

A Good Start: A Progressive, Transactional Approach to Diversity in Pre-service Teacher Education

M. Beatriz Arias and Leslie Poynor
Arizona State University

Abstract

Researchers of teacher education programs have lamented the fact that these programs do little to prepare teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children. In this paper we problematize the traditional transmission teacher education approaches to diversity with respect to preparing teachers to teach reading and language arts to culturally and linguistically diverse children. Further, we use Banks' developmental stages of ethnic identity to discuss the potential impact (or lack of impact) of such traditional transmission teacher education on pre-service teachers. Our research then examines the potential impact of a progressive, transactional reading and language arts methods block of courses at an urban professional development school on pre-service teachers' understanding of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children. Finally, we situate our findings within Banks' developmental stages of ethnic identity.

Since the early 1990s, researchers of teacher education programs have lamented that these programs do little to prepare teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children (see, for example, Delpit, 1995; Huber, Kune, Bakken, & Clark, 1997; Jung, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Liston & Zeichner, 1996; Quintanar-Sarellana, 1997; Zeichner, 1996). This is no doubt due in part to the fact that many teacher education programs are based on the ideological underpinnings of traditional transmission education, which often ignores the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse children. Traditional transmission teacher education becomes even more problematic considering that most pre-service teachers are white, middle-class females who are mostly prepared to work with students who share their race, class, and language (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). Further, if diversity is addressed at all, the instruction usually concentrates on the superficial and often stereotypical elements of a culture.

This type of instruction, often referred to as the “Foods and Festivals Approach” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 131) or the “Foods and Folkdances Approach” (Carger, 1996, p. 148), reduces members of cultural groups outside the mainstream culture from complex beings to simplistic stereotypes. Typically, teacher education programs with this approach to diversity offer a single course on multiculturalism or student teaching placements in culturally diverse settings (Goodwin, 1997). They may offer Saturday seminars or one-shot workshops that focus on the superficial elements of culture with little or no follow-up (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Occasionally, diversity is included as part of content classes, but typically only on the occurrence of multicultural holidays such as Indian Week or National Black History Month (Huber et al., 1997). Because these approaches to diversity are “assembly line models that merely require teacher educators to fit puzzle pieces together, without regard for . . . the experiences prospective teachers bring to the classroom” (Striedieck, 1997, p. 40), there is little chance for the (mostly white, middle-class female) pre-service teachers to reflect on and clarify their feelings about their own ethnic identity or that of the culturally and linguistically diverse children they will encounter in the classroom. Without that opportunity it is highly unlikely that they will reach an increased awareness and understanding of ethnicities other than their own.

This lack of understanding is especially disturbing if the pre-service teacher is in what Banks (1984) describes as “ethnic psychological captivity,” in which individuals feel ashamed of their ethnic identity because they internalize the negative stereotypes about the ethnic group. Equally disturbing are situations in which pre-service teachers are in “ethnic encapsulation”: Individuals live, work, and play within their own ethnic community believing that community to be superior to all others. Pre-service teachers who enter teacher education programs in either of these first two stages are unlikely to progress beyond them by participating in traditional transmission approaches that concentrate on stereotypical elements of the culture. Banks goes on to describe four more developmental stages of ethnic behavior with each successive stage representing an increased awareness and understanding of ethnicities outside one’s own. For example, pre-service teachers who accept themselves and their ethnic identity and respect the cultural diversity of others, are in stage three, “ethnic identity clarification,” which also involves the clarification of personal attitudes. However, if the pre-service teachers are enrolled in a teacher education program that doesn’t provide them an opportunity to identify and reflect on their feelings about ethnic diversity, there is little chance that ethnic identity clarification will occur as a result of traditional transmission instructional activities. Individuals in stages four, five, and six (biethnicity, multiethnicity, and globalism and global competency respectively) have the understanding and skills necessary to participate comfortably in two or more ethnic cultures. The final stage is characterized by individuals who seek and value the universal similarities among all human

beings. The pre-service teachers in these stages are unlikely to gain anything from or be influenced by traditional, transmission teacher education approaches to diversity.

