

Teachers Begin Developing Socio-Cultural Awareness in Early Field Experiences

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Abstract

The research presented in this paper is a two-year, action research project examining the impact of early field experiences on teachers placed in low-income, urban schools and communities. The undergraduate pre-service students were concurrently enrolled in social foundations of education and educational psychology courses. Qualitative data including reflection journals and a range of class work chronicles teacher's thoughts, feelings, and actions as they struggled to tutor or complete projects with diverse elementary school children. The researchers found that faculty-facilitated early field experiences combined with social foundations course content helped early teachers in developing a 'teacher persona' and gaining a more critical understanding of the impact of culture and diversity on teaching and learning early in their education program.

Introduction

As accountability measures link teacher performance to student outcomes, teacher preparation programs find themselves struggling to include all the courses and content necessary to help new teachers develop socio-cultural awareness to work effectively with diverse students. There never seems to be enough time to cover content and provide teachers sufficient real-world applications in the field. An increasingly narrowed emphasis in teacher education on common core standards, accountability, and fiscal expediency is problematic for the eclectic and interdisciplinary field of social foundations, which has resulted in what Butin (2005) argues is its uncomfortable and unfruitful 'positioning between the professional standards movement and the conservative "market-driven" paradigm' (p. xv). Adding to

the challenge is the current focus in PreK-12 on reading and mathematics and the demand to increase content courses in these areas, which can result in the reduction of time spent in courses designed to enhance socio-cultural awareness of pre-service teachers. With all the focus on content and teacher professionalization, what role do social foundations of education courses play in the preparation of new teachers?

As educators whose backgrounds and research interests focus on teacher preparation for diverse populations, including awareness of the historical and contemporary issues that have shaped educational equity and access, we are concerned about the displacement of social foundations courses in teacher education program. Many times these are the only courses in the teacher education program that focus on the link between

the academic course content and the socio-cultural realities of schools and communities. What role can social foundation courses play in preparing teachers for culturally diverse learners?

A review of current literature suggests that schools of education across the U.S. are witnessing the marginalization of social foundations courses in teacher education programs to the point at which some are disappearing completely (Butin, 2007; Carter, 2008; Hess, Rotherham, & Walsh, 2004; Morrison, 2007; Sirotnik, 1990). Carter (2008) argues that many pre-service and new teachers 'relegate social foundations concepts to the heap of learning considered not directly applicable to the classroom' and 'see their coursework as only marginally important to the work of teaching' (p. 223-224). Social foundation courses, and particularly those courses examining the history and sociology of education, are critical in preparing culturally competent teachers (Ryan, 2006); however, when they are disconnected from classrooms they are seen as a hurdle to scale before the 'real' teacher preparation courses begin.

Most of the students in this study had experience working with children—primarily as camp counselors, childcare provider, or tutors—prior to entering the teacher education program. Recounting these experiences, study participants frequently expressed an uncritical love for children upon whose lives they believed they might foster a love of learning. Grounded in these largely positive prior experiences, facilitated by supportive adults, participants' experiences of teaching revolved around children whom they categorized as an enthusiastic and receptive audience for learning. When we asked participants to then compose a photostory of why they wanted to teach and what they believed about teaching, they invariably created moving portraits of themselves playing with mostly white, middle class children, or classrooms depicting attentive students gazing lovingly up at a happy, young, and white, teacher in a colorful, resource-rich space. Images of mission trips and forays as camp counselors were celebratory and

ahistorical, and were often accompanied with a voice-over that described the terrible conditions in which 'poor children lived' and how 'they just wanted to learn.' No messy behavioral or cultural issues disturbed these celebratory images of teachers and teaching, or at least none that could not be overcome with fun and love. This is where our work began.

In an effort to deepen students' socio-cultural awareness and situate their learning within a more critical framework, we developed a concurrent course section of introduction to social foundations and educational psychology that included a 10-hour faculty-supervised field experience hosted at a low-performing, urban elementary school. The courses were organized around a critical multicultural education conceptual framework (CME), which operates as both a pedagogical philosophy and an operational tactic for affirming diversity and engaging pre-service teachers in the analysis and critique of individual and systemic power and privilege and its impact on teachers, students, schools, and society (Nieto & Bode, 2012). A key part of this project was the intentional placement of beginning education students—the majority of whom were White, middle class women—in a school setting that was different from their own in terms of race, class and cultural context. We believed that by decentering pre-service teachers' personal, largely monocultural experiences of school early in their education program, we might interrupt stereotypic views of certain racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups and trouble our students' notions of schools as equitable and undisturbed spaces of harmony (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Mason, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Pre-service placements in culturally diverse schools and classrooms is supported in research by Mason (1999) who found that combining the theory and practice of a multicultural education in the university classroom with an urban field experience is crucial in making the information and its implications for teaching and learning more relevant and meaningful.

