

“ONLY CONNECT!”: CROSS-
CULTURAL CONNECTIONS
IN THE READING LIVES OF
PRESERVICE TEACHERS
AND CHILDREN

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In this research, we present case studies of three Anglo American preservice teachers – Clara, Luke, & Varla – as they worked with children of color and/or poverty – Sam, Reggie, and Lucinda – over the course of a semester. In a university class entitled the Literacy/Social Studies Block, we asked the preservice teachers to look within to explore their own literary backgrounds in a reading-autobiography assignment. And we encouraged them to look about as they read and discussed literature with diverse children in the Child as Teacher Project. Here we argue that the combination of autobiographical accounts with reflective field experiences helps preservice teachers reconsider their life stories in reading in order to build bridges of literacy to and with children.

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... she might yet be able to help ... [in] the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments ... unconnected arches that have never joined ... (E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, 1921, p. 213)

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IT MIGHT BEGIN WITH THE PRESERVICE TEACHERS: three youth – one man (Luke), two women (Clara and Varla) – all in the mainstream, all in the know, readers one and all. They were each successful in school and could name a teacher, often more than one, who led them to lean toward teaching as well.

Or it might begin with the children – one girl (Lucinda), two boys (Reggie and Sam) – who swam against the stream, each with their own stroke, who looked on reading and teaching from their individual, distant shores. They were not successful in school, and reading figured primarily in this breach, though each, when asked, had much to say about the lives between the pages of a book.

But we may as well begin with the class – the university class – that linked the preservice teachers with the children, physically at first, putting one in front of the other, requiring a weekly meeting for them to read and write, to talk and listen, to draw and dramatize in an assignment called the Child as Teacher Project. But later, through the efforts of both preservice teachers and children, they came to connect their prose with their passion in an attempt to build rainbow bridges of their own.

Theoretical Framework

How to connect young teachers with children across the chasms of class, culture, and family dynamics is one of the major challenges of preservice teacher education today. According to Willis and Harris (1997), statistics for preservice educators indicate that they are predominately Anglo American, female, and middle class, yet the population of children is far more diverse. Statistics from the National Education Association predict that by the year 2000 less than 5% of the teaching force will be teachers of color, while students of color will make up 45% of the current student population – a comparison that makes one “appreciate the alarming nature of the trend” (Weil, 1998, p. 163). Recently, there has been an increasing focus on multicultural education, particularly since the shift in NCATE standards in 1979, which “herald[ed] an era of greater accountability whereby rhetorical commitments to the notion of multicultural teacher education were required to be bolstered by substantive actions in order to meet professional requirements of practice” (Goodwin, 1997, p. 5).

Typical substantive actions supplement academic training with field

experiences with children in diverse schools and communities. These cross-cultural connections provide “meaningful, direct, and positive experiences with diverse others ... [to enhance] cultural competence” (Aguilar & Pohan, 1996, p. 265). Still, the forms of cross-cultural training vary widely, with some more effective than others (York, 1997). Although all are stamped with good intentions, the old expression about “the road to hell” highlights the necessity of looking carefully at the construction beneath the smooth paving of such programs. Some are marked by “dominator intelligence ... [which] seeks to frame relationships among groups and individuals in terms of the enforced hierarchization of social differences,” whereas others are characterized by “partnership intelligence ... [which advocates] the egalitarian and caring linking of groups” (Sleeter & Montecinos, 1999, pp. 119–120).

Of all the groups with little power, there is possibly none so powerless as children, for common assumptions about their “innocence,” “egocentric” natures, and “short attention spans” abound (Nodelman, 1996, p. 73). Such assumptions inevitably result in instruction that leads instead of listens, that guides without garnering enough information to really know which way to go. This is particularly true when it comes to reading and talking about texts, for preservice teachers may see their role as “givers” of knowledge whereas children should respond as apt “receivers,” and what teachers choose to give will be highly dependent on their own ideological assumptions about children. As Nodelman suggested, “The more we believe that children are limited in various ways, the more we deprive them of experiences that might make them less limited. ... Deprived of the experience of anything more than the little we believe them capable of, children often do learn to be inflexible, intolerant of the complex and the unconventional” (p. 80).

Inflexibility and intolerance can be particularly strong when preservice teachers are involved only in “intellectual models” of teacher education (York, 1997). They read about classes, cultures, and communication styles other than their own and may fail to recognize that generalized norms will not apply to all. Indeed, academic articles and lectures are not effective when they stand alone. Facts may overshadow the faces of real children, for as one of Forster’s (1921) characters exclaimed when asked about the value of the university for “learned” individuals: “They collect facts, and facts, and empires of facts. But which of them will rekindle the light within?” (p. 36).

