

## **The M/M Center: Meeting the Demand for Multicultural, Multilingual Teacher Preparation**

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The Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Center (M/M Center), a teacher preparation program offered by the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department (BMED) at California State University, Sacramento, is entering its third decade of operation. The M/M Center was established by a group of progressive

teacher educators, most with a history of activism and advocacy around democratic education, immigrant rights, and the elimination of racism and other forms of discrimination in local schools and our own university. The Center founders developed a comprehensive program to prepare teachers to be change agents actively working towards social justice in low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, schools, and communities. Race-conscious (Moses & Chang, 2006) and language-conscious policy-making and program development characterize the program's history and current operations. Multicultural content and the application of theory into practice through extensive field experiences in schools serving low-income and culturally

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and linguistically diverse students anchor the program's design. Focus on these issues combined with active and strategic recruiting and support make the M/M Center an attractive option for students of color and bilingual students who typically select the teaching profession as the avenue through which they will work towards social justice for the children in their communities.

Data indicate that our program has achieved significant successes. In 2004, California public school teachers were 72% White, 15% Hispanic, approximately 5% Asian, approximately 5% African American, and 3% other ethnicities ([www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us)). Candidates in the M/M Center invert this statewide statistic: over 75% are students of color and our White students are usually bilingual, both of which are features of the program that have held constant since its inception. The diversity of the BMED faculty serves as an additional draw for students of color and bilingual students: 37% of the faculty are Latino/a, 25% each are Asian and White, and 12% are African American, a stark contrast to faculty in the California State University system as a whole who, in 2004, were almost 80% White (California Faculty Association, 2005).

By sharing details and analysis of the M/M Center, we hope to engage other social justice educators in critical reflection on effective practices in multicultural/multilingual teacher recruitment to and retention in teacher preparation programs. The article is organized as follows: (a) the theoretical framework that orients our efforts to recruit and retain students of color and bilingual students; (b) history of the M/M Center; (c) highlights from our multiple and single subject programs; and (d) reflections on the M/M Center's accomplishments. The article describes the M/M Center based on the experiences and perspectives of the authors—one of whom was a co-founding member of the M/M Center and of BMED, and others who have been active in recent transformations of the Center and Department. Where appropriate, we accentuate our description with data from a limited set of sources including graduate exit surveys, student work, student interviews, and anecdotal stories and accounts.

### **Teachers for Social Justice**

Recent studies have confirmed what most parents know inherently, that teacher quality—defined broadly rather than with a narrow No Child Left Behind definition—is central to success in our educational system, particularly for low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse students (Haycock, 2002). For California's school children, and increasingly those of the nation, teacher quality must be defined beyond the parameters of content knowledge to include teachers' ability to create optimal learning environments for students marginalized by the system because of their primary language, race/ethnicity, social class, culture, gender, and ability. Moreover, such teachers must be skilled not only in structuring high quality learning opportunities for diverse students in their classrooms, but also in developing

informed and sophisticated advocacy skills to challenge and resist processes and systems designed to limit students' educational opportunities. Such teachers must place students, their lives, voices, perspectives, historical and cultural backgrounds, and emerging cultural formations at the center of teaching and learning efforts (hooks, 1994). These teachers should employ dialogical and praxis-oriented methods, foster students' identity development, and tap the wealth of resources available in communities and from other adults who know these students (Freire, 1970; Glass & Wong, 2003; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). In addition, these teachers use critical reflection and act as pedagogic militants (Gouvea, 1998) who achieve social justice outcomes by providing a high quality and culturally-relevant education to those least valued by our school system and society.

While it is facile to articulate a utopian vision that every student in California's public schools has a teacher that fits the above description, creating a teacher preparation program that can move candidates toward that ideal poses significant challenges. As the subsequent brief history exemplifies, faculty in the M/M Center embrace this challenge by explicitly making race-conscious and language-conscious policy and program decisions and by drawing on the linked traditions of critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and feminist pedagogy.