The primary purpose for this two-pronged approach was to investigate the impact on our early pre-service teachers' understanding of learning development, diversity (specifically race, class and language), and systemic factors affecting educational equity. We were especially interested in how students developed a bridging dialogue with foundations content to inform their understanding of the ways learning, sociocultural diversity and (in)equity intersected and shaped their engagement with and planning for the K-5 students with whom they worked.

We operated on the premise that a foundation of critical multicultural content in combination with early experiences in an historically underserved school could serve as the bridge connecting pre-service teachers' university classroom readings, questions, and conversations to their experiences in schools, thereby allowing them to negotiate the practical implications of what are too often theoretical conversations. Although early field experiences are not a new concept in teacher education, they are neither widely practiced nor substantively supported by our institution, and field experiences of any kind are rarely supervised on-site, by faculty who also teach the content.

Our inquiry focused on the questions: *What is the impact of faculty-supervised field-experiences in two introductory teacher education courses on pre-service teachers' development of a teacher persona, and on attitudes toward students from various racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds? What instructional practices meaningfully and effectively connected social foundations content to field experiences?*

This article highlights a portion of a two-year research study examining the effects of early field experiences in low-performing schools serving predominantly poor students of color on pre-service teachers' development of a culturally responsive disposition and practice. We draw from data collected in the larger study to examine how early field experiences, linked

to introductory foundations course content, can open authentic spaces for pre-service teachers to 'gain a sense of critical awareness about issues of inequity' (Castro, 2010, p. 207) and begin the process of developing effective strategies and ways of knowing to shape a critically reflective and culturally informed practice.

Field Experiences in Teacher Education

Teacher education operates within a larger educational ecology of significant resource and achievement gaps among diverse PreK-12 student groups (Wiseman, 2012). Amidst ongoing debates about the relevance and effectiveness of colleges of education, the demand for talented teachers and sophisticated teacher education for diverse classrooms is a pressing concern. This demand is echoed by Gay's (1997) contention that 'climate, philosophy, pedagogy, and ethos (underlying value assumptions) of teacher education programs must be revised to reflect the cultures, histories, and heritages of the many ethnic, racial, and social groups' (p. 159). Early field experiences are an essential part in this process and continue to be an important part of teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996). How they are structured, who supervises them, and where they are held determines the value of the experience for pre-service teachers (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). Knowles & Cole, as cited in Maxie (2001), note that development of teaching skills through field experiences is complex and the focus should be on the process of teacher development through reflection and dialogue. This is underscored by Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness that grows through dialogue grounded in experience (1973, 2000). Field experiences early in the teacher preparation program are especially valuable when intertwined throughout the program, not just as a culminating experience (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Knowles and Cole found that such experiences were layered, revisited, and recalled as teachers progressed through their program. The opportunity to practice teaching within a teaching setting helped emerging

teachers develop experiences they would draw upon when they received a classroom of their own.

Hickcox (2002) identified field experiences, a form of active learning, as the most optimal way for pre-service teachers to apply concepts learned in a traditional instructor-centered classroom. Applying new concepts in field sites allowed pre-service teachers to move the learning from passive to active or learner-centered and then develop a broader and more in-depth understanding of the knowledge or skill. It is also important to include field experiences that are well planned and timed in the course, so the value of the experience was maximized (Kozar & Marcketti, 2008). In one example of a teacher preparation program with early field experiences, a California-based program included intensive field experiences early in the undergraduate program (Maxie, 2001). Activities used in the early field experiences included specific questions for pre-service teacher reflection that connected the concepts learned in the university course to the application of activities within a K-12 classroom. Although the results of this course-based action research indicated that pre-service teachers in the earliest classes are self-concerned rather than learner-concerned, they did make connections between concepts covered in the foundation classes to what they applied in the field experiences (Maxie, 2001). Field experiences connected to a critical multicultural framework are particularly important. Research suggests that exposure to the critical multicultural framework of a social foundations course, can result in teachers (pre- and in-service) being less likely to embrace culturally deficit views (Irvine, 2003).

