Preservice Teachers' Reflections and the Role of Context in Learning To Teach

By Colleen M. Fairbanks & Julia Meritt

Activity and Reflection in Preservice Teacher Education

Recent efforts in teacher education have focused upon assisting preservice teachers develop reflective practices as they enter the teaching profession (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Grossman, 1991&1992; Hollingsworth, 1994; Zeichner, 1983). These professional development activities are aimed at creating circumstances in which preservice teachers can reflect upon their own histories (both in and out of school), upon broader debates about schooling, upon their actions as developing teachers, and upon the settings in which learning-to-teach activities take place as they complete preservice education. In a previous study of novice teachers (Fairbanks, *et al.*, 1995), we examined the nature of reflective processes among a cohort of student teachers completing their teacher education program in an urban middle school setting. In this study we found through observation and dialogue that preservice teachers created a base of information from which they could

Colleen M. Fairbanks is an assistant professor and Julia Meritt is a doctoral student, both in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Texas at Austin.

examine their own and others' practices in light of readings from coursework, their initial beliefs about teaching, and the effects of specific practices on students' school experiences. In the course of these activities, the preservice teachers used their observations and reflection-in- and -on-action (Schön, 1983) to engage in purposeful change, a conscious decision to adopt, maintain, or alter specific teaching practices.

As we examined the preservice teachers' materials, we became increasingly convinced that the role context played in the development of preservice teachers' beginning practice required further exploration. In particular, we have begun to investigate "how the act of teaching is used by the beginning teachers to acquire practical knowledge" (Russell & Munby, 1991, p. 185). How, for example, do the institutional practices in a specific school site influence the socialization of new teachers? Do preservice teachers draw upon the practices of cooperating teachers or examples from course readings in their practice? In what ways? What is the relationship between their experiences in the schools and their emerging identities as educators? In order to answer these questions, we have turned to activity theory to clarify the complex nature of learning a practice within a social institution such as a school.

Activity theory focuses on the integration of knowledge and practice. It argues that learning is situated within contexts that both transform knowledge and the context itself as practitioners carry out their activities. As Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) point out, "there is no activity that is not situated" (p. 33), and hence no learning that is not situated. As a consequence, Lauren B. Resnick (1991) states plainly that "every cognitive act must be viewed as a specific response to a specific set of circumstances" (p. 4). Extending this position, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that not only does context affect learning, but also that individuals' actions construct context. Understanding the situatedness of learning, then, depends on understanding "the whole person rather than 'receiving' a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other" (p. 33).

One means of examining the interplay between an individual learning to teach and the setting in which learning takes place is to examine the means by which individuals forge an identity as a member of the community of practitioners. For Lave and Wenger (1991), becoming a member of the community of practitioners is a process of learning to talk within the community and through such talk to assume a role of "legitimate peripheral participation" (p. 109). In the case of preservice teachers, coursework, field placements, and student teaching activities are embedded in specific schools with specific mentor teachers and university faculty who constitute "teaching practice" in specific ways. In addition, each preservice teacher brings a (provisional) set of knowledge, values, and beliefs to the university and school settings where her teacher preparation takes place. These institutional and individual perspectives influence how preservice teachers come into their identities as practitioners (Kagan, 1992). In addition, their concrete, daily classroom activities

shape the preservice teachers' experiences (Feiman-Nemser *et al.*, 1994).

The organization of teacher education programs into university courses and field placements gives such programs characteristics of both formal learning settings and of apprenticeships. Some theorists argue that apprentices learn without deliberate instruction because they learn as they carry out the activities of practitioners (Lave, 1991). However, Barbara Rogoff asserts that the apprenticeship model serves to illuminate school-based learning situations in several ways: (1) apprentices learn as they participate in skilled activities with others; (2) apprentices learn to meet socially valued goals; (3) learning is facilitated through interaction with more skilled people; and (4) "apprentices seldom learn alone" (pp. 349-350). These characteristics of apprenticeship learning are particularly well suited not only to children learning in school but also to teacher candidates learning to teach: preservice teachers are guided in their acquisition of teaching practices by more experienced mentors, they have opportunities to participate actively in classrooms, gradually taking on greater responsibility for teaching responsibilities under the supervision of a mentor teacher and university faculty, and they learn their practice through interactions with their peers and mentor teachers, in university settings, and through the teaching activities they undertake in classrooms. As Rogoff points out, it is through "repeated and varied experience in routine and challenging situations" that individuals become "skilled practitioners in the specific cognitive activities of their communities" (p. 351).

The purpose of this research is to apply activity theory to the learning-to-teach experiences of four preservice teachers. We analyze the products of preservice teachers' reflective activities and observational data gathered during their year-long preparation, looking closely at the intersections between context and the shaping of practice. We examine the ways in which these preservice teachers contend with the responsibilities, the development of their professional identities, and their experiences in the teaching context. Further, the application of the apprenticeship model to the preservice teachers' interactions with more skilled others allow us to discern ways in which they construct their teaching practice.

Program Components and Participants

The data for this study were derived from a year-long teacher education program designed to prepare middle school teachers in urban settings. The program offered a cohort of fifteen students university coursework and field placements with two primary aims: (1) to see professional teaching practice as a reflective activity in which teachers make instructional and procedural decisions based upon their beliefs and assumptions about the students they teach, the school setting, the methods available to them from coursework and mentor teachers, and the subject matter they teach; (2) to gain experience teaching students of diverse ethnic and socio-economic background in a culturally sensitive and academically sound manner.