### **The M/M Center: A Brief History**

Frederick Douglass stated, "power concedes nothing without demand. It never has and it never will" (1857/1985, p.204). A key element in Douglass' notion of social transformation is the presence of individuals who will collectively make demands. The history of the M/M Center is, in many ways, a history of key groups of core faculty who organized to demand institutional power, so that the resources of various institutions could be employed for social justice purposes (Gurin & Naguda, 2006). In contrast to the current bleak context, where legislative rhetoric feigns a social justice stance while aggressively dismantling real social justice and affirmative action policy, landmark civil rights legislation in the 1970s provided the original M/M Center faculty with opportunities that they used strategically to advance the cause of educational equity.<sup>1</sup>

Our Center, originally called the Bilingual Center, began as one of many teacher preparation centers housed in the Department of Teacher Education. The Bilingual Center was formed in 1974 and was shaped by a wave of state and federal civil rights legislation that made specific provisions for bilingual education. Capitalizing on this policy context, our Center operated a number of projects in the 1970s which recruited and supported Chicana, migrant, and other bilingual students and educators in the College's credential and MA programs. The successes were impressive: one program recruited more than 25 Mexican-American and Chicana graduate students a year to our CSU campus at a time when there were only 30 Mexican-American and Chicana graduate students in the entire CSU system.

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These programs also spurred key curricular changes in the university program, resulting in two new required credential courses for teaching English as a second language and for cultural diversity and education, respectively. Faculty who later became the primary leaders in efforts to sustain and grow the Bilingual Center, including Dr. Duane Campbell (eventually the first chair of BMED), were instrumental change agents during this period. The success of these programs led to enrollment growth which in turn enabled the hiring of new faculty. The Dean at the time, Dr. Tom Carter, actively supported recruitment of new faculty hires with demonstrated expertise in bilingual education; the result was a sizable group of new faculty with an activist, social justice, and bilingual education agenda. Not only did this core faculty group introduce the new courses mentioned above, but they were also active in state policy-making, playing a key role in the creation of the Cross Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) emphasis and the Bilingual CLAD (BCLAD) emphasis for the basic credential.

Despite these successes, the work of this core faculty group was hampered by internal battles within their home department at the time about the very aims of the Bilingual Center. Ultimately, the core group of faculty members decided to form a separate Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department with the M/M Center as a primary program, supported by a smaller M.A. program with emphases in multicultural education and bilingual leadership. Though this separation was a difficult one on personal, professional, and political levels, the M/M Center faculty advocated for a separate department as a means for gaining more control over processes and policies that would advance the Center's mission, namely faculty hiring, student admissions, course content and course scheduling. Thus, in 1994 BMED was officially formed with eight of the core faculty members from the Teacher Education Department<sup>2</sup> as founding faculty. Since then, fourteen additional faculty, all with a history of social justice, bilingual education and/or educational equity projects, have joined BMED, while five have retired. Our status as a separate department has empowered us to effect important policy decisions within our department. Within the political context of our College, our status as a department also legitimizes aspects of our social justice mission, inserting them for consideration among the other competing variables (e.g., technology, reading instruction, etc.) in the budgeting and priority-setting process. For example, the College as a whole recently approved a BMED proposal for a College-level Equity Coordinator position. Had we remained an area group within a larger department, we would not have had the same means to initiate such actions.

These gains notwithstanding, since we have become a department shifts in the broader policy context have not favored our mission. A series of voter-initiated propositions (209, 227) have corroded the core principles and existing legislation supporting our department. New credential requirements adopted by the State Legislature and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing in 2001 weakened competencies required for teachers working with English Learners. Most

of the districts and schools that we work with have responded to mandates under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 by focusing intensively on language arts and mathematics through the use of highly scripted K-6 curricula. The introduction of the much-disputed California High School Exit Exam has further exacerbated educational inequalities for marginalized youth in our community. Ironically, though our department's faculty and student numbers are now more robust than in the past, it seems we must work twice as hard to see even half the gains enjoyed earlier.