Early field experiences may also have relevance for addressing the issue of teacher retention. A 2005 report from the *Alliance for Excellent Education* (cited in Butin, 2005) attributed teacher attrition in part to the overall lack of preparation of new teachers to deal with classroom dilemmas, administrative duties, and challenging work environments with diverse learners. We argue that linking introductory social foundation course

content to field experiences not only fosters the construction of reflective practice, but facilitates early pre-service teachers' ability to bridge the gap between classroom content and real-world teaching applications and experiences (Goodman, 1985; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

The Study

The research presented here draws extensively from narratives from pre-service teacher's weekly reflection journals and results from an exit survey where pre-service teachers made links between field experiences and coursework. The items selected from the pre-service teacher's work chronicle their thoughts and feelings as they struggled to tutor or complete projects with young children.

Context

The study took place at a college of education in a highly selective, predominately white (85%) and affluent, mid-sized public university, located in the Southeastern United States. The surrounding city is largely segregated by class and race, and is a stark contrast to the university campus. High concentrations of poor and mostly African American families reside in less desirable sections of the city, and are served by struggling neighborhood schools. As is reflective of the teaching profession overall, the education students in this study were predominantly white (98%), middle income, and female (90%). In contrast, the children in the study were 98% racial and/or ethnic minorities (80% African American and 15% Hispanic) with 98-100% receiving free or reduced lunch. Study participants were selected from the larger, two-year study pool of education students enrolled in blocked sections of Teachers, School, and Society and Psychological Foundations of Education¹ during fall 2009/2010

1 As of fall 2010, the two courses were blocked and the same students were enrolled in both sections. There were different students each semester. During 2009-2010, the students were different between courses and across semesters.

and spring 2010/2011. All students participated in supervised field experiences in low performing schools serving predominately low income and African American students.

Data analyzed in this article are drawn from fall 2010 (n=24 students) and spring 2011 (n=12 students). Participants were enrolled in the two blocked courses and the same students were enrolled in both sections during their respective semesters². By fall 2010, we had fully developed a blended approach for delivering the two social foundations courses by aligning course objectives and content across the courses with field experiences, covering the same thematic information within the context of working in schools with children using dialogic, reflective, and practice/action elements of a critical multicultural education framework.

Each week, pre-service teachers spent 2-1/2 hours working in small groups with K-5 students at a diverse, low-performing school, then participated in a debrief and reflection session with course faculty for the final 45-minutes. Students in the fall were required to complete a 12-hour field experience, and students in the spring semester completed a 10-hour field experience³ of tutoring children struggling with reading and math skills. The remaining weeks of the semester took place at the university where students continued to reflect on their experiences and develop connections to issues and topics covered in the blended courses through dialogue, personal narratives, and research of local schools and communities.

Data Collection

Data collected included weekly reflection journals (these included student reflections on their participation in a poverty simulation), and an

end of semester survey. Because we functioned as both course instructors and participant-observers, we also used the extensive field notes from observing and working with our pre-service teachers and from debrief sessions. We saw our role as cultural translators (Gay, 2010) and advocates as we interrupted and informed deficit talk and attitudes, provided guidance and support to pre-service teachers struggling to manage small group dynamics, and modeled effective communication and developmentally appropriate interactions and instruction with and for our university students. Pre-service teachers' reflective journals chronicled their experiences with the children they were tutoring and provided a space for students to interact with course content (i.e., readings, videos, simulations, assignments). Reflective dialogue in class and in the schools also challenged students to examine the relationships between their work with children, the school, and the communities it served.

Data Analysis

We used students' weekly online reflective journals, post-survey of field experience, debriefing notes, and research field notes for inductive coding. Themes emerged from a review of the four data sources. Using both an educational psychology and a critical multicultural lens, we looked for patterns of awareness of learning development, and critical consciousness and attitudes about students from diverse backgrounds in the pre-service teacher's writing, discussions, and our observations. Two major themes emerged: (1) development of a teacher persona; and (2) the impact of culture and diversity on teaching and learning, as well as several sub-themes.

Results

The results of triangulating student journals with research observation, classroom and school dialogues, and post-survey comments revealed two major themes and several sub-themes. Under the major theme of *Developing a Teacher Persona*, two important sub-themes emerged in

² Prior to fall 2010, all classes were held on campus and pre-service teachers completed field hours through a series of four separate 1-hour observations of PreK-12 learning environments.