Where, then, does a traditional transmission teacher education program leave culturally and linguistically diverse children? Zeichner (1996) argues that it leaves “vast numbers of students of color, many of them poor, without the benefit of teachers who have been especially prepared for cross-cultural encounters that are a fact of life in many schools” (p. 216). But what if pre-service teachers were enrolled in an English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual teacher education program? And what if that teacher education program included classes based on progressive, transactional ideology rather than traditional, transmission ideology? Would pre-service teachers be prepared for working with culturally and linguistically diverse children? What would they really understand about working with culturally and linguistically diverse children? It is to answer these questions that the authors undertook this study.

Purpose of the Study

As instructors for (and one director of) the ESL and bilingual pre-service teacher preparation program at a large Southwestern university, the authors are particularly concerned about the ways in which our pre-service teachers are being prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of what our ESL and bilingual pre-service teachers learn and understand about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children as these teachers participate in a progressive, transactional reading and language arts methods course.

In the sections that follow, the authors first provide a brief review of the literature on the ideological underpinnings of progressive, transactional teaching and corresponding approaches to diversity. The sections that follow address the research question, the participants, and the setting. The fourth section includes methods of data collection and analysis. In the fifth section the authors share their findings and in the final section they offer some concluding remarks with implications for future study.

Review of the Literature

Perhaps the most comprehensive and detailed listing of the ideological assumptions underlying the practices of transactional teaching are those listed by Constance Weaver (1994). According to Weaver, a transactional teacher:

1. Serves as a master craftsperson, mentor, role model;
2. Demonstrates what it is to be a literate person and life-long learner;
3. Stimulates learning by demonstrating, inviting, discussing, affirming, facilitating, and collaborating;

4. Creates a supportive community of learners wherein collaboration and assistance are encouraged;
5. Treats students as capable and developing, honoring unique patterns of development and offering invitation and challenges to growth;
6. Responds positively to successive approximation, thus encouraging risk taking and hypothesis formation; and
7. Shares responsibility for curricular decision making with students, thus empowering them to take ownership of responsibility for their own learning.

Approaches to diversity aligned with the ideological assumptions of progressive, transactional teaching are often called the “cultural awareness approach” (York, 1997) or the “self-knowledge approach” (Gay, 1993; Jung, 1997; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997). In these approaches, teacher educators provide opportunities for the prospective teachers to become aware of their own cultural heritage and background. All too often, white, middle-class pre-service teachers “believe that culture is what other people have; what we have is just truth” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 131). These approaches allow pre-service teachers to examine, perhaps for the first time, their own cultural heritage and identify their feelings about it. In addition, a self-knowledge or cultural awareness approach provides a forum for identifying, examining, questioning, and discussing their attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about other cultural minority groups so that the pre-service teacher might develop more culturally sensitive perspectives (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997). The ideology of progressive, transactional teaching is apparent in these approaches to diversity. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to transact with one another, bringing their own personal experiences to the discussion. The teacher educator serves as the facilitator to raise their cultural awareness. In discussing field experiences for pre-service teachers, Peretti (1997) describes an approach similar to the self-knowledge or cultural awareness approach that effectively illustrates the progressive transactional ideology:

Meeting the challenge of diversity in teacher education includes requiring students to assess their own starting points and providing a realistic, individualized curriculum to move to even higher levels of consciousness. . . . People learn most effectively when they construct their own knowledge starting at an appropriate point and proceeding along a continuum. Social interaction is crucial in developing new understandings. (p. 203)

Research Question

The research question arose from the authors' own curiosity about what ESL and bilingual pre-service teachers were learning and understanding about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children in the transaction reading and language arts methods courses held at the newly created urban Professional Development School (PDS). They were also curious about what the pre-service teachers were learning and understanding, given that some of the pre-service teachers had their field experiences at the PDS and therefore had the opportunity to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children. Specifically, the research question was: What do ESL and bilingual pre-service teachers in a progressive, transactional reading and language arts methods course at an urban PDS learn and understand about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children?