Finally, the emphasis on race- and language-conscious policy-making (detailed below) is evident in our department name whereby we deliberately privilege bilingualism and bilingual education, both of which are perpetually under attack in state and national arenas. The M/M Center is so named to signal our commitment to students coming from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds, in particular African American students and students from recent immigrant communities (East Indian, Russian, Mexican, etc.) as well as those with a primarily oral tradition (Hmong, Mien).

### **Language-Consciousness and Race-Consciousness**

The theoretical and political orientations of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Rethinking Schools, 1994), multicultural education (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 2003), and feminist pedagogy (Fine, 2005; hooks, 1994; Weiler, 2001) form the foundation for our department. The primary components of our program—from recruitment to the experiences that students have while in the program—are shaped by the themes that transect these broader frameworks: education as a (1) personal act shaped by the experiences, knowledge, and positionality of those involved; (2) process that engages learners as whole beings who have emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and kinesthetic dimensions; (3) political act where actors make crucial choices about teaching and learning for whom and for what. Within this broader framework are the distinct but inter-related frameworks of language-conscious and race-conscious policy-making and program development which most actively shape the day-to-day lived experiences of M/M Center faculty members and students.

Delpit and Dowdy (2002) blend these two frameworks together when they state that “just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world—both in how we perceive our surroundings and in how those around us perceive us—our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speak*” (pp. xvii). Thus language usage, in a stratified society, marks one's position and privilege (or lack thereof) and language policy can be used to maintain a hierarchy that supports the dominant culture. Darder (1997) reminds us that “language represents one of the most significant educational tools in our struggle for cultural democracy” (p. 336) and that the “codes of power” enacted in K-12 schools promote “Standard English only,” reject bilingualism, biliteracy, and

bidialectalism, and further nativist aims of linguistic (and eventually cultural) genocide (Skutnab-Kangas, 2000). This form of neocolonialism strips children of various ethnicities from their own identity, language, and culture (Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003). Because the BMED faculty members have either experienced this internal colonization and/or actively fought against it, in their personal and professional lives, preparing teachers to maintain the heritage language of their students permeates all aspects of the M/M Center.

### ***Race-Conscious Teacher Recruitment Efforts***

Just as issues of language link tightly with issues of identity and, therefore, cannot be ignored or marginalized in the dialogue around how to best educate low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse children, issues of race and ethnicity must also be at the crux of our discussions about education for whom and for what. Some studies suggest that many teachers of color enact culturally coherent/relevant education by integrating into their teaching the background and experiences of children of color (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Southern Education Foundation, 2001). Other studies indicate that students of color perceive teachers of their own ethnicities as role models, whose very act of being a teacher demonstrates that people of color can hold roles of authority and influence (Gursky, 2002; Solomon, 1997). Noted scholars also reiterate that the ethnicity of a teacher is strongly associated with her/his personal expectations for the students with the same ethnic background and that such high expectations lead these students to feel a stronger sense of commitment to their own education and advancement (Foster, 1993; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Studies within several different ethnic and cultural communities reveal that teachers of the same ethnic and cultural heritage more successfully connect the cultural lives of the students to school knowledge, empowering students as learners and agents of change and increasing community connections to the school (Galindo, 1996; Lipka, 1991; Weisman, 2001; Wilder, 2000). Low expectations, limited or no role models, and a Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy yields none of these benefits, leaving students of color to feel disempowered and marginalized.

In light of this research, which is confirmed by the experiences of the BMED faculty and scores of students who have completed our program, we view with concern current demographic trends indicating that most students of color will (still) go through their entire public school experience without ever coming into contact with a teacher from their same ethnic group while White students may complete their K-12 education without ever having a teacher of color (Latham, 1999; Southern Education Foundation, 2001). The combination of these factors—the success that students of color experience when taught by teachers of color *and* the relatively small numbers of teachers of color—compels our department to use a race-conscious framework in all aspects of its work, from recruitment and outreach efforts to interview protocols and application evaluation rubrics to program structure and course content, as detailed below.