The Program and Its Setting

The preservice teachers were apprenticed into professional practice under the guidance of university faculty and supervisors as well as school-based cooperating teachers. Course assignments and beginning teaching experiences provided clearly defined and structured assignments by which the preservice teachers examined educational theory and practice in the context of the classrooms they observed and in which they conducted their practice teaching activities (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; O'Donaghue & Brooker, 1996). Students were encouraged to take risks and to analyze critically their practices and their values. During the fall semester, the cohort attended a classroom management course, participated in an interdisciplinary team for two-and-one-half days per week, and took content area methods courses. During the student teaching semester, the preservice teachers completed a ten-week student teaching assignment in two content areas (*e.g.*, language arts and math). Throughout the year, the preservice teachers maintained reading/observation journals, conducted an interactional analysis of a lesson they taught (videotaping and transcribing the lesson, identifying types of interaction among students and teachers, and assessing teaching performance [cf., Au, 1994; Cazden, 1988; Gaskins *et al.*, 1994]), compiled a folio on an individual student as well as a professional teaching portfolio, participated in goal-setting sessions with their university supervisor, and assessed their own teaching performance. In addition, each preservice teacher was interviewed at the beginning and end of the student teaching semester. These open-ended interviews explored each preservice teachers' philosophy of teaching, the events that influenced her over the course of the year, and the usefulness of program activities.

The preservice teachers completed their student teaching with guidance from both cooperating teachers and a university supervisor. The university supervisor was committed to allowing the preservice teachers as much latitude as possible in constructing their professional identity. She scheduled regular goal-setting meetings with them in order to talk about school and to foster professional growth based upon self-identified goals. In this capacity, the supervisor acted as facilitator for a smooth transition from student to teacher. She observed lessons formally, allowed the preservice teachers to present lessons' strengths and weaknesses, and offered immediate feedback to the lessons taught. During the final evaluation, the preservice teachers assessed themselves along with their cooperating teachers and the university supervisor.

The preservice teachers selected for this study completed their field placements at Windsor Middle School, a small middle school located in Austin, Texas. The school's student population is typical of many southwestern U.S. cities: over 90 percent of the student population is either Hispanic (approximately 65 percent) or African American (approximately 30 percent), most students are eligible for free lunch programs (84 percent), and the students struggle to pass the state's compe-

tency examinations. This school setting presented many of the preservice teachers with their first encounters with urban youth. The school has had a reputation as a "tough" school, although the preservice teachers were often surprised at its orderliness, its clean facilities, and the generally positive atmosphere maintained by both its students and its faculty.

The teachers and administrators at Windsor have taken an active part in structuring the preservice teachers' field experiences as well as some of their coursework. The teachers' philosophies of teaching and hence practice varied widely. For example, Mr. B seemed to feel order and organization were of paramount importance. Ms. F displayed a keen interest in thorough lesson and unit planning and implementation. Ms. W seemed to feel the administrative constraints on her teaching very strongly. Mr. H was intrigued by the ways in which creativity encouraged motivation to learn science. Mr. P juggled both teaching and administration. As a result, the preservice teachers obeserved and participated in a variety of classroom settings. The principal also maintained an active role during student teaching, requiring, for example, that they submit lesson plans in the same format as teachers within the school. These plans were reviewed by the principal and returned to the preservice teachers in the same manner used with the school's regular faculty. Throughout the 1995-1996 academic year, the principal insisted that lessons supported students' acquisition of skills related to the state competency examinations.

The Participants

Eight preservice teachers were placed at Windsor Middle School. (The other seven preservice teachers completed their field placements at another Austin middle school.) Of these eight, we have selected four as informants for this study. Our selections were based upon several criteria: (1) commitment to teaching as a career (two of the preservice teachers at Windsor intended to pursue other activities after graduation); (2) the range and diversity of the preservice teachers' background, success in teaching, and reflective activities; (3) the range and diversity of the preservice teachers' academic specialization and academic abilities; and (4) our assessment of their interactions with supervisors and cooperating teachers.

Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

We collected a variety of information from the cohort of preservice teachers. Reflective journals, essays, the interactional analysis of lesson they had taught, the student folio (a small case study of an individual student), and observation and assessment reports were gathered during the fall semester. The student teaching semester provided us with considerably more data: teaching portfolios, reflective journals, and entrance and exit interviews, as well as observation reports and goal setting documents. These records, along with our own observations of the preservice

teachers, provided us with a rich picture of the preservice teachers as well as their preferred teaching methods.

The records were then analyzed in two ways: first for patterns of reflective activity, and second for elements of the context that shaped the preservice teacher's socialization. In order to establish patterns of reflective activity, the data set from each preservice teacher was coded independently using four categories: critical observation, reflection-on-action (*e.g.*, analysis or interpretation of events), reflection-in-action (*e.g.*, evidence that in the process of an event the preservice teacher redefined or reconceptualized the event), and purposeful change (*e.g.*, a decision to modify a practice based upon the preservice teacher's observations or analysis of events) (Fairbanks, *et al.*, 1995; Schön, 1983).

We then examined each preservice teacher's record for the ways in which their learning-to-teach experiences were shaped by: (1) contextual influences such as interactions with students, cooperating teachers, or university faculty; (2) events or teaching activities that became significant to them; and (3) responses to their experiences as novice teachers. The focus of our analysis was guided by previous research in activity theory and theories of situated learning (Keller & Keller, 1993; Rogoff, 1991; Tharp, 1991). These perspectives on learning suggest that individuals interacting in a situation engage in, as Lave (1993) puts it, "open-ended processes of improvisation with social, material, and experiential resources at hand" (p. 13). We examined the preservice teachers' data sets to account for the social, material, and experiential aspects of learning-to-teach by attending to the ways in which they used, modified, or responded to the resources and conditions of their preservice teaching experiences. For example, we analyzed lesson plans and teaching journals for the elements of the learning-to-teach context that shaped the content or teaching practices the preservice teachers used. In addition, we examined the preservice teachers' response to the lesson or to the feedback she received about it. From this analysis, three significant patterns of interaction with teaching contexts emerged: shifting conceptions of professional identity, using and improvising on models, and transforming teaching through meaningful events.