Participants

The participants were a small cohort of three ESL and two bilingual pre-service teachers whose field experiences would occur at the PDS. Unfortunately, soon after the study began, the two bilingual pre-service teachers assigned to the PDS withdrew from the methods course for personal and/or health reasons. Consequently, the three remaining pre-service teachers participating in the study were seeking an ESL endorsement; therefore, all three classrooms were ESL classrooms. Further, much as Zimpher and Ashburn (1992) describe, all three ESL pre-service teachers were white, middle-class females with relatively few experiences in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Thus, the authors modified the research question to reflect the reality of the study. The revised research question was: What do three ESL pre-service teachers in a progressive, transactional reading and language arts methods course at an urban PDS learn and understand about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children?

Setting

The setting for this study included the reading and language arts methods courses and the elementary classrooms of the urban PDS for ESL and bilingual pre-service teachers. The PDS is less than two years old. When it was built the plans included a PDS classroom complete with an office, restroom, walk-in closet, and lockable cabinets. The PDS serves children in grades K–7. (It is in the process of becoming a K–8 school, but at the time of this study the eighth grade had not yet been added.)

During this semester the authors did not serve as instructors of the reading and language arts methods courses, but rather as researchers. The instructors of the courses included two professors, one graduate student teaching assistant

(TA), and one graduate student intern. One of the professors and the TA had taught the class for many years. Prior to the first day of class, they met with the second professor on numerous occasions to hammer out the syllabus, textbooks, packet of readings, course assignments, and teaching responsibilities. During those meetings the instructors agreed that they would facilitate and serve as mentors for transactional classroom practices, which included (a) writers' workshop; (b) reading workshop that included shared readings, read alouds, literature studies, and independent reading; (c) collaborative group work; and (d) individual conferences as needed. They agreed that the children's literature used for shared readings, read alouds, and literature studies should be representative of cultural and linguistic diversity. They also decided that the students should be engaged in weekly written reflections on the professional literature on second language learners as well as class discussions of the multicultural children's literature, course assignments, and assigned readings. Carol, one of the instructors, summed up their reasoning behind organizing the class in this manner:

Let me try to get the wording right. This is something that I truly believe in. In a transactional stance in education, the child's life is part of the curriculum. If you truly believe that, then you have to make it inherent to the everyday life. And so that becomes your curriculum. Today, for example, one of the things that I had them do is write letters to teachers who made a difference in their life, and it could be a good or bad. When that happens, when you unpack it, a lot of it comes back to people talking about bad experiences, that their culture was not respected, that they were made to feel stupid, they were made to feel dumb. So it's not something that you teach, it's just something that is ongoing. But then, I think, knowing that to be true and that you are unconscious of it, I do think that all of us [the instructors] make an effort to step back and say, "What am I teaching today? How do I make sure that I address that from a multicultural perspective?" See, I think you have a responsibility to look at children's literature to make sure that all cultures are represented and to point out to students the value of literature in children's lives. Obviously if you have children from different cultures it enriches because you get different worldviews, different ways of seeing the world. So I think that if it's literature, if it's writing, you've got to step back and address that dimension [of diversity] and make sure that it is there. It needs to run through every class, every day, all the time.

The methods courses were held from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday of each week. After each class, the two professors and the intern held a debriefing session. The TA had other commitments and could not participate in these sessions. During these sessions they would discuss the previous class, noting understandings and misunderstandings the students

seemed to be having about teaching reading and language arts to second language learners. They would share their insights and concerns about the assignments turned in by the students. Using that collective knowledge, they would then plan for the next class.

In observations and interviews, the instructors' progressive, transactional approach to first/second language development, literacy/biliteracy development, and cultural/linguistic diversity was apparent. The pre-service teachers were encouraged to bring their own personal experiences to the discussion, and the instructors served as facilitators to raise issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. The process of learning occurred through collaboration, discussion, and interaction.