³ Variations between fall and spring hours depended on differences between university and school vacations and official end-of-grade-test schedules in the spring.

which pre-service teachers offered insight into: 1a. *Understanding Children and Learning*, and 1b. *How Assessments Inform Teachers About Students*. The second major theme, *Impact of Culture and Diversity on Learning*, examined pre-service teachers' conceptualizations of 2a. *The Impact of Poverty on Learners*, and 2b. *The Impact of Working Across Cultural Differences*. Insights from these themes and sub-themes provided a context from which to examine connections students made (or missed) between their applied work in the schools and the blended course content.

Developing a Teaching Persona

A teacher persona developed as pre-service teachers navigated their role as classroom teachers. Developmentally, teachers begin their careers concerned with their own performance and success as a teacher. Typically, only after personal success as a teacher do they begin to focus on the success of their learners. Our hope was that the earlier pre-service teachers take responsibility for their learners the sooner they will move to focusing on learner success. The pre-service teachers in this study quickly learned that they had to make decisions to support the children they were tutoring. Although pre-service teachers were initially provided with educational games and instructional guidance, it was ultimately up to them to decide what interventions were necessary to help the child they were tutoring succeed. Pre-service teachers consulted with faculty on a regular basis, and resource-sharing discussions took place during regular class time. An example of an emerging teacher persona is evident in Tiffany's journal entry.

Getting him to focus on what is important is what makes me feel most like a teacher every time I work with him . . . Anybody with common sense and math skills can teach a kid how to count but the fact that I can connect with him on HIS level, without the need of an adult or supervisor to get him to relax and calm down around me . . . is a big accomplishment.

Once all the game playing was done we were able to get a LOT of work done.

As a beginning teacher education student, Tiffany was already noticing what strategies were necessary to gain the trust of the child and how important the interpersonal relationships were to teaching and learning. This knowledge worked in tandem with the unit in the educational psychology course on the social and emotional development of children, as well as the importance of developing relationships with learners to support teaching and learning.

Another demonstration of teacher persona and how its connection with the course content leads to an awareness of the necessity of selecting appropriate materials for focusing on specific learning needs came with Clint, who had the challenge of working with a first grade English Language Learner. Clint had extensive experience as a camp counselor for the local YMCA, but had no prior experience working with non-native English speakers.

I was partnered with Leo, an ESL student. Right off the bat, the language barrier was pretty significant. While Ms. D was writing letters on the board, Leo would trace the letters on the bag of gel. He made a lot of mistakes and didn't seem to be able to recognize differences between the letters. I worked with him and instead of trying to talk to him I was able to show him using our materials. There was also clay available to shape letters. I worked with Leo for about 30-45 minutes and he learned to write his name with the clay and recognize the 4 letters in his name. I felt it was a significant achievement for him and myself. For him because he probably has never had that much direct attention and mentoring in a learning environment and he accomplished something that would have taken him much longer without that one-on-one time. For myself, it was the first time I have made a difference in a child's life in the classroom. From now on, whenever Leo writes his name, the first time he ever did that was in Room 141 of [sic] ABC Elementary and I was there to help him do it.

Clint's success in a one-on-one tutoring situation required him to make and implement instructional decisions on the spot. Clint's decisions were not made in a vacuum; rather he was able to dialogue with classmates during our weekly post-tutoring debriefing sessions that included instructor-facilitated discussion and encouraged students to draw from readings that addressed issues of educational equity, access, and support for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The combined immersion in readings and research on the theoretical and philosophical foundations of education and educational psychology provided pre-service teachers with an introduction to research-based perspectives and served as a tool for engaging students in the critical examination of teaching and student engagement.

Understanding Children and Learning

As the social foundations of education provided an historical foundation for understanding schools, teaching, and society, the Psychological Foundations of Education course provided insight into child development. Child development is an abstract concept if taught solely within the context of the university classroom. Applying theories and concepts within the field experience helped students make sense of child development because they could see evidence of the theories, as well as ages and stages of child growth and development. Denise noted in her journal an observation that was a common concept taught regarding the physical and social development of learners: 'I learned that as an after-school program we should take the girls outside for 15 minutes to get out all the energy and have bonding time with all 4 of us.' Denise recognized that she would have more success tutoring the children if she took care of their physical development needs prior to expecting them to work on academic skills in an after-school program. This information will continue to inform her, as a classroom teacher, about the important connection between cognitive and physical

development. Bonding with the tutors was important for understanding why relationships are so important between teachers and learners. Hopefully, as she works with young learners in the future she will remember this transition technique to help learners get focused.