In the following sections, we look closely at the dynamics of context and its impact on the preservice teachers' socialization into the teaching community. We begin with a brief profile of each of the preservice teachers that emphasizes the ways in which their professional identities shifted over the course of the preservice year. Then we look across the cases at their uses of models and at the significant events that influenced their conceptions of teaching.

Shifting Conceptions of Professional Identity

The preservice teachers began their practice teaching by designing lesson plans and teaching one class period per day. They participated in team planning meetings and conferences. By the end of the semester they assumed all of the duties of the

regular teacher, including hall duty, detentions, faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, classroom and management, and instruction for their students. In this section, we explore the transitions and shifts of each student in her understanding of being a teacher.

Karen

Karen began the preservice year wanting to facilitate learning. Midway through the year, she began to vacillate between being a learning guide and being a disciplinarian; the two roles did not seem compatible to her. She enjoyed making math games and designing labs for students but resented misbehavior in class as an intrusion on her other roles. By the end of the year, she seemed to strike a balance between the two roles:

> I would try to make it [content] interesting and relevant to them...try to capture their attention.... B and I tried to run the lab one way and it was just chaos. And we both sat down and brainstormed "O.K., what can we do differently. O.K., the groups are too big.... You get that many kids that close together they are going to behave that way. It's just the law of physics or something...

Karen's focus shifted from perceiving the role of a teacher as that of facilitator, to that of disciplinarian, and, finally, to that of someone who needs to be proficient at both. Further, her comment reveals a belief that she must add to those roles by creating an environment that encourages success and allows for risk-taking.

Karen's success during student teaching seemed to rely upon her mature ability to integrate the various pieces of her teaching context in a way that made sense to her. She positioned herself as a responsible educator considering the many issues that she must address in the classroom. She pondered assessment practices, collaborative and individualized instruction, and interactions with students. Perhaps most important, though, she merged different parts of her own identity with those of the particular students, courses, and instructional requirements that the context presented her.

Karen had completed her undergraduate degree five years subsequent to her decision to become a teacher. She worked in the intervening years as a crisis counselor and bank teller. Bright, critical, and conscientious, Karen applied herself to coursework and teaching activities with seriousness. She was conscious of the financial obligations she and her spouse had assumed in order for her to return to school. These background experiences prepared her for the daily routines of teaching and for constructive interactions with students.

Karen's experience in her field placement was largely positive, although she struggled some with discipline and with what she perceived as her "boring" teaching style. She completed her student teaching in math and science, eagerly drawing upon methods courses and professional development seminars to develop lessons. Her two cooperating teachers were quite different. In math, Karen worked

with Mr. A, who encouraged and supported her but left her to plan as she chose. With Ms. F in science, Karen experienced a much more collaborative environment, planning and assessing instruction cooperatively. In her reflective journal, Karen often compared these two teachers in order to construct her own practice. She decided, for example, that she could not be as "laid back" as Mr. A but did not want to be as strict as Ms. F. Above all, Karen seemed more willing than other preservice teachers to mold herself to the school's assumptions about learning and its expectations for teachers—the activity setting at Winsdor.

Jenny

Jenny's primary interests centered on classroom interaction from the beginning of the preservice year, and she emphasized her role in constructing a dialogue with her students. She also actively sought the support of her cooperating teachers and university supervisor, chronicling the natural evolution from intern to full-fledged preservice teacher. Her placement with two supportive cooperating teachers during the internship phase of practice teaching gave her opportunities to try activities and lessons learned in her methods courses. She said as much in her journal: "Ms. R gives me lots of room and I like how she respects my ideas as well as understands what I am going through during this stage of my teaching." Jenny's concern with students' participation and involvement helped her analyze and modify each lesson taught in a surprisingly proactive way. She created an inviting and stimulating environment for herself and her students, keeping the process simple while she sorted out for herself what it meant to be a teacher. Jenny's transition from university student to beginning teacher was characterized by this quiet reflection and the dialectic she created across her own and others' practices.

Jenny used her journal as a place to better understand herself as an educator when moments of frustration arose. For instance, reflecting on a student's treatment during a conference and his response, she voiced concerns about how the student was treated and how she hoped to be more sympathetic when she became a teacher on her own:

> A ran into the nearby apartments, but eventually was caught, cuffed, and carted off to jail. The scenario made me think harder about what I'm doing in the schools and how I could have handled the situation differently if I were in a better position.

Dissatisfied with the outcomes of this event, Jenny wondered if she could have better advocated for A and prevented his fleeing the school were she in the position of regular teacher. As it was, she could do little but watch in frustration as the circumstances unfolded before her. Of particular importance is Jenny's emerging recognition of her own, distinctive beliefs regarding responsible teaching practice and her articulation of these beliefs in her journal.

Another aspect of learning-to-teach for Jenny involved getting to know her students. For example, learning from Ms. R that a student did not like her came as

a surprise. She thought she and the student had a positive relationship. Reflecting on her role with her students she writes:

> The different roles and relationships a person can play and be involved in through teaching amazes me.... This "thing" with C has shown me yet another teacher-student relationship and has made me think about the best way to go about maintaining the casual talking between us, yet [have] authority in the classroom.

This event provided Jenny with an opportunity to consider her role as teacher in relation to students. Her journal entry reveals the tension she felt between friend-liness and authority. She stated: "Every student can learn, but it is up to the teacher to find the most appropriate teaching style to accommodate each student."

As the year came to a close, Jenny anticipated with confidence her own classroom. She described, for example, what happened when Mr. A was out sick:

> I kind of became excited about having everything to myself. I didn't get nervous or anything, even though I knew today would be a test of my patience.... I made it through the day and I really like being in control of the room. I can't wait to have my own classroom and run things the way I want to.

Jenny felt her management techniques would work for her. Mr. B's absence from school gave her a chance to implement them and test that theory. She had made, in her eyes, the transition from university student to new teacher, drawing upon her many experiences, even the less positive ones, to help her discover the teacher she wanted to become.