This was not the case, however, in the three PDS classrooms to which the three pre-service teachers were assigned for their field placement experiences. Not only was the physical arrangement of these classrooms more traditional, but the reading and language arts activities were also traditional. Perhaps because each of the three ESL classes were partnered with a bilingual (Spanish) class, there was little on the walls in Spanish. Further, there were very few books in each room and, except for Stacy's first grade, no multicultural children's literature. A brief description of each room follows.

Candace, who often described her own children's language learning during the whole class discussions in the methods course, was assigned to Stacy's first-grade classroom. Stacy's class was the ESL component of a dual language first grade. The two first-grade classrooms were separated by a partition with an opening that allowed for easy movement from one room to the other. The carpeted room was filled with age-appropriate tables, chairs, and bookshelves. The bookshelves were filled with a variety of books. The children's tables could accommodate groups of four or five children and each held a different activity. Stacy had a horseshoe shaped teacher's table at which she conducted small group reading lessons. On the white board was a work jobs chart that listed the activities in which each child should be engaged. The rules were posted on the walls. The partition was lined with computers, which mostly ran programs designed for children to use in learning phonetic rules or math facts.

Kelly, a conscientious, reflective student, was assigned to Jan's second-grade ESL classroom. The desks in Jan's classroom were arranged in four orderly horizontal rows. Along the side of one wall were a few computers. All students faced the front of the room, giving the feeling that the room was a crowded place. There was very little student work displayed on the walls; there were no books on display and no student-created displays on the walls. The rules of the classroom, however, were displayed in both English and Spanish, but nothing else was written in Spanish. There were no centers or areas set aside with the exception of a desk on each side of the teacher's desk for students who were being disciplined.

Carlee, who often took the role of environmentalist by reminding members of the methods class to recycle, was assigned to Mary's fourth-grade ESL classroom. In Mary's room, one gets the sense that all is orderly and in place. Desks are arranged in rows facing the front of the room where Mary usually stands to deliver whole class instruction. In three corners of the room there are small round tables for small group activities. One of the corners is reserved for computer work. There is usually material relevant to the small group activities displayed on the round tables. There is a small library display—a revolving unit that displays many books all in English. The wall displays are all in English; some student work is displayed, and the rules of the class are presented bilingually.

Methods

Data Collection

The authors used the work of Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994) in their book *Studying Your Own School* as a conceptual framework for data collection. As stated earlier, this study begins with the first cohort of pre-service teachers to participate in the methods courses and field placement classrooms at the PDS. Adhering to the advice of Anderson et al., the following types of data were collected in order to “maximize time and to see the same scene from different angles” (p. 115):

Documents

The syllabi of the reading and language arts methods courses were reviewed in order to shed light on what the instructors hoped the pre-service teachers would learn and understand about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children. With the permission of the three focal pre-service teachers, their reflective writings that dealt with issues of diversity were reviewed in order to gain insight as to what they actually might be learning and understanding.

Course observations

Using the syllabi as a guide, the authors sat in on the classes at various times in the semester to take notes on the content of the class and interactions of the three focal pre-service teachers.

Interviews

Using a semi-structured interview format, the authors interviewed the three instructors who planned the class and the three pre-service teachers who had their field placement assignments at the PDS. In the interviews with the instructors the authors were seeking to understand the reasoning behind the course activities. With the pre-service teachers the authors sought to understand what they were learning and understanding about culturally and linguistically diverse children as they both participated in the field placement classrooms and as they considered their future work with other diverse students.

Placement observations

The authors observed the same pre-service teachers in their field placement classrooms in order to capture those details that highlighted what the pre-service teachers were learning and understanding about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children.

In order to “maximize time,” the data collection was divided between the two authors. Dr. Arias made multiple visits to each of the three placement teachers’ classrooms, spending one to two hours at each visit recording field notes. Dr. Poyner made observations and recorded field notes during the methods course. It was decided that for continuity, one professor should conduct all of the interviews; Dr. Poyner was chosen because of her rapport with both the students and the instructors and her experience as methods instructor in the past.