To rekindle the light, research suggests two essential views: *look within* and *look about*. Like the Janus-faced god of beginnings, preservice teachers, quite early in their university programs, are asked to explore their own cultural and/or literary background while simultaneously interacting with

J L R
Only

diverse children. The inward look emphasizes self-knowledge, which includes “the use of autobiography, biography, and life history methods to help students understand their own cultural identities, and ... reexamine their attitudes, assumptions, expectations, and beliefs about ... groups different from their own” (Melnick & Zeichner, 1997, p. 29). Autobiographies reveal life themes, for as Bruner (1987) explained, “When somebody tells you his life, ... it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given” (p. 13). Autobiographical accounts are marked by “irresistible error” and “instability ... [which makes them] highly susceptible to cultural, interpersonal, and linguistic influences” (p. 14). Yet, they are seriously seductive, for we often believe in what we “tell about our lives” (p. 15). Thus, although looking inward is a critical step in understanding one’s motivations, educational programs cannot assign autobiographies without the realization that they are creative constructions as prone to hyperbole as much as accurate observation. Still, following Bruner’s lead, we know that “a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (p. 31).

On the alternative, yet connected, side of looking out and about, educational programs often speak of the difficulty of such a view. Delpit (1988), for example, said that,

Listening to alternative voices is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another’s angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue. (p. 297)

Although difficult, many researchers (e.g., Goodwin, 1997) feel that a phase of “conceptual and emotional disequilibrium” is necessary, because it “can engender thoughtful reflection and questioning [and force preservice teachers] to reexamine what they thought they knew” (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). Still, looking about is less daunting if one is equipped with an explicit set of experiences grounded in pedagogical content knowledge, rather than a loose directive to “hang out with a kid.” Viewing a child’s life must be a directed gaze, focused on specific aspects of learning. In this study, the focus is on preservice teachers’ and children’s engagement with reading literature. Enciso (1996) defined engagement as “a complex interplay of personal, emotional, visual, evaluative experiences, and perceptions that are typically felt privately but also may be expressed publicly among a community of readers who share a variety of purposes, interpretations, and interests in reading” (pp. 172–173). In the title words of Enciso’s article, here we concentrate on *why engagement in reading matters* to the three preservice teachers and the children with whom they read and discussed

literature, as well as what happened when they attempted to share their individual processes and purposes both within and about the pages of a book.

Method

In this section, we begin by setting the context of the university course, the Literacy/Social Studies Block. We then describe the theoretical foundation for the class as well as the two specific assignments – the Child as Teacher Project and the reading autobiography – that were key in supporting the preservice teachers’ growth in understanding diversity. Next, we briefly introduce the study participants, Lisa and Darcy, who became fellow researchers in the study, and Clara, Luke, and Varla whose cases we will later explore in depth. Finally, we discuss our data collection and analysis to provide insight into how we interpreted the narratives both written and told to us by the preservice teachers.

The Literacy/Social Studies Block

Predominately Anglo American and female, the Literacy/Social Studies Block was a mix of undergraduates and post B.A.s. They had taken at least one introductory class on issues of diversity and educational equity, yet many still felt that when they got to their core classes there would be methods that would apply to all children, no matter their background. But as Delpit (1988) suggested, there is no uniform curriculum, and the Literacy/Social Studies Block, in particular, was devoted to exploring multiple methods for teaching diverse children through both textual and human dimensions of learning.

Building from her earlier research on children’s literary response (e.g., Wolf, Mieras, & Carey, 1996), Shelby (the Block leader) worked with her university colleagues to create classes centered on culturally conscious teaching. Designed as a team-taught, interdisciplinary combination of courses in children’s literature and literary engagement (which Shelby taught) as well as methods in social studies, writing processes, and reading concepts, our team carefully constructed a textual dimension for learning, selecting academic texts (e.g., Harris, 1993) as well as children’s literature (e.g., Curtis, 1995) to emphasize cultural diversity. We encouraged our preservice teachers to build new canons of literature rich in more representative styles, languages, values, and cultures. Still, what is the use of reading about culturally conscious pedagogy, unless we provide opportunities for our preservice teachers to experience this point of view? Thus, we worked to balance the textual dimension with a human dimension of learning through two specific assignments – one that encouraged our students to *look within*, and the second that asked them to *look about*.

The first assignment was the reading autobiography. In our description of the assignment, we asked our students to prepare a written reflection “on how you learned to read, home and school influences on your reading development, and the kinds of reading habits you have formed.”