***Creating a Multicultural/Multilingual Pipeline to Teacher Education***

California's certification process has historically been conducted through 5<sup>th</sup> year, post-baccalaureate credential programs.<sup>3</sup> The typical single subject applicant completes a B.A./B.S. in his or her subject area (with a GPA of 2.75 or better) and passes the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) as requirements for admission into the credential program. For the typical multiple subjects applicant, basic requirements for admission into a credential program include a B.A./B.S. in any field (2.75 GPA or better) and passage of the CBEST and the California Subject Exam for Teachers (CSET), an exam testing competency in the core subjects taught in grades K-8. Eventually, multiple subject candidates will also need to pass the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) to earn their credential. The single subject and multiple subject programs comprise 42 units (including coursework and student teaching units).

The disconnect between undergraduate education and teacher preparation programs results in inconsistent advising and a lack of articulation across campus units that, when coupled with myriad credentialing requirements, generates a long list of obstacles that hamper the progress of students unfamiliar with higher education, a group that is comprised disproportionately of students of color. Though our department is a relatively small one, we have always committed faculty time to advising undergraduates interested in teaching careers and, until recently, were the only credential program in the College that did this. With expert and passionate leadership from a senior faculty person, who has been advising undergraduates since the early 1970s, our department enjoys an established presence in the undergraduate programs and students interested in becoming teachers know that our faculty will assist them in overcoming the various obstacles to earning a credential. In fact, local school district personnel and administrators, community leaders, community colleges, regional high schools, outreach staff (e.g., EOP, Migrant Education, etc.), and campus student associations direct students of color and bilingual students to our faculty since they know we can be relied on for consistent, informed and personalized mentoring and advising.

It is important to stress that advising encompasses much more than holding students accountable for meeting program requirements. First, early advising is key and students must be informed of their best options as soon as they decide to work towards a teaching credential. Early advising can allow well-prepared students to complete their B.A./B.S. and credentials in four years; it can also open opportunities to them for subject matter certification in additional subject matter and grade levels. For aspiring teachers who are not well prepared for college level work (e.g., some students for whom English is a second language, students whose high school math preparation was weak) early advising ensures the systematic selection of courses to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses in preparing for the subject matter examinations.

We have expanded the notion of advising to include other kinds of mentoring



and support. We help students form study groups, link them to financial aid sources that enable them to continue at the university, arrange for experiences (e.g., tutoring, working as bilingual aides) that will make them attractive and well prepared candidates for our program, and assist them in completing applications for the credential program (statements of intent, letters of recommendation, registering for tests), satisfying course requirements, and occasionally, addressing personal family issues—housing, work, health and child care. These may seem like tasks that a college student could easily manage; but for many of our students—who are the first in their families to attend college, who were educated in the very schools we hope they will transform as social justice teachers—it is imperative to provide coherent and precise explanations for how the system works and the steps they must take for success. This approach to advising generates the best results for students but also creates human resource issues that bump up against bureaucratic priorities like enrollment targets. Most importantly, our faculty advocate for low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse college students who still struggle with institutionalized racism, in subtle and outrageous forms, while working to augment the fledgling commitment of the institution to the preparation of diverse teaching candidates.

In addition to advising at the undergraduate level, we have also begun to insert ourselves strategically into the undergraduate programs by teaching a capstone course for Social Science majors interested in teaching, by offering an undergraduate minor in Multicultural Education (that includes pre-requisites for the teacher preparation program and a Hmong language course), and by teaching sections of a Freshman Seminar (an important early identification tool). Contact with students at these pivotal times offers a significant opportunity to shape their thinking about their future as teachers. Many of them begin to envision a future as social justice educators, and therefore pursue admission to our program. Thus, long before our candidates matriculate into the M/M Center, they have come to appreciate consistent contact with members of our faculty, despite the structural disconnection between the graduate and undergraduate programs.