Data Analysis

Again relying on the work of Anderson et al. (1994, p. 155), data analysis was an ongoing part of the data collection. At regular weekly meetings, the authors discussed their respective observations, how these observations related to the research question, what gaps they were finding in the data, and what new directions they needed to pursue. The authors shared their preliminary and developing understandings and sought triangulation of data from all sources. For example, with regard to the pre-service course work, the authors reviewed the data collected from the documents (syllabi, student work), the course observations, and the interviews (both student and instructor).

At the end of the data collection and ongoing data analysis period, the authors again followed the advice of Anderson et al. (p. 157) by providing one author with copies of field notes and transcripts. In one three-hour sitting, the authors compiled all data, including individual and collective notes. The authors re-read the entire corpus of the data, starting with the student interviews. Keeping the initial question in mind, the authors made notes of patterns, trends, and interesting cases. At the end of three hours the authors shared their preliminary findings, taking note of what the other had observed. Prior to the next meeting Dr. Poyner took the data and created a list of codes that reflected the emerging patterns and trends, which she gave to Dr. Arias, who applied the codes to the data, refining the codes and creating new ones as they were needed.

At the second three-hour meeting the authors reviewed the data coded with the joint list of codes and discussed agreements as well as contradictions until they had a set of codes upon which both agreed. The authors generated preliminary assertions from the data and codes (Erickson, 1986). At the third three-hour meeting the authors shared preliminary assertions and began the process of consolidating the assertions into those that would best answer the research question. All subsequent meetings were spent warranting assertions and writing the final report. All assertions were modified to account for both the confirming and disconfirming evidence.

Using the actual data (field notes, transcripts, and documents) the authors constructed a narrative vignette for each one of the assertions. Erickson (1986) points out that constructing narrative vignettes is a way to both analyze and present the data. The vignettes include quotations from the participants, descriptions of the methods courses, and excerpts from documents and interviews. All are actual data, reorganized and presented in such a way that the reader can follow the interpretations the authors made (Smith & Shepard, 1988). The authors use the vignettes to present the data so that the reader might understand what led the authors to each assertion and the logic of their analysis. The assertions are as follows:

1. The three ESL pre-service teachers recognize that the cultural and linguistic diversity of the children needs to be infused into the curriculum.
2. The three ESL pre-service teachers recognize that diversity is a resource, and they acknowledge the importance of respect for diversity.

In the following section a narrative vignette is presented for each assertion and each vignette is followed by interpretive commentary. The findings section is followed by a discussion and a conclusion.

Findings

Assertion 1: The three ESL pre-service teachers understand that the cultural and linguistic diversity of the children should be infused into the curriculum

Narrative Vignette

“Today the shared reading is a song called *Bandera del Sol/Flag of the Sun*,” begins Carmen, as she puts the chart on the stand at the front of the room.

Carmen explains, “At the school where I teach, this is an important song for us. We use it for ceremonies. It is a song written by Tish Hinojosa. A lot of her songs are about human rights and about migrant workers. Whenever she is in town the parents, students, and teachers go to hear her. Let’s read the words together.”

Carmen turns to point to the words on the chart and begins reading in Spanish, “Brinde a ti, brinde a mi.”

Carlee looks around the room and sees that the Spanish-speaking methods students join in immediately. Confident after years of Spanish classes, Carlee begins reading too. Kelly wrinkles her eyebrows together as she follows the words on the chart. She joins in the reading at the Spanish chorus. Candace carefully watches as Carmen points to the words but doesn’t attempt to say the words until they get to the English chorus.

“Well, what did you think?” Carmen asks the class.

Candace answers, “Even though I didn’t know exactly what the song was saying in Spanish, I could follow along anyway because part of it was in English. I think that must be what it is like for kids when they read bilingual books.”

Kelly adds, “That was the same for me. It made me realize what happens to kids when they are in the classroom.”