Another example of connecting course content with field experience was John's reflection on using hands-on materials: 'When B. and S. played a game with [aesthetic] materials, they were more likely to remember things later on.' The use of hands-on, aesthetic materials is a strategy used for classroom management and cognitive (memory) development. Noting this himself, John realized he could support the child he was tutoring by providing aesthetic materials for the child to use rather than keeping everything abstract.

How Assessments Inform Teachers about Students

During regular class instruction, pre-service teachers were introduced to how assessment and accountability data was used at the school and national levels. Students engaged in classroom discussions, debates, web searches, and readings to build awareness of the national debate about test scores, the purpose and outcomes of NCLB, inequities inherent in a high-stakes test environment, and teachers' struggles to balance assessments with effective teaching. Pre-service teachers also discussed and debated the value of assessment and how data could be used to support learners. This became a reality within the field experiences as noted by Kyle's journal.

. . . it became quite clear when assessing J's scores at the beginning of our tutoring and at the end. I wasn't aware that he had learned so much until after I saw the results of his alphabet assessment. I knew we had progressed and he was learning the alphabet, but I hadn't realized he had learned the entire thing.

Kyle was pleased with the progress his student had made. His pride and confidence during the

presentation was obvious. He was able to connect the use of assessment data to how teachers plan for student success.

Another example of how the field experience helped the students understand and critically examine authentic assessment was the comment Jennifer made in her journal.

As a teacher, I couldn't really tell which students actually knew the right answer if they were the second one to repeat it until I gave them individual assessments. It wasn't until then that I saw what they each individually needed to work on.

This acknowledgement by the student is powerful when considering the focus on differentiation of assessment and instruction needed in the classroom. Although these topics are covered in many teacher education classes, Jennifer's reflection confirms her recognition of this important part of teaching and learning. That such recognition is contextualized within a social foundations framework connected with student field experiences deepened students' understanding of how the socio-political contexts of education and school practices impacted student learning.

The Impact of Culture and Diversity on Learning

In developing a teaching persona, pre-service teachers had to develop skill in navigating unfamiliar cultural territory and build awareness of the impact of culture and diversity on teaching and learning. Approximately 98% of the students in this study were White, middle income, and female (90%). Most of our university students stated that they had little or no prior experience working with diverse peers, students, or communities. However, the children in the study attended a low-performing elementary school and were 98% racial and/or ethnic minorities, with 98-100% receiving free or reduced lunch. The cultural divide between pre-service teachers and the students with whom

they worked illuminated the necessity of self-reflection about their own identity and culture as a way to begin the process of questioning and unpacking assumptions. Yet initial journal entries were often reticent in their approach, often avoiding any mention of race, class, or language as they struggled to 'see' their students as individuals and avoid the appearance of prejudice and bias. Gay and Kirkland (2003) found that 'developing skills in self-reflection and critical consciousness specific to racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity among teachers is obstructed' in part by students' efforts to divert or diffuse attention away from the targeted topic particularly when it conflicts with their celebratory conceptions of teaching (p. 183). Such resistance to examining multicultural issues is not uncommon.

Using personal cultural narratives, simulations and role-play, we worked with students to explicitly engage in critical self-reflection of their own socio-cultural identities as well as interrogate their beliefs about what makes for 'good' neighborhoods, 'good' schools, 'good' teaching, and 'good' students. There were two sub-themes in this area, one was working with children and families in poverty and the other was the impact of working across cultures.

Impact of Poverty on Learners

Because our students were embedded in urban schools serving predominantly low income communities, awareness of economic equity and stress were an important focus in our instruction. It was important to engage our mostly middle-class pre-service teachers in both a theoretical and practical examination of poverty. All students were required to participate in a poverty simulation experience facilitated by university faculty (the authors served as lead facilitators). Simulation-based learning (SBL) experiences are one way teacher education programs can provide pre-service teachers with focused experiences that assist in the development of the skills they will require to effectively teach learners from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. One area of particular growth

in SBL is in the area of helping pre-service teachers understand the challenges faced by families living in poverty (Row, 2002; Stark-Rose, Lokken, & Zarghami, 2009; Woodward-Young, 2008).