### ***Language-Conscious and Race-Conscious Teacher Preparation***

Through the M/M Center, BMED offers both single subject and multiple subject preliminary teaching credentials,<sup>4</sup> and candidates with bilingual competence can also pursue the BCLAD Emphasis credential. Though “best practices” as defined by the teacher education literature (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2003; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Zeichner, 2002) are apparent in our overall program design, the theoretical orientations described above have been most influential in creating a program geared to fully prepare candidates to teach as advocates for educational equity in urban multicultural and multilingual schools.

These theories emerge in practice in several distinct ways. First, through specific training and direct instruction from BMED faculty, candidates deepen their understanding of multicultural issues and content, first language development and



second language acquisition, socio-cultural learning theories, and constructivist educational philosophies. In both our multiple subject and single subject programs, candidates complete additional coursework and field experiences focused on pedagogy, curriculum, and school organization that best serve the needs of English learners. Of note, our single subject candidates teach at least one section of English Language Development or SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English) in their secondary placement, a departure from most single subject programs where such requirements do not exist, despite the high proportions of ELLs in California's public schools.

Second, the BMED pathways are structured to provide candidates with varied opportunities to integrate theory, practice, and self-reflection. Courses have been deliberately structured to maximize theory-practice integration. In the MS program, several methods courses are taught at professional development school (PDS) sites where opportunities to engage with and critique the school curriculum as well as to apply methodologies with small groups of culturally and linguistically diverse students abound. Candidates also complete all coursework in their final semester at the 12<sup>th</sup> week to allow for three full weeks of unencumbered focus on student teaching (though they do about 30 hours of student teaching per week during the first 12 weeks as well). In the single subject program, methods courses are taught over the course of the entire academic year and faculty members teaching the methods courses also serve as the candidates' supervisor. In addition, this year-long structure allows instructors and candidates to capitalize on a process where strategies and content are introduced by methods faculty, candidates practice them, and have opportunities to question, refine and transform them with the guidance of seasoned mentors, both cooperating teachers and faculty. Through the site-based courses and a faculty commitment to candidate supervision, the department faculty maximize the opportunities available to candidates to continually integrate theoretical frameworks with applied knowledge.

Third, multicultural content, practices, and pedagogy that provide diverse learners with full access to core curriculum are emphasized in all courses and student teaching protocols. While multicultural education and strategies for teaching ELLs may be included in other teacher preparation programs, they are typically add-ons, conceptualized as a "celebration of diversity" rather than as a means of achieving social justice. As a result, candidates will likely internalize the notion that multicultural education should be done "if there is time." In the M/M Center, faculty use regular articulation meetings to insure that multicultural and educational equity strategies and content are integrated across the courses. Moreover, such integration allows us to push on the existing boundaries of the field. For example, in our course Bilingual Education: Introduction to Educating English Learners, we recently integrated content related to language varieties and dialects, specifically Black English Vernacular.

End-of-semester assessment events, where faculty as a whole review a mini-

portfolio of candidates' curriculum and instructional work, also assist us in evaluating our efforts to prepare candidates to be teachers for social justice. In addition, the BMED lesson plan template, developed by the faculty collectively, is a comprehensive tool that lays out specific components for lesson planning and includes prompts to guide candidates' thinking around issues of access for all learners, multicultural content, connections and applications to students' communities and social-political issues, and assessment of student learning and understanding. The template is used by all course instructors and supervisors. It communicates to candidates as well as to cooperating teachers a "vision" of multicultural education that we expect candidates to work towards. We have also created a new student teaching assessment tool, which corresponds with the lesson plan template and integrates elements from the Structured Instructional Observation Protocol (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004) with additional descriptors of multicultural and equity-related teaching behaviors and cooperative learning strategies.

Fourth, candidates are cohorted, providing a built-in peer support network that is often essential for the majority who work and maintain families during this full-time program. Significantly, this cohort experience is usually the first time in their post-secondary experience that our students of color will be the majority in a college classroom, rather than the lone student of color in a majority White peer group. We include a range of activities to highlight the vast resources available to the cohort by virtue of their peers' language, culture, ethnicity and identity. A particularly powerful activity is "long introductions," completed during orientation, where faculty and students tell their life stories to each other, making specific connections to their memories of being K-12 students and their experiences with various forms of oppression.