Carmen responds, “That’s true. So many times children’s cultures and children’s languages are not always respected. This would be a great way to value their language and their culture. At my school this song became so important that the parents started asking for the words of the song and we started sending them home. So I brought a copy for each of you.”

Carmen passes out the words to the song and says, “OK, I’m going to turn on the CD, and let’s try to sing it all together.”

As the music starts, the students join in. At the end of the song Carmen says, “Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet, says that singing the songs is what we should do when times get hard. And this is such a good way to value kids’ cultures and languages. So, keeping that in mind, I would like you to get with three or four people and discuss other pieces of writing that could be used for a shared reading.”

The class erupts into noise as the students pick up their chairs and move about the room making small groups. Carlee and Kelly are sitting next to each other, but neither gets up. Candace brings her chair from across the room to join them. As she sits down, Carlee is telling Kelly, “We need to be able to do a shared reading in Spanish using high quality children’s literature. What I see in my placement class is that they have not as much literature in Spanish. Not as many [sic] to choose from and not as many high quality things. I know it is hard because I know they are not as available, so there is more English literature.”

Kelly answers, “I think that you have to look at the books in your classroom and make sure they represent more than one culture, or at least they can apply to other cultures even if they are not in Spanish.”

Candace jumps in, “Yeah, because I don’t speak Spanish like you do, Carlee. Even if I had the good quality Spanish literature, I couldn’t read it to my class. So I would want some Spanish literature for my kids to read, but I think multicultural books for shared readings are very beneficial, because they help children see other cultures that they may not have been able to experience and understand. I think it helps children and adults alike to accept people for who they are, even if they don’t look or act the same as we do.”

Carlee wrinkles her forehead and speaks as if she is thinking out loud, “Yeah! In fact, we need to be able to implement a language arts program using good children’s literature in Spanish or at least multicultural literature that values the child’s culture.”

Candace reminds Carlee again that she doesn't read Spanish.

Kelly puts her hand on Candace's shoulder and says, "Yeah, but still you can make certain that the books talk about things important in the Hispanic culture. I mean, too often the kids just read about the dominant culture and not their own."

Candace says, "Right! That's what I was saying before. It's not just important to have multicultural books for shared readings but also bilingual books, books in Spanish and books about a child's culture that they can read at any time."

Carmen calls from the front of the room, "Let's take a five-minute break and then come back and share our discussions."

Interpretive Commentary

In the preceding vignette, the authors learned that the three pre-service teachers look at the curriculum as a place to value and respect the home culture and language of the children. When Kelly and Candace were reading the song in Spanish, they were able to make the connection between their own discomfort with their inability to read and understand the language and the reality of life in schools for second language learners. Along with that connection, they were able to identify ways in which they could infuse the curriculum with the child's culture and possibly language. Although less confident in their ability to read in Spanish, they still recognized shared reading as an opportunity to infuse the child's culture in the curriculum. Carlee, on the other hand, who was quite comfortable reading in Spanish, saw the pedagogical strategy of shared reading as an opportunity to infuse the curriculum with not only the child's culture but also the language.

As the conversation turned from shared readings to the language arts programs in general, all three pre-service teachers were very concerned about infusing the child's culture and language into the curriculum. Their conversations focused on how to make certain that the children would be reading about their own culture, how to make certain that important events in the child's culture were represented, and how to make certain that the child's language was represented. Even though they were particularly concerned with valuing and respecting the child's culture, they did not, however, address any changes that they themselves might have to make in interacting with children from a culture other than their own. Their understanding did not seem to go beyond infusing the curriculum with multicultural literature that represented the children's own culture.

Assertion 2: The three ESL pre-service teachers understand that cultural and linguistic diversity is a resource that should be valued and respected.

Narrative Vignette

Susan stands at the front of the room and waits for the students to settle into their seats. She begins, “As part of the methods coursework, one of the things we wanted to have you do is participate in a literature study just the same way that kids might participate in a lit study.”