In the second assignment, the Child as Teacher Project, we assigned our students to a community center, where they worked with a child for 2 hours a week. Our project description began:

Throughout the first semester, you will *interact with and learn from* an individual child on a weekly basis. The child can range from kindergarten to 6th grade, but must be a child of color and/or a child from a lower socioeconomic background. Nieto (1992) suggests: “The voices of students are rarely heard in the sometimes heated debate surrounding school failure and success. The experiences of students from disempowered and dominated communities are usually even more invisible” (p. 5). Your goal is to make your child’s insights into literacy and his/her social world visible. With your child as your teacher (instead of the other way around), we hope that you will come to understand what it takes to illuminate and enhance how you think about and act on diversity, literacy, and learning.

Rather than simply asking the teachers to “volunteer,” we provided them with an explicit set of experiences that included observing the child in his or her community and school, interviewing the child’s parents and classroom teacher, conducting research on the child’s cultural background, and studying the child’s literacy through specific activities, especially literary discussion. We gave the parents and children consent forms that explained that the central purpose of the project was for the preservice teachers to focus on developing their own understandings of individual children in order to help them become better elementary school teachers in the future. The consent forms also assured privacy through the use of pseudonyms and guaranteed their right to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time.

The preservice teachers kept field notes on their work, carefully documenting the questions, comments, and activities of each literary discussion. They then connected their findings to relevant research and wrote analytic papers on selected patterns. Each teacher worked closely with Shelby or another professor who offered informal advice (during meetings and telephone calls) and formal evaluation (in written reflection on the field notebook).

The Study Participants

Of the 60 students, Shelby chose 10 preservice teachers for the study on

the first day of class. With help from her colleagues, she selected a group that would represent the larger class in terms of educational status, gender, and diversity, in the hopes that such an early decision would reduce selection bias. Although the 10 students represented a range of interactions between preservice teachers and children, this article focuses on two smaller sets of the preservice teachers. The first set includes Lisa and Darcy, who began as participants in the study and stayed to work with Shelby over the next 3 years to analyze the data and write articles (e.g., Wolf, Ballentine, & Hill, 1999), while they simultaneously finished their licensure programs, found teaching jobs, and returned to the university to earn master’s degrees in literacy.

The second set of preservice teachers is the one we follow here, and we chose them through a process of elimination. First, we eliminated Lisa and Darcy’s cases, for we felt they were too close to their own data to make distanced analysis possible. Next, we eliminated two Japanese/Anglo American females, for their awareness of diversity came more from their deep personal experience of what it means to be biracial/bicultural in America today than encounters provided by the class, and we were particularly interested in the impact of the Literacy/Social Studies Block on preservice teachers’ understandings of diversity. Of the remaining six, we chose Clara, Luke, and Varla, for they seemed to most represent the Anglo American, middle-class, preservice teacher discussed in the research literature, though such stereotypes can do more harm than good in analyzing a teacher’s life. Still, these individuals fit the descriptors used for the majority of preservice teachers and went well beyond – they loved literature, they had had highly successful school experiences, and their interactions with children of color and/or poverty were limited. Finally, they were “good students” and took the Child as Teacher Project seriously – not only in their attention to the parameters of the assignment, but also in their steadfast commitments to the children themselves.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data consisted of the three preservice teachers’ reading autobiographies and Child as Teacher Project field notebooks – which contained field notes they took on their interactions with their children as well as analytic papers they wrote to present their own analyses of their field notes. Their field notes consisted of approximately 50 pages of typed notes in which they provided a detailed account of the activities and conversations from their sessions with their individual children as well as their interactions with the children’s parents and teachers. At various points in the semester, Luke, Clara, Varla, and their preservice teacher colleagues looked across

the patterns in their field notes and wrote five analytic papers (5–6 pages in length). In the first two papers – due at the semester’s midpoint – the preservice teachers wrote about their child’s “social/political world” and the “forms and functions of writing” that existed in his or her world. Toward the end of the semester, the preservice teachers wrote two more analytic papers, one that provided a profile of their child as a reader (with an emphasis on decoding abilities) and one on their child’s literary response. At these two points, Shelby provided her mentees with an extensive evaluation of both their field notes and their analytic papers. At the close of the semester, the preservice teachers wrote a final analytic paper (7–10 pages) on a topic of their choice. Luke, Clara, and Varla all chose to write more extensively about their child’s literary response.

In addition to the field notes and analytic papers, Shelby conducted interviews with the preservice teachers she mentored in the beginning of the year, at semester break, and at the end of the year. These interviews included questions on their background, their views of literacy and diversity, and their evaluation of the Block assignments. Each data segment presented is marked with a code to indicate data type and date: field notes are marked FN, analytic papers AP, the reading autobiography RA, and interviews according to placement in the sequence (I#1, I#2, & I#3).