Data collected from student journals and anecdotal records from classroom discussions suggest that the simulation had some impact on pre-service teacher's awareness of the challenges children and families living in poverty face. During discussions our students talked about their experience participating in the poverty simulation, specifically the lack of hope and the desperation they started to feel when it was clear they could not accomplish what they needed to within the unfolding 'weeks' of their lives. Jan said:

After week four, we had no utilities and had not eaten [for] two of the four weeks. I had failed my girlfriend and her son, as well as my cousin. The economy had failed me. I had failed me. Covered in sweat, I returned to my table as we blankly stared at each other and the mess we were stuck in. At the end of the month, we had no possible way to pay our utilities or two weeks' worth of food. We had worked hard and not given up the whole time, yet we couldn't put food on the table. I was completely devastated. I had no idea how hard it was for those who live in poverty. I had never even thought about the children who live in these conditions.

Students also discussed how 'it makes sense now why some low income families are desperate enough to steal, can't find food, and don't send their kids to school with supplies or money.' As another student stated, 'I feel that as a future teacher this simulation really put into perspective a part of the community that I do not usually see.' Although pre-service teachers frequently cited their frustration, lack of time, and sense of futility to manage the challenges presented by poverty during the experience, some students still espoused a belief that moving out of poverty was largely based on individual initiative and personal responsibility, as noted in one student's journal.

Most of my perceptions and ideas haven't changed about poverty. It is an issue, but I think most people can do something about it. I'm not saying there aren't circumstances that poverty is uncontrollable, but for the most part I think people can do something about it.

Another student noted his discovery that poverty is not as obvious as he had assumed when he reflected on the children he worked with in his field-experience placement.

You would never be able to guess that these children come from very diverse and possibly struggling households. Resulting from my experience in the Poverty Simulation, I learned how tough it can be on the parents and the children in a household that is struggling to make ends meet. I can imagine that some of these children come from these households, but you could never tell that from the way the students acted.

Similarly, another student discussed how her biases about poverty and unemployed people were challenged by participation in the simulation.

I had always felt sorry for people of low-income families or people who lived in bad living situations. At the same time, I would always think that those people may be lazy and need to just go out and get a job. After doing the simulation, I learned that it is not always that easy and there are other outside factors that contribute to the situation. Yes, there are some individuals who may be lazy and choose to not get a job or not work their hardest, but in fact many times this may not be the case.

Students regularly referenced the poverty simulation experience throughout the semester. While tutoring in her assigned kindergarten classroom, one pre-service teacher noted on her field experience poster the importance of pre-school for children entering Kindergarten. A class discussion preceded her notations in an online

discussion focusing on why children do not attend preschool. Students discussed the levels of quality of preschools that were available to low-income families, the lack of spaces for children in high quality programs, and the challenges families might face accessing high quality preschool. Her poster noted:

I learned the value of Pre-K education. I feel that low-income families truly suffer from not having the funds to send their children to Pre-K education. The students of these families start school behind all of their classmates and it is extremely difficult for them to catch up without extra attention and time.

This student's comments suggested a realization that it is neither the fault of the child nor should it be assumed to be a lack of caring by the families when a child arrives in Kindergarten without prior school experience. This knowledge reflects a more complex understanding of the challenges of poverty and teacher attitudes and assumptions about children and families. It is sometimes a matter of access and resources that are out of the control of the families. This young woman hopes to become a Kindergarten teacher and she will enter her profession with a deeper understanding of her future children than she would have had without her field experience. This student and her peers' growing understanding of the impact of poverty was merely the beginning. It is vital that continued opportunities to examine issues of poverty be available throughout their teacher education in order to move students beyond individual, localized understandings of injustice to more critical questioning of historical inequities embedded in and perpetuated by our economic, political, legal, health, educational, and social institutions.

Impact of Working Across Cultures

Daniella's journal entry highlights this sub-theme.

We must first take a look at ourselves before we can even try to understand others, but both of

these efforts need to be made in order to have any hopes of crossing the boundaries we've created for our cultural differences in this society.

Working across cultural differences was an ongoing effort for our early pre-service teachers and a major focus of our combined courses. Having little prior experience with groups and individuals outside their own social and cultural groups, our students had few points of reference from which to shape their approaches; and when they did, they were frequently misinformed, simplistic, and lacking the critical consciousness necessary to challenge these assumptions. Rather than place students into the field immediately, we scheduled the field experience to begin three weeks into the semester allowing us time to facilitate student examination of key educational issues from social, historical, and philosophical perspectives as well as engage in collaborative research and discussion of our prospective school site and the community it served.