Maria

Conversely, Maria was often overwhelmed and confused about lesson plan-ning and implementation. Once, rather than seek help with planning a lesson she dumped it on one of her cooperating teachers with no warning. This incident gave both her cooperating teachers and her university supervisor pause to consider her readiness to teach. The university supervisor attempted to hold a four-way confer-ence with both of Maria's cooperating teachers and Maria in order to discuss Maria's progress and possible interventions. Since this meeting was not possible, the university supervisor met with each teacher individually first and then held an extended goal-setting conference with Maria. Out of this conference came a single goal—keep it simple.

The complexity of Maria's teaching context added extra layers that may have contributed to her confusion. First, Maria's particular placement followed a very creative and self-sufficient student teacher from the previous year. Perhaps this led Ms. M and Mr. P to expect similar performance from Maria. Secondly, Maria is tri-lingual and was given an ESL/regular education placement. As a result, she handled three preparations and worked with both cooperating teachers simultaneously while the rest of the cohort worked with only one cooperating teacher at a time. More than this, Maria expected very explicit, carefully organized directions and

feedback before and after she taught. In the absence of such feedback she was understandably unsure of how to proceed.

In contrast to Karen, who actively sought information and advice, Maria felt it was not her place to question her cooperating teachers. Maria felt that student teaching was a time to add to her scrapbook of experiences, a time to learn from her mistakes, a time of personal growth. While it is all of those things, it is also a time in which students are expected to display teaching proficiencies for which they will be evaluated. Perhaps she did not understand, as the others did, the implicit requirement of student teaching—the important responsibility she had to the students she taught.

Maria's difficulty in practice teaching stood in opposition to her ability to analyze her learning-to-teach experiences. She responded to texts and coursework thoughtfully. Her philosophy of teaching suggests the breadth of her conception of teaching. "To me," she writes, "there are three basic natures of teaching. Teaching is challenging the mind; teaching is providing support; and teaching is helping acquiring wisdom." Maria's stance regarding teaching was evident within her lesson and unit planning. She also posed interesting questions on a global level in her reflective journal. She notes, for example,

> In reading the articles about kidwatching, I generally agreed with both authors of its importance. However, I realized that when I took what I read into the real world is wasn't as easy as they seem to express.

She went on to say that the articles were based on a "rich, innovative curriculum" that she rightly felt she was not seeing at Windsor.

Thus, Maria had difficulty translating insights acquired from reading about and reflecting upon teaching to classroom practice. In the first place, one of her cooperating teachers required Maria to follow his lesson plans verbatim at the beginning of her student teaching, thinking that this experience would help her make the transition to planning on her own. When she was allowed to construct her own plans, Maria's attempts to weave ideas, high levels of student interaction and involvement, and real-life practical applications for her students were promising. However, she struggled with the practical details necessary to create lessons that combined concepts learned in university courses with the requirements of the classroom. For example, Maria once separated her students into various groups representative of those at the Constitutional Convention. She provided each group with different goods/services to barter with. The students really seemed to enjoy trading painter's pants for prime farmland among other things. Yet the lesson did not go as smoothly as she hoped. As was her tendency, she succumbed to discouragement, became overwhelmed, and perceived the entire lesson as a failure.

In a similar way, Maria took on activities but often abandoned them because they were beyond her abilities. For example, her cooperating teacher, Mr. P, encouraged her to design her own grading system, a task about which she was

initially enthusiastic. In her entrance interview she said:

> Mr. P is giving me a chance to make my own grading system...so I'm going to propose to him a grading system. Maybe it could be very similar to his or not.... I feel good about it, but then I feel it's a lot of work.

This task was not consistent with her abilities, and unfortunately Mr. P expected her to act as a competent member of the teaching community rather than as a partial participant in need of guidance and modeling. Maria ventured into the role of a full participant before she was fully ready to do so, and she eventually dropped the project. Events such this one contributed to Maria's often frustrating experience as a student teacher.

Maria's transition to professional practice was further clouded by contradictions she found in teachers' responsibilities. For example, she saw a conflict between her desire to encourage risk-taking in her students and the requirement that she grade their attempts:

> If I have a student for a year, I want the student to go out of my classroom being a little bit wiser in the way he or she behaves or thinks.... I want them to experience failure if that's what it will take them. [Why?] Because I learn from my failures, too. I find that personal experience is the best way of learning things.... I want them to realize that because [they] are not perfect so just work on what you have best. [What kind of safety net can you provide?].... All I could do is encouragement like, I don't like giving grades.

Maria expressed the tension created by trying to encourage critical thinking in her students and assessing their performance. Because she was compelled to grade students' attempts to think, she felt she could not also encourage risk taking. Perhaps the broad pedagogical lens though which she saw learning—both her own and that of her students—made it too difficult for her to reconcile these tensions through her student teaching experiences.

Although Maria was aware of problem areas, she did not often make her thoughts accessible through oral or written discourse. She seemed to view the whole professional development year as a forum for experimentation unencumbered by accountability. As such, she did not use student teaching as an opportunity to construct practical solutions on her own or with the help of others. At the end of the student teaching semester, she confronted the supervisor about her final evaluation remarks saying, "This is too much to expect of a student." Her words had a ring of truth, in that the expectations placed on student teachers often seem to ignore the fact that they are, in fact, students. The lack of carefully sequenced scaffolding by the cooperating teachers that she experienced certainly mitigated against a successful student teaching experience.

Susan

Constrained by the need to raise math scores on the state competency exam,

Susan's cooperating teacher in math, Ms. W, would not allow her to construct her own, unique lesson plans. In contrast to Karen and Jenny, Ms. W did not provide her with a chance to collaborate on lesson planning. Instead she was obliged to follow the plans and lesson presentation format that her cooperating teacher had already established. In science, however, Susan had the opportunity to plan an interdisciplinary unit with Mr. H. She referred often to the goals they had and the lessons they were planning together; they both felt they were team-teaching during this unit.