Fifth, candidates are carefully placed with mentors who share the M/M Center philosophy and serve as models of teacher/activists committed to educational equity. Often, they are M/M Center graduates and frequently they have returned to do master's work with BMED as well. To the extent that our numbers allow, our elementary candidates are placed in four PDS sites associated with our department. These placements maximize the congruence between our program philosophy and the modeling and mentoring that candidates receive in the field. Involvement in PDS schools, which also have high numbers of M/M graduates, also allows faculty to teach methods courses on site, in a "lab" setting, modeling theory-based practices with low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse students. In addition, BMED faculty provide professional development at the PDS sites, improving coherence between practices in the student teaching placements and the theory and practices highlighted in coursework.

Finally, candidate activism is encouraged with faculty leading the way on any number of educational issues facing our polemical state. Candidates participate in self-governance through the Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Association (MMTPA), an official student organization. The MMTPA helps to set a

political/educational agenda for the cohorts and plans their special graduation, where their compelling accomplishments—typically as the first in their families to go to college and beyond—can be celebrated by our community. Many a candidate has been socialized into social justice-oriented political action by working with the MMTA to campaign against anti-equity and anti-bilingual propositions. It has hosted two annual Teachers for Social Justice conferences, which featured former graduates as participants. It also provides in-kind services during the department's annual multicultural education conference.

These elements operate to recruit and retain students of color into our program. The opportunity to be a part of the “majority” is an attraction for most of our candidates, and sometimes serves to recruit students of color from other Centers. What candidates learn while in the program also matches their own interests to work as educational activists, often with intentions of returning to teach in their own marginalized communities.

### **M/M Students: Into, through and beyond the Pipeline**

As stated previously, M/M candidates represent the diverse children found in California's K-12 public education system. Thus, they enter the profession understanding and being able to relate to the lived experiences of their future students. They were/are learning Standard English as a second language or dialect, they are immigrants, they know firsthand how discrimination in its many forms marginalizes many low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse students. For M/M students, these experiences compel them to become educators and shape the kind of teacher they will become.

A typical student of color in our program has graduated from one of our regional high schools, and has usually received the kind of sub-standard education that we prepare them to transform as new teachers for social justice. Often, they have struggled in high school with issues related to language acquisition and institutionalized discrimination. Many can tell stories of teachers who were intolerant of their bilingualism and/or counselors who unjustifiably tracked them into low ability programs. At the same time, many speak with gratitude about teachers and other mentors who helped them to recognize and hone talents, and about family members who struggled to ensure that they could pursue dreams of high school completion, academic success, college programs, and professional lives. This range of experiences motivates our candidates to pursue teaching and to return to their communities to expand educational opportunities for the next generation of children, many of whom are their younger siblings and cousins. Using new paradigms from our program, they begin to identify their own experiences with institutionalized oppression and to (re)build a sense of faith in education as a means of resisting this oppression. These very struggles, once obstacles to high quality education, now inspire and shape the choices they make about the teachers they will become, with

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the first step being selecting the M/M Center as the place where they will receive appropriate preparation.

While in the program, we see our students actively engaging with theories related to educational equity, educational language policy and practice, and multicultural education. They struggle in this process, and recent educational policies that have resulted in highly monitored scripted curriculum in the elementary schools complicate their efforts to fully conceptualize their future as multicultural educators. However, they are persistent in their efforts to enact a democratic vision of education. One recent graduate reflects on her own K-12 experience and articulates how it has affected her struggle to become a multicultural, social justice educator:

My educational experiences have enabled me to grow both outside and within my family. They have exposed me to new horizons which were once only a distant dream. However, along this journey, I cannot forget the obstacles I have had to overcome and the struggles that have shaped my identity. A culmination of my own memories has shaped my philosophy on teaching.