Students arrived at their field experiences hopeful, nervous, and excited about what they would encounter. The elementary school site where we have worked since spring 2010 recently relocated to a new building. The structure is impressive, welcoming, and environmentally friendly. Pre-service teachers' first impressions of the beautiful new school were variations of awe. As preparation for the first visit to the new location, students discussed the impact of increasing local, state, and national racial and economic re-segregation of public schools. Students also conducted research about our school site's academic rating, teacher quality, student demographics, and surrounding community resources and challenges. This helped inform and temper students' initial reactions as noted in the following journal entry.

As beautiful as the school was, I couldn't help but remember the research I had done on the school and its students. In the past few years they have not performed as successfully as they should. They are still in jeopardy as far as standardized testing goes. Not to mention, a majority of the

students come from low income families and receive free or reduced lunch; making this a Title I school. So, the building gives you a false sense of the success of this school, but if you look more closely you will notice that there is still more work that needs to be done. With that being said, this school is still bubbling with bright and cheerful children.

The pre-service teachers were enthusiastically welcomed by their tutees, and were instantly enamored with the ‘bright and cheerful children’ before them. It did not take long before this undisturbed space of apparent harmony was troubled by the specter of race. During our second visit to the school, one of the first graders began to cry when her young, White female tutor approached her and the small group of first and second graders assigned to the tutor. When we finally calmed the child down, she said she was scared of White people and she did not like being there with them. We shared the incident with our students during the post-experience debrief. The shock and dismay expressed in the following student quotes upon hearing this story was a reminder of their privilege as members of a dominant culture for whom race was largely invisible.

It was really upsetting to hear that one of the little girls said she was scared of white people. I would never want a child scared of me based on the color of my skin. It’s sad that in today’s world we have schools that are so racially divided and that children are only being exposed to a certain race. I wish this could be changed.

When you [instructors] said that little girl was scared of white people I was very surprised. I feel like at times I’m ignorant at the fact that racism is still alive. I was just never raised to be that way and it’s very relevant once you open your eyes.

Although we constructed our course content and field experience to connect to examinations of larger foundational issues, we were aware that the constraints of time (in the classroom and

in the field) and exposure to teachers and other important support staff (i.e., social worker or guidance counselor), families and communities served by the school, means there is insufficient time and experiences to engage students in a deeper deconstruction of systemic racism and discrimination and the influence of power and privilege in schools and society. Gilbert (1997) reminds us ‘Simply “being there” without careful analysis of multicultural and socio-economic issues in the community in relation to the individual’s personal constructs and the community at large, may not provide the positive results expected from direct experiences’ (p. 93). And so, we continue to build strong relationships with the school site to develop options for fostering more extensive connections to schools and communities and combat entrenchment of early pre-service teachers’ stereotypes and biases.

Connections

As part of their reflective journals and final survey, students were encouraged to draw from course readings, films, simulations, and discussions to assist them in making sense of their field experiences. Although not all students did this on a regular basis, those that did showed a growing awareness of the connection between student outcomes and institutional inequities. On some level, pre-service teachers still assigned primary responsibility or blame for perceived lack of academic preparation to families. Despite evidence of these entrenched deficit views, the disequilibrium resulting from field engagement facilitated students’ question-posing as they began to participate in the critique of prior and new knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Development of a more critical perspective—through course content, instructional methods, and student consciousness—serves as an important counter-narrative to less threatening and oversimplified conceptions of multicultural issues and ideas as seen in a journal excerpt from a spring 2010 student.

After reading the article on school funding, I became more aware of some things I have noticed at [sic] ABC elementary. Most of the children at the school are economically disadvantaged and this sets them as a minority. In the article, I liked how Deborah Meier pointed out that ‘privatizing’ schools means a loss of democratic control. Public schools have to take everyone, but private schools can be the ones to turn away a child who is causing trouble or who is ‘unwanted.’ If public schools are supposed to be fair then why is it not ‘fair’? I have even noticed when doing math problems and reading with my kids that many of them are on different levels . . . how is it that some are way more ahead than others? Even though many kids move at a different pace than others I do not think this is the whole problem. Maybe some children have more help with their parents or older siblings than others. . . . There are so many factors that can affect a child’s attitude. Even though public schools are supposed to be equal, they are far from it.

Early field experiences were important in helping our pre-service teachers begin to unpack the differences between their own experiences of schooling and how diversity serves as a tool for affirming and building bridges between home and school cultures. Students found the experience to be valuable and a start to building the relationships they wished to achieve with their ‘students’.