By the end of the year, Susan appeared to have taken on the role of classroom teacher. For example, she felt she could allow only 15 minutes for the last goal-setting conference with the supervisor because she had more pressing appointments with her students regarding end-of-term grades. She managed only a short meeting with her university supervisor, something she lingered over at the beginning. Susan represented herself as "on top of things" throughout the year, by talking about lessons, inservice sessions, and interactions with other practitioners. She seemed to prefer spontaneous or casual discussions about her teaching activities over thinking or writing reflexively about them. Debriefing conferences were filled with Susan's comments and defensive explanations regarding choices she made during a lesson. It seemed that Susan felt she had more to offer the student teaching experience than the experience had to offer her. For example, in her exit interview Susan enumerated ways she thought goal-setting could be improved:

> I wouldn't schedule any goal-settings for the first week...of student teaching. Its kind of like what questions do I ask when I really don't know about the topic? You're kind of maybe grabbing at something. [The final evaluation form] may be a guide, but I'm not sure if we're able to really conceptualize it before we've done the teaching. You've got to know what it is before you give it a name.

Her advice depicts her sense of the preservice year. It also illustrates her tendency to reflect critically upon the work of others with whom she interacted at school.

Susan's difficulties lay not so much with planning but with learning how to cross the border between student and professional. She took on the confident persona of a seasoned teacher very early in the year. This view did not, however, always coincide with those of her supervisors. For example, one of her cooperating teachers voiced concern that Susan took on projects or activities without consulting the cooperating teacher. In this way, it seemed as though Susan did not feel accountable to others during student teaching. She did not seem to conceive of herself as an apprentice. Consequently, it was very difficult for anyone to guide her through the process of learning to teach.

Partly, Susan's struggle can be explained by her previous classroom experience. Susan had worked extensively with children at a local elementary school, assisting in the development of computer-based classrooms. As a result, she was not as "new" to the school environment as preservice teachers often are. Her notions of

teaching practice seemed to be firmly established, and she did not appear to feel the need for guidance. This assessment is not intended to suggest that Susan did not feel a need to learn and grow. It suggests, instead, that her understanding of her experience far outweighed others' observations related to her teaching. Susan's journals document this tendency to observe others more critically than herself, although she was capable of assessing her own performance and charting her professional development. Her self-assessments indicate that she could identify both strengths (working one-on-one with students) and weaknesses (managing whole group instruction). She avidly pursued professional development opportunities available through the district and attempted to implement new ideas in her teaching practice. She was especially interested in the kinds of hands-on instructional activities she preferred as a student. In this regard, she acted in ways more characteristic of member than apprentice, and the mismatch between her beliefs and the expectations of her supervisors may have created her resistance to supervision.

Partial Participation

In the partial participation of the school context and in social dialogue with the supervisor, cooperating teachers, and peers, these four preservice teachers may or may not have been assisted in juggling the multiple roles of teacher, student, and colleague while learning to teach. Moving from partial to full participant in the school, the preservice teachers fell on a continuum of success in maneuvering practitioner roles. Jenny and Karen were both more successful and more supported in conceiving ways to juggle the multiple roles they encountered than Susan and Maria. Jenny and Karen seemed comfortable practicing the varied skills necessary to move from student to teacher. Their cooperating teachers authorized them to negotiate the role of teacher in ways congruent with their expertise and understanding at that point in time. Hence they facilitated the preservice teachers' joining the community of practice at Windsor Middle School. Maria and Susan, on the other hand, viewed many tasks as simply requirements of the university and less connected to building their own future practice. They were "on their own" either by choice or by default, and both encountered difficulties that required the intervention of the university.

Using and Improvising on Models

As preservice teachers begin their apprenticeship in teaching, they draw upon models acquired through observation, course work, and previous experience to construct their own practice. As Charles Keller and Janet Dixon Keller (1993) point out, models of practice are derived from social and material resources (*e.g.*, other practitioners, examples of previous actions, or written materials). They provide to newcomers routine actions and everyday procedures. However, these models are not adopted outright by either novice or experienced practitioners. Instead, knowl-

edge about practice derived from social and material sources are "continually being refined, enriched, or completely revised by experience..." (p. 127). Preservice teachers, for example, may begin their teaching experiences using a cooperating teacher's lesson plans or examples taken from coursework, but in their use of these models, they adapt them to the context in which they are teaching.

All four of the preservice teachers consciously modeled the teachers they observed. They borrowed lesson plans and teaching strategies as well as ways to interact with students. Maria used her cooperating teacher's note-taking procedures to "cover" material from the history textbook. Although in science Susan used her cooperating teacher's models less often than the other preservice teachers, she did draw upon her cooperating teacher's organization of science projects and cooperative groups when developing her own units. In Jenny's observations of Ms. L, a first-year math teacher, she found many examples that she would like to emulate, especially Ms. L's caring and concern for her students and her attempts to provide hands-on activities to make math more interesting for the students. For Karen, her unsuccessful implementation of Ms. F's discipline plan led to her realization that ultimately she needed to develop her own.

Outright adoption of others' plans or procedures was, however, rare, and usually occurred because the cooperating teacher had already established specific routines with students, and was often undertaken with skepticism. Jenny notes in her journal, for example, that "Ms. R's five-step writing process is different than how I would set it up, but I had to stick to what they know, at least it's something!" Maria questioned the grading procedure saying,

> I had the chance to grade the Loyalist v. Patriot. I don't think this thing should be graded within a 45-to-50-minute period. I mean they worked four weeks for it. I gotta see the process! I can't just do this.

These examples illustrate both the preservice teachers' desire to build their own classrooms and the contrast in their responses to the contexts of their learning-to-teach. Although Jenny notices the differences in how she would teach writing process, she also views the context as malleable, as one she can live with. Maria, on the other hand, gave up when she encountered difficulties. Her response seemed to be the result of both her own temperament and the relations she had with her cooperating teachers.