Often, the experiences are so painful their memories are still palpable. Another recent graduate shares the following:

Since I was from China, many classmates and teachers in America did not understand me not only terms of language, but also in terms of my personality, my cultural characteristics, and my way of thinking...My freshman year in high school was a nightmare. The unforgettable experience of being totally ignored by my English teacher...I was totally alone without being answered when I asked questions. In addition, the teacher never paid any attention to me. Why? I never did find out the answer...my social experience was a joke during the high school years. The majority of the students did not like to talk to me or be my friend because they did not want to make friends with an "Alien." Yes, that's what they called me...I still remember that there was a White kid who explained to me: "Would you feel comfortable to hang out with someone you are more familiar with someone strange from the other planet? He looks different, talks different, and thinks different."

Still others relate that while these experiences serve as painful reminders of poor quality education, they still feel energized to work towards a more equitable educational system that eliminates such dehumanization and oppression. That conviction goes beyond just a love of their subject, but often reflects a need or even a sense of responsibility to give back to their communities and offer a different perspective on what learning can be like or even what life can be like. Through this alternative approach, grounded in transformational/multicultural/social justice education, BMED students aspire to provide access to quality education (which, in many cases, was denied them as K-12 students). One student stated, "I have found teaching to be more than just a noble profession. It is a career that can change the world. Teachers have the power to guide their students and create social change." The advocacy these students envision threads across attempts to democratize

classroom organization, curriculum, and student/teacher relationships. With inspiring commitment, our students write about how they perceive their role in that context.

... It is essential that teachers guide students and play off their interests. The more input students have regarding their education, the more they feel they are being heard and understood. Paulo Freire wrote about democracy in the classroom in a very practical form. He said, "Democracy, like any dream, is not made with spiritual words, but with reflection and practice" (Freire, 1980, p. 67). The task of being a teacher requires a conscious effort to challenge oneself and strive to create a classroom community inclusive of all our students. This quote takes away the mystical aspect of democracy and allows it to penetrate the walls of the school environment to become a real and tangible experience.

In addition to these excerpts, a brief survey tool focused on candidate knowledge base and orientation towards educational equity and multicultural education generated data about M/M Center candidates and those in another Center also with an "urban" focus. While both groups were in the final semester of their program, the M/M candidates listed at least twice as many strategies as the other group for creating democratic classroom structures and developing multicultural curriculum. In addition, the M/M candidates more frequently used professional terminology for these strategies (e.g., "use cooperative learning strategies" or "use TRIBES"); by contrast, the other candidates were more vague in their references (e.g., "create a safe place," "respect students"). Lest we over-interpret these results, it is also important to note the M/M candidates generated significantly more questions about these goals as did the other candidates. Further analysis of the M/M candidates' questions reveals a depth of critical thinking not evident with the other group. For example, they posed such questions as: How do I avoid a point system? How do I form partnerships with parents so that we can support students' behavior? How do I incorporate multicultural education without it being separate or just during the holidays? By contrast, the other candidates either had no questions or simply stated that they wanted to learn "more." We conclude that our candidates are actively engaged in the process of becoming multicultural, social justice educators. Their knowledge base is expanding and yet, they are still critically questioning and seeking deeper understandings.

These data combined with the results of an exit survey and a follow up study of alumni indicate that the M/M Center candidates are well-positioned to become leaders for educational equity. Exit survey data confirm that the majority of M/M Center graduates leave the program with a strong desire to work in low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, a disposition that is not the norm for graduates from other Centers. These data demonstrate that our candidates possess a strong sense of purpose, that they do not feel they have been prepared to be a teacher of all children, colorblind to differences and inequities, but rather a teacher for specific groups of children who have been consistently marginalized in our system. A follow up study of a sample of graduates who exited the program in

Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 supports this contention. Preliminary findings, based on contact with 72% of the Fall 2001 completers and 38% of the Fall 2002 completers, indicate over 80% from each cohort are teaching in low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse settings.<sup>5</sup>