Carlee raises her hand, “I’m not sure I understand why we are doing this. I mean I loved the book, but I just don’t know what it has to do with teaching reading.”

Susan answers, “Well, I guess from my perspective, if you are going to be able to implement a transaction language arts program, you need the experience of participating in it. And practically, if we do one literature study where people read the same thing, then we will all have a common frame of reference when we’re talking in class. So we—Carol, Sandra, Carmen and I—thought *The House on Mango Street* would be good for our own lit study.”

Kelly, who is sitting next to Carlee, says, “I liked the book too, but I was wondering why you chose this particular one”

Susan says, “Well, it is one that is available in both languages, and I like the quality of the translation of it in Spanish. And because Cisneros is a Latina author of quality—because of the quality of the writing and the crafting that she is able to do. I think that she demonstrates good writing. Also since she is a Latina, I think that highlights the notion that we do want some of what we read, and what we would hope that you would use with children, to reflect children’s lives, children’s experiences, children’s ethnic backgrounds. And probably because I like the book myself and I like the writing. We’ve talked about using other books, but we seem to come back to this one at least for one of our literature studies.”

This seems to satisfy Kelly. Across the room, Candace is whispering to Monica.

Susan looks at them and says, “You seem a little concerned.”

Candace answers, “Well, I was just explaining to Monica that even though I read the Smith article on literature studies, I’m still not clear what we are supposed to do. I mean do you just get into groups and talk about what you liked and what you didn’t like?”

Susan says, “Well, that is part of it. Another reason I like this book for a literature study is because it evokes varying reactions. In the past when we’ve had lit studies on this book, some people found it depressing and dark, but other people loved it because it represented their culture and background. So the transaction that you have with the book is somewhat dependent on where you’re coming from. In that lit study, I said that I didn’t think it was that dark,

and I gave several chapters and vignettes that were not that dark. So that is one thing that you could do. Another time, with this same book, we talked about the craft of the writing. Then we went through and found parts that we thought were especially well crafted. Does that help?"

Candace nods her head.

Susan says to the rest of the class, "Why don't we break up into four groups. Carol, Sandra, Carmen, and I will be the facilitators for the first lit study."

She indicates the four corners of the room and the students begin separating into the four groups. Kelly, Candace, and Carlee sit down in a group with Sandra. Sandra begins the discussion with, "What did you think?"

Kelly begins, "I have a hard time relating to it because my family is not really like what she is describing in her family. But I think a lot of Hispanic families, they have a lot of similarities to what she is describing."

Sandra asks, "How does that make you feel when you are reading a book where your culture isn't specifically represented?"

Kelly answers, "I don't think that it is necessarily bad not to be represented in the book, because it makes me realize that, you know, that sometimes happens in the classroom."

Candace says, "That's what I was thinking about *Mango Street*, that it wasn't really representing my culture. And so I felt like I wasn't connected, like I wasn't a part of the class. I think with literature, you need to make sure that kids all feel like they are part of the class and their culture is just as important as the dominant culture."

Curious about this turn in the conversation, Sandra decides to leave *Mango Street* for a minute and ask, "So when you imagine your own classroom, what kinds of things do you see yourself doing so that you honor cultural diversity?"

Carlee jumps in, "I'd like to do this literature study. I'm against the old-fashioned 'this is what they eat, this is what they wear,' multicultural day. I feel it should be intertwined throughout and have the student really feel that experience, like through a book, that is the personal experience of someone in that culture. And then they can see that connection to their culture."

Kelly adds, "Yeah! Sometimes I see teachers reading a book about an African American family just because it is Black History Month. While it is good to address certain cultures, it is good to do it all the time and at any given moment instead of waiting till a certain month. We should celebrate all kinds of cultures and learn from each other."

Candace answers, "I like what my placement teacher does. She seems to address all the needs by trying to evoke, if they do stories, information about different cultures and sharing that with the classroom. She lets the child sit and read, and they talk about it if there are questions from other kids. I think that I would like to do something like that."