The relations between preservice teachers and cooperating teachers also helped determine what new methods the preservice teachers could bring to the classroom. Jenny, for example, worked with two teachers who were open to new activities, giving Jenny confidence to try lessons and units that she wanted:

> Well, I'm working with Ms. R. and Mrs. L. and they're both very open to trying new things.... They really know the kids they work with so that makes a big difference. They want me to try new things. They want me to go in and do whatever I want.... Seeing them fail and succeed at their new experiences. They just told me

today that they still go through, you know, good things and bad ideas and so...

As a consequence, Jenny modified a writing strategy called "5-7-10" in language arts. She writes in her journal:

> Today I tried the "5-7-10" activity in languages arts, which I modified to the "5-10-30" activity for first period. They were given prompts (sorry Dr. F, I had to) for writing and they brainstormed memories or thoughts on all or one topic.

Similarly, Karen and Susan implemented activities learned in methods courses, adapting these activities for their seventh grade students. In her entrance interview, Karen explained that:

> [The students] are really doing a lot of, I guess, seat work. You know, individual seat work. I want to try to do something else. I have seen them use some manipulatives in small groups last semester, but I still want to bring in more of that.

Susan instituted a dialogue journal activity that she learned during language arts methods. Even Maria consulted her college history textbooks to generate lesson ideas and to bring more perspectives into the classroom: "[College textbooks have] their own opinion of how history is and its kind of neat to find that out... I think it would be interesting for students to know how other people thought about this."

Karen and Susan also collected ideas, plans, games, and activities from additional sources. Karen, for example, wrote:

> I'm very excited about teaching math. I'll be able to use ideas from the seminar I went to last weekend at the Professional Development Academy. I got a lot of games and activities I can reproduce easily, and they cover topics the students will be working on in class. What great timing.

Susan found information connected to a roller-coaster unit while searching the internet one evening. She was able to give her students an array of interesting facts as well as show them pictures of very large roller coasters around the country.

The preservice teachers used knowledge in the form of models from sources beyond the school as well. Karen used what she had learned as a crisis intervention counselor to deal with disruptive students. Susan regularly consulted her fiancé about issues in school, especially to deal with problems between her and her cooperating teacher. In addition, Susan relied upon her own experiences as a student and adolescent to guide her decisions. Early in the year, she wrote:

> We (my friends and I) counseled each other. We did not turn to our parents about sex, alcohol, and drugs. We were "knowledgeable" kids out to have a good time, not trying to ruin our lives in the process. Some of us had older brothers and sisters to turn to about adolescent behavior and choices. We never turned to our teachers or counselors. (I used my counselor for help choosing a college).

Maria also drew upon her own experiences as a student to consider her students' performance during a lesson that involved group work and student assessment of

the activity. Discussing the students' responses, Maria commented: "I'm kind of wondering if what they're writing is really like how they feel or just writing for the sake of, to look good on teachers, because I used to just write when I was little, just write." Both Susan and Maria, in this way, used their own experiences as students to interpret their observations of students in classroom settings.

The preservice teachers' reflections also chronicled negative models that they would not adopt and that led them to compare and contrast their cooperating teachers' practices. Susan, for example, talked at great length about "being organized" as compared to Mr. H. Mr. H's lack of organization was a source of irritation for her, and she commented upon it both in her journal and her entrance interview:

> H doesn't assign homework that often. If he does he verbally explains the assignment. He rarely writes it in the same place, if its written on the board at all....
> With H, homework can be a mystery.

Similarly, Maria writes that Mr. P's history "class is boring. He doesn't allow or provide assignments or activities that require students to think," a fundamental responsibility of teachers in Maria's opinion. Mr. P's practices are compared to Ms. M's ESL classes where the teacher is "consistently involved with students as they work on group projects...." Moving back and forth between Mr. P's and Ms. M's very different classroom within the same day did not help Maria get her bearings.

In her journal, Jenny also dissected a lesson she co-taught with Ms. L. Jenny responded to the lesson with a long list of the ways that she would have modified Mrs. L's plans, part of which is included here:

> - Mrs. L let them pair up on their own.
> + I would have kept them at their seats & paired up those whose partners weren't here today
> - Mrs. L gave them their cards before turning the class over to me for explanation.
> + I would have *explained* first, then given them their cards.

Jenny's ego seemed a bit bruised by the chaotic nature of the lesson, but she also used the event as a means of examining one teacher's practice to identify the flaws in its execution. Disagreeing with teaching practices served an important function for Jenny and her colleagues by allowing them to imagine alternative teaching practices.

Both negative and positive models served this function, becoming an important aspect of the preservice teachers' socialization into the teaching community. Adapting models from a variety of sources indicates to us that these preservice teachers were interested in forging their own identities as teachers, not just in imitating their cooperating teachers or methods they learned in university courses. As Jenny said, "the methods classes make things seem so simple." Yet, rather than polarizing the school and the university, these preservice teachers all seemed motivated in varying degrees to use ideas, methods, strategies, or activities learned

during the professional development year. Part of their introduction to the community of practice appeared to be learning how to adapt models. For example they discovered that classrooms are not as "simple" as methods courses may suggest. The students in different schools or classes need consideration; the temperament or experiences of individual teachers plays a role in how or what practices are implemented. Karen perhaps sums up the preservice teachers' views of teaching: "You're always changing and revising, improving." In some cases, specific events stood out as significant examples upon which the preservice teachers reflected, arriving at a more global understanding of themselves as teachers. We turn now to these "meaningful events" and the impact they had on shaping the preservice teachers.