Our own informal alumni networks also provide rich anecdotal information about our graduates. Within the Sacramento region, we can point to numerous program graduates who have taken on leadership positions in the public schools, most as site administrators, some as activist classroom teachers. The first Hmong principal in the area and several Mexican American and African American principals completed our program and later went through the Urban Leadership and Bilingual Administration programs in our college. At the only independent dual language immersion Charter school in our region, the Principal (a Latina from Nicaragua), the Vice Principal (a Pilipina), and the majority of teachers at the school are graduates of our program. The school serves a struggling inner-city neighborhood and is one of BMED's PDS sites. Graduates of our program, now working as site administrators, are occasionally featured in local media. Their contributions as leaders for educational equity in some of our system's most disadvantaged communities are always highlighted. Other graduates have assumed leadership positions at district, county and state-level units, and in community-based organizations, including one Chicana graduate who was the executive director for a nationally recognized inter-faith, community organizing group.

Many of our graduates focus their work on activism within their classrooms or with/on behalf of their students. A Puerto Rican/Mexican American graduate and intermediate grades teacher (also on the board for the above-referenced community-based organization) infuses her activism into her students' curriculum. These students are experienced activists in their own right and leave her class having addressed members of the local school board, regional transit board and other policy organizations. Another Chicana graduate was one of the leaders of a hunger strike at the state capitol aimed at maintaining funds for schools serving low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. She has also developed a special program for students coming from the historically disenfranchised school where she teaches. An African American graduate developed a Saturday school program at her school attended by mainly African American students, who are battling the achievement gap present since they first entered school. This same teacher has become the teacher of choice of the Black parents at the school and two years ago was nominated as the outstanding teacher in her school. Other graduates have also been nominated for "Teacher of the Year" awards in their respective districts.

## **Conclusion**

The M/M Center is unique in being a program focusing specifically on teacher education for low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse candidates,

preparing them to serve young students who live in communities much like their own. The original founders of the program came from either low-income and culturally and linguistically minority backgrounds or had histories of commitment to working for the rights of people coming from these communities. Although initially funding was provided through Title VII, this funding has not been a critical part of program operations for many years.

Moreover, the M/M Center would have probably persisted without funding because the faculty did not see a mainstream, predominantly majority culture program, as an alternative. It is highly likely that founding faculty would have not remained and junior faculty would not have come had the program not had its original focus. Faculty personal and professional commitment to the philosophy of the program is a *sine qua non* for maintenance of the program. Whether or not a separate pathway in the existing teacher education program would have had as much of an impact is questionable. Our commitment to low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse students will remain; especially now that we have experienced the personal and professional rewards of working for and with students from these backgrounds. Furthermore, the critical mass of administrators and teachers from the M/M Center who are in the schools and district offices in the region will not allow us to waiver in our commitments to their students. It can be done! *¡Sí se puede!*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to acknowledge the radical wisdom and courage of BMED's founding faculty and the valued work of other department colleagues who have contributed to this article in spirit.

<sup>2</sup> When we refer to the Teacher Education Department in this brief history section we are referencing the department as it was in the early 1990s and before. We would like to note that there is more agreement about educational equity goals in our College now than at that time.

<sup>3</sup> The Legislature has mandated "blended" programs where completion of the bachelor's degree and the credential occur simultaneously, but most candidates in the state still earn certification through 5<sup>th</sup> year credential programs.

<sup>4</sup> In 2001, AB 1059 and SB 2042 created new teacher preparation program standards which significantly weakened previous credential options (e.g., CLAD) related to competencies for teaching ELLs. M/M Center candidates complete a program that exceeds these standards, with two separate courses on working with ELLs and extensive field experiences with this population.

<sup>5</sup> The survey analysis did not include a determination of candidate *choice* of school setting. While we recognize that a high proportion of new teachers are only offered jobs in low income, culturally and linguistically diverse settings, we feel that the persistence of our graduates in these settings indicates some level of preference and choice.

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