I noticed the artwork on the walls of [sic] ABC elementary and how all cultures and ethnicities were represented. I think this is very important because I do not remember any artwork like that in my elementary school. ABC’s artistic walls help symbolize their support for all ethnicities and backgrounds. I would recommend that every [introduction to education] class take part in this experience. Out of all the activities in this class, I have gained the most from getting field experience working with the children, but I feel like eight weeks is not long enough to work with the kids

and get to know them. A textbook can only teach so much. Without working with children in the beginning, students cannot get the full effect of the teaching profession. This class has reassured me that I want to teach.

As pre-service teachers participated in these introductory field experiences, they engaged in the active construction of a teaching philosophy and practice that would support their ability to make informed decisions about whether or not they wanted to teach, as well as the kind of teacher they hoped to become. We recognized that our approach to connecting social foundation courses to school-based field experiences was not a novel concept; however, financial constraints and lack of institutional support for faculty who wish to embed their courses within a school or community site, have made opportunities for these important early experience near impossible. It seems that in the face of these challenges, the value to prospective teachers and future students and the need to increase these opportunities is an effective way of introducing—and possibly retaining—early pre-service teachers to aspects of teaching, learning, schools, and society they would not be exposed to until later in their program. In fact, it’s elementary and just good teaching.

Conclusions and Implications for Action

This study provided evidence that some pre-service teachers in social foundations of education courses with urban field experiences, identified meaningful links between theory and practice in the application of course content (Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Brown, 2004; Middleton, 2002). However, not all students had the experience and, as we have seen in their journals, transformation of deficit perspectives does not always occur. One of the limitations of this study—and what we hope to understand in the future is how these early experiences with diversity weave their way in beginning teachers’ conscious through the first year of teaching.

Pre-service teacher journals and survey data, detailed how the uncritical love our students profess for all children early in the semester was challenged and changed as they engaged with children from predominantly African American and poor communities. Their **teacher persona** began to emerge as they invested in relationships with their students and were held accountable for successful outcomes in the learning projects they were assigned. As noted in a student journal from spring 2011, field-based foundations courses build pre-service teachers' awareness of the socio-political contexts of schools, and their role (and possibilities) as a teacher-leader.

These two courses and this [field] experience are continuously keeping me aware that job of a teacher moves beyond just educating students about political structures, citizenship skills, historical events, and academic foundations. It is so much more. My eyes and ears are more open now than they have ever been, and I am only at the beginning.

In an article on the role of social foundation courses in preparing culturally responsive teachers, Ryan contends that 'social foundations courses can provide an integrated experience where content is wedded to the practice of teaching in such a way that students can see how individual and social issues have real implications for everyday pedagogical practice' (2006, p. 12). Keeping with Ryan's assertion, we argue that establishing supervised, connected, field experiences in social foundation courses provided pre-service teachers' opportunities to develop their 'teacher persona' throughout their teacher preparation program, not just during the final year of preparation. Additionally, opportunities for individual and collaborative reflection and immersion in course content and field experiences that engage students in critical examinations of institutionalized inequities in schools and society are vital to helping students develop a critical multicultural awareness (Smith, 2000; Garmon, 2004).

In addition to adding field experiences in social foundation, faculty in teacher preparation programs should collaborate to begin the field-experiences early in the program and intentionally link those experiences to methods content as the pre-service teacher continues through the program. A model for early field experiences challenges schools of education to reexamine current university-school partnerships and agreements that present barriers from schools of education to support faculty who move their classrooms outside the university (Butin, 2006). The field experiences need to be an authentic application of content, not just observation, and faculty must be on-site, visible, and engaged in developing meaningful, sustainable links between classroom content and on-site experiences. It is our hope that these early pre-service teachers will begin to write the next chapter in teacher preparation as they are inspired and prepared with early experiences serving diverse learners.

In this article, we offer pedagogical possibilities opened up by critical, collaborative efforts between two foundations faculty and their pre-service teachers. Student reflections provided examples of practices that can serve to meet the growing demands from schools and communities for culturally competent, socially aware teacher-leaders. The implications for effective, culturally responsive teaching is clear: uncritical, untroubled, untested love is not enough. These reflections also offer a glimpse into the value of linking social foundation courses to field experiences as a strategy for facilitating socio-cultural consciousness in early pre-service teachers.

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