Analysis of the data leaned heavily on literary theory, particularly story structure. We began by analyzing the reading autobiographies as narratives, which revealed the preservice teachers’ lives in literacy. We then moved to the Child as Teacher Project accounts of their interactions with children, which told a different kind of narrative and held plots that involved more conflict and complexity as they moved with their children through time, space, and adversity. Finally, we analyzed how these two narratives meshed. Most importantly, we tracked the emotional response reflected in their written and spoken words. In literature, readers study the words and actions of characters to capture the motivation and intention behind them. In our study, we followed the emotional ups and downs of our preservice teachers as they learned about children and literacy. Our analytic categories included (a) features of language that marked their construction of self in literacy (e.g., “My parents always read to me”), (b) insights into how academic readings and literature influenced their thinking (e.g., “I agree with Graves (1994) who states ...”), (c) features of language that signaled cognitive or emotional reactions often indicated by mental state verbs (e.g., “The parent interview really frightened me because ...”), (d) key understandings of the features of the child’s literary engagement such as personal connections and artistic expression (e.g., “My child likes to ask questions, not answer them, and she likes to draw her response even more”), (e) understandings of how children live and learn in their community con-

text (e.g., “My child’s mom works the night shift and dad the day, which means a lot more responsibility for the kids around the house”), and (f) insights into the value of multicultural literature (e.g., “When I read the Spanish words, her eyes lit right up!”).

A caveat to our work is that this analysis represents the construction of yet another tale, a research representation of three preservice teachers and their children told by Shelby, Lisa, and Darcy. Yet, we were encouraged by our teachers’ responses to this article, for they characterized their cases as “truthful” and “fair” even when the insights were what Luke termed “painfully honest.”

In constructing the cases, we concentrated on the mesh of stories – looking for points of congruence among the plot lines of the preservice teachers’ narratives and their stories of children. We asked where in these two tales did they link their reading history with their child’s day-to-day life. Where did their reflections on pedagogy align with their child’s insights into what it means to be a “poor reader” in school? Thus, we combined formal criticism of their autobiographies and field notebooks (with attention to word choice, images, characters, and plot patterns) with reader response criticism (attending to the transactions among the teachers, their children and the literature they read). Our analysis was ultimately designed to understand how the preservice teachers’ preliminary understandings of what it means to be a teacher of literature might be transformed through the sharing of stories, including (a) their own reading autobiographies, (b) their children’s stories of family and school, (c) research narratives of race, ethnicity, and class, (d) literary tales, as well as (e) the preservice teachers’ reflections on how to connect their prose with the passion of teaching and being taught by children.

Results

In our results, we show the intersection of six lives within a program: Clara and Sam, Luke and Reggie, and Varla and Lucinda in the Child as Teacher Project. We begin each case with the preservice teacher’s reading autobiography, move to her or his insights into the child’s life, and then explore their relationships through books. We have limited our commentary in the cases to let the preservice teachers speak for themselves. However, in the final discussion, we explore the vital lessons to be learned from these detailed cases to illuminate the lived reality of their efforts.

Clara and Sam

Clara’s experience with school approached mainstream Utopia. Raised in

a prosperous ski town, Clara “loved going to school” (1#1, 13-Sep-96). She was still in touch with many of her teachers, for she often had teachers for multiple years both in and outside the classroom. Yet, Clara’s love of school, learning, and particularly reading began at a much younger age:

I remember having books everywhere around my house ... [and] either my mother or father read to me every single day and night.... My biggest influence, though, was the extensive time I spent reading with my mother. She read to me whenever I wanted her to, and she always read with vigor, enthusiasm, character, and love in her voice.... To tell the truth, I do not remember ever having a negative response to reading with my mother. (RA, 4-Oct-96)

Clara’s text is full of absolutes: *everywhere*, *whenever*, *always*, and *ever*. In her idyllic construction, she suggests that no matter the number of requests, the place, or the time, her mother stood by with book in hand ready to read. And it did not have to be a book, for reading could be found on “food labels” or even on street signs. As Clara explained, “Even while we were driving.... there wasn’t a moment that passed without me asking my mother and father what some sign said or meant.” In Clara’s emphatic recollection, time stretched and reshaped itself to a perpetual pace toward reading.

Clara’s positive outlook on reading continued in elementary school. She remembered using basal texts and answering multiple comprehension-based questions. The kind of discussions she had shared with her parents were rare, but Clara was unperturbed: “The questions usually just merited