactions through this online dialogue created a community of learners in which students and teachers felt comfortable in stating their viewpoints, and the students were eager to learn from other teachers. Through this online dialogue, our students became familiar with how important it is for teachers to view the world from multiple lens.

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