Learning to Teach from Meaningful Events

As beginning teachers acting in a classroom setting, these preservice teachers both responded to and shaped the context of their teaching as they experienced life in classrooms. Their responses to specific classroom events prompted them to examine their goals, the outcomes of lessons, or specific interactions with students. Keller and Keller (1993) point out that productive activity is goal-oriented; that is, aimed toward the resolution of a problem. In this sense, they suggest (in the work of a blacksmith) that individual actions can be distinguished by three structural properties: transformations of objects, evaluation of results, and transitions to new actions. In our analysis, we found that the preservice teachers examined significant classroom events by drawing upon each of these properties. The effect of these reflections was to shape the preservice teachers' beliefs about practice by changing or enriching their conception of teaching, affirming or refuting teaching practices, and leading them to plan for subsequent actions. In this way, they constructed new knowledge about teaching practice through their own analysis of the stream of events during student teaching.

For example, Karen writes in her journal about a boy in her class who threatened the cooperating teacher because of a dispute over a field trip. The cooperating teacher was very upset about the incident and the administration's response to it. (The student remained in school until a formal transfer hearing could be scheduled with his parents.) The incident became a topic of Karen's journal writing for several days. She wondered about the cooperating teacher's reaction (several days of complaints and worry), about the lack of immediate response by the administration, and about the way the student had been treated. She writes, for example, that "It's sad that death threats and threatening remarks are not taken as serious actions that require severe and immediate consequences." However, she also pondered the role of teachers in creating the behavior they were so upset about:

> ...it seems like teachers have already decided in their minds that some students won't be able to stay in school.... I think sometimes teachers approach these students with a lot of attitude of their own. It's unfortunate, but it's a no-win situation.

Karen's struggle with what to do about students who threaten violence was informed by her previous work as a crisis counselor, and her proposed solution is to wish for more counseling staff at the school. She also enriched her conception of practice, writing, "I hope that I can be the kind of teacher who truly doesn't hold a grudge, and can be open-minded about the potential of all students even when they have made many mistakes in the past."

Through her reflections, Karen begins to locate herself within the community of practice. She used the event to re-conceptualize the complex role of teachers and evaluate the actions taken by others. Her assessment of the event led her to a re-positioning of herself as a teacher, wanting, as she said, to respond differently from the teachers she has observed and to advocate for better support for troubled students.

In a similar way, Jenny affirmed the practices she implemented in the language arts class as a result of the students' response to specific activities. Having learned about writing workshops in her methods class, she decided (with the support of her cooperating teacher) to establish a workshop in her classroom. Her planning began even before student teaching had started, telling us in her entrance interview:

> I'm going to try like a very miniature writing workshop and go like maybe next week and do some activities, think about some things about themselves [the students] that they might write about. There's one activity called Positive-Negative chart [Reif, 1992] that we did in class.

Once she implemented this activity, she assessed the outcomes in her journal:

> Today I tried the positive/negative charts in first period. While [the students] were listing (or trying to list) their positives, I felt this bad feeling come over me about the activity.... Listing the negatives seemed easier for them to come up with.

A day later, though, she revised her assessment: "Perhaps the initial confusion worried me because when I think about the activity a day later, I believe it went well (considering)."

As the workshop progressed, Jenny became more confident that her teaching goals, modified from her methods coursework, were having the desired effect on her students. She marveled at the students' response:

> I felt like bursting when I looked around the room at my usually unruly second period and they were all working! I heard bits of conversation that included "Well, I think you need to change this sentence around to make sense," etc.

In addition to her excitement, Jenny seemed to affirm her beliefs in students' ability: "I think that once the students see that they can write (and see how it feels) that they may be willing to experiment more and take risks in their writing."

Maria described beginning to understand what it meant to her to watch her students and get to know them as learners in her final interview. "Just today when Mr. P was teaching I was sitting there in a group and we would just converse.... I was just listening to their conversation...get to know them, that sticks out." Perhaps

Maria was more able to relax and focus on the students rather than herself as this event took place at the end of her student teaching. For her, this simple, concrete episode began to change her conception of herself, and it illustrates the way specific episodes change preservice teachers' conceptions of teaching.

Conclusion

Many scholars have argued that becoming a reflective practitioner leads to more principled and effective teaching, teacher empowerment, and greater professionalism (Grossman, 1991; Schön, 1983). In relation to this study, however, reflective activity has provided us with a way to see how our preservice teachers respond to and learn from the social and material contexts of their learning-to-teach. When Jenny reflects upon her initial attempts to establish a writing workshop in her classroom, for example, the attention she pays to students' interactions and their products suggest what aspects of teaching are most salient to her, how she is beginning to define her role as teacher, and how her interactions with her cooperating teacher and university coursework have influenced her practical knowledge of teaching. As Karen relates her struggles with discipline in the science classroom, we are privy to the ways in which she is constructing her dilemma and the resources she draws upon to help her determine the best courses of action. In other words, the preservice teachers' reflective activities serve not only to advance our pedagogical aims, but they also permit us to observe their learning-to-teach processes as they engage in forms of legitimate peripheral participation.

Their reflective activities also allow us to glimpse the ways in which the preservice teachers contend with the contingencies of setting. For example, Maria completed her apprenticeship in an activity setting that required initiative and independence, both of which were difficult for her to manage. Based upon their previous experience with student teachers, Mr. P and Ms. M anticipated that Maria would enter the system in the same way as her predecessors, and they were surprised by her lack of confidence and need for additional support. Moreover, the faulty assumption that Maria's teacher preparation had equipped her with the reflective and pedagogical skills to sort out or seek remedies for her difficulties left her unable to meet the demands of her placement adequately. In other words, she was never able to find a way to participate effectively in this setting. By contrast, Susan's experience illustrates a mismatch between her conception of legitimate peripheral participation and her cooperating teacher's. Ms. W's strict interpretation of the math policy which defined in large part the activity setting for Susan and Susan's independent streak collided in ways that were never fully resolved even with the intervention of both the university supervisor and the faculty coordinator. As a result, her apprenticeship was satisfying to none of the participants.