Sandra turns the conversation back to *Mango Street*, “So were there parts that you could identify with?”

Carlee answers, “Oh yes. Just like the whole thing about being a woman and having hips and a rite of passage into being a woman.”

Everybody in the group laughs.

Candace comments, “I just thought about how innocent you are as a child. You think about winning the lottery and getting a new house. I think we are all like that. It’s just our nature I think.”

Kelly disagrees, “I remember living in low income houses when I was little and I was happier then than when I lived in a nice house. So I found this book confusing. I felt like she was looking on the bad side of things.”

Sandra is just about to comment, when Susan calls that it is time to take a break.

Interpretive Commentary

The students’ comments in this literature study group indicate the importance they attribute to cultural diversity. As one student reflects on her inability to relate to the experiences of a family from a different culture in the literature study, she transforms this experience into empathy with children who can feel disconnected and isolated under similar circumstances.

All of the students comment that the literature study especially is one place where it is essential that children feel they are part of the class. In order for this to occur, the literature selected needs to reflect the cultural experiences of the children. Additionally, one student notes that the approach to literature needs to be an integral part of what children are learning and not a token acknowledgement of multiculturalism.

Discussion

Returning to the authors’ opening question, “What do pre-service teachers who have participated in an ESL/bilingual progressive, transactional reading and language arts methods course really understand about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children,” the findings would suggest that these pre-service teachers have a heightened awareness of and compassion for the difficulties culturally and linguistically diverse children face in schools. The findings also suggest that they recognize the importance of infusing the curriculum with the child’s culture. So how prepared are they?

It might be helpful to think of “prepared” in terms of Banks’ (1984) six developmental stages of ethnic behaviors. The three pre-service teachers seem to function beyond the first two developmental stages of “ethnic psychological captivity” and “ethnic encapsulation.” They neither displayed shame nor superiority about their ethnic identity. Rather, they seemed to accept themselves and their ethnic identity, as well as accept and respect the cultural and linguistic diversity of others, which is characteristic of stage three, “ethnic identity

clarification.” The three pre-service teachers certainly had the opportunity to clarify their personal attitudes through the readings, assignments, and interactions of the methods course. Perhaps they entered the program with a predisposition toward ethnic identity clarification, but even if this were the case, the methods course provided them the opportunity to reflect on and clarify their personal attitudes. In this way, it appears that the methods course helped prepare them for the cultural and linguistic diversity they are likely to encounter with their future students. But was the experience in the progressive, transactional reading and language arts methods course enough to prepare the pre-service teachers for true cross-cultural understanding?

Returning to Banks’ stages, the authors note that none of the pre-service teachers seemed to function at stages four, five, or six—“biethnicity,” “multiethnicity and globalism,” and “global competency,” respectively—in which individuals have the understanding and skills necessary to participate comfortably in two or more ethnic cultures. Although the three pre-service teachers had a strong desire to value and respect “other” cultures, they did not function from the perspective of any ethnicity beyond their own. While stages four, five, and six represent deeper cross-cultural understandings than stage three, it is unlikely that those stages would be attainable through participation in a single block of courses such as the reading and language arts course, but the block is a good start.

Conclusion

As with most interpretivist research, the authors found that in the process of answering the research question, they were left with even more questions. If a progressive, transactional ESL/bilingual reading and language arts methods course is a good start toward preparing pre-service teachers for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse children, what more can be done to further that process? If this methods course is a good start, what happens when the pre-service teachers are student teaching without the benefit of guided reflection and clarification of personal attitudes? Further, what impact would the methods course have had if the PDS classrooms had shared the progressive, transactional ideology? These are issues for further study, because there is very little in the professional development school literature about helping student teachers become knowledgeable about progressive, transactional teaching practices with culturally and linguistically diverse students, or how to help student teachers use this knowledge in their own future teaching. Fortunately, this is only the beginning of the relationship between the teacher preparation program and the PDS. The authors will continue to study the PDS methods courses and the elementary classrooms to see if the good start becomes a lifelong journey.

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