The difficulties these two students faced suggest the complex nature of activity settings in relation to the preservice teachers' ability to construct legitimate

participation. Multiple layers of social activity underlie apprenticeships in teacher education: entering a social system as novice; negotiating with other, more experienced colleagues; juggling the various roles of teaching. Not only must preservice teachers contend with the dynamics of students, classrooms, and instruction, they must also find ways to work cooperatively and collaboratively with those whose classrooms they share. As a result, the role of the cooperative teacher in establishing the contexts of legitimate peripheral participation emerged as a critical element of the activity setting. The nature of the cooperating teachers' support is related to the kind and nature of newcomers' legitimate peripheral participation. A comparison of Susan's experience in Ms. W's math class and Karen's in Mr. A's math class provides a case in point. In contrast to Ms. W, Mr. A responded to the math policy differently. He allowed Karen to create her own lesson plans, but he supervised her lessons closely to ensure that they met with the school administration's requirements. These differences in approach resulted in the creation of substantially different activity settings and affected Karen's and Susan's opportunities for legitimate participation.

In a similar way, Mr. A did not always provide the best of models of instruction for Karen, but he succeeded in creating a supportive environment for her to develop teaching practices different from his own. For example, Mr. A did not use cooperative groups, manipulatives, or other hands-on activities. And yet, he both allowed and encouraged Karen to develop such lessons, advising her in terms of pacing, expectations, organization, and assessment. Despite his lack of modeling, Karen flourished during her time spent in his classroom, trying out and improvising on instructional models acquired in university courses or professional development workshops. As these examples demonstrate, the approaches that individual cooperating teachers take toward their role as mentor have considerable influence on preservice teachers classroom experience. When these approaches are combined with the responses and orientation of the preservice teachers to their learning-to-teach contexts, the activity setting becomes increasingly complex and unpredictable.

There are, however, ways to mitigate against such unpredictability. In *Situated Learning*, Lave and Wenger (1991) describe four models of apprenticeships, distinguishing among these models the various means by which apprentices join the community of practitioners. They suggest that those apprenticeships that support legitimate means of participation in the community of practice, which include partaking in actual practices of increasing complexity and responsibility, provide apprentices with more successful entrance into the community of practice. The experiences of these preservice teachers, in support of Lave and Wenger's argument, also suggest that mentors who support the fledgling attempts of newcomers to assume responsibilities as practitioners are most successful in inducting these newcomers, even when the newcomers engage in specific practices to which the mentors do not subscribe. Both Karen and Jenny seemed to have had such experiences; both were actively encouraged to compose themselves not as replicas,

but as legitimate members with their own skills and contributions. Their cooperating teachers communicated a desire to learn new techniques and a willingness to act as troubleshooters during both the planning and debriefing of teaching in uncharted waters. Additionally, both Karen and Jenny more skillfully constructed their participation in ways that allowed them to experiment, take risks, or to learn from their mentors. Whether they were more able to interpret the activity setting or were more fortunate in their placements is difficult to determine, although they were consistently more open in their reflections about practice and more able to use their critical observations of classroom practice in proactive ways.

This study suggests that individual preservice teachers' responses to their learning-to-teach experiences provide clues to the various construals of legitimate peripheral participation in the school setting and the importance it holds for the socialization of new teachers. Each of the preservice teachers were steeped in the complex social system of the school, and their responses to this context were consistent with Dona M. Kagan's (1992) review of teacher growth. That is, the preservice teachers were influenced by the models they learned on campus and in school, the people and events they encountered during their teacher preparation, and their personal responses to these influences. Constructing a professional identity entailed the give-and-take of shaping and being shaped by the circumstances of their teacher preparation, by the interplay of all of these forces. In other words, each preservice teacher was engaged in "an evolving form of membership," some more successfully than others (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53).

References

Au, K. (1993). *Literacy instruction in multicultural settings*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch.

Fairbanks, C.M., Elliott, B., & Meritt, J. (1995). Teaching reflection: A conceptual model. *Teacher Education and Practice*, 11, 28-40.

Cazden, C. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (1990). Teacher preparation: Structural and conceptual alternatives. In W.R. Houston, (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education*, (pp. 212-233). New York: Macmillan.

Florio-Ruane, S. & Lensmire, T.L. (1990). Transforming future teachers' ideas about writing instruction, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 22, 277-289.

Gaskins, I.W., Satlow, E., Hyson, D., Ostertag, J., & Six, L. (1994). Classroom talk about text: Learning in science class, *Journal of Reading*, 37, 558-564.

Grossman, P. (1991). Why models matter: An alternate view on professional growth in teaching, *Review of Educational Research*, 6, (pp. 171-180).

Hollingsworth, S. (1994). *Teacher research and urban literacy education: Lessons and conversations in a feminist key*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kagan, D.M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 129-169.

Keller, C. & Keller, J.D. (1993). Thinking and acting with iron. In S. Chaiklin & J. Lave (Eds), *Understanding practice: Perspectives on activity and context* (pp.125- 143). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J. (1993). The practice of learning. In S. Chaiklin & J. Lave (Eds.), *Understanding practice: Perspectives on activity and context* (pp. 3-32). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Reif, L. (1992). *Seeking diversity.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Resnick, L.B. (1991). Shared cognition: Thinking as practice. In L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, & S.D. Teasley, (Eds.), *Perspectives on socially shared cognition* (pp 1-20). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rogoff, B. (1991). Social interaction as apprenticeship in thinking: Guidance and participation in spatial planning. In L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, & S.D. Teasley, (Eds.), *Perspectives on socially shared cognition* (pp 1-20). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Russell, T. & Munby, H. (1991). Reframing: The role of experience in developing teachers' professional knowledge. In D.A. Schön, (Ed.), *The reflective turn: Case studies in and on educational practice* (pp. 164-187). New York: Teachers College Press.

Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.*, New York: Basic Books.

Tharp, R. (1993). Institutional and social context of educational practice and reform. In E.A. Forman, N. Minick, & C.A. Stone, (Eds.). *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in childrens' development.* (pp. 269-282). New York: Oxford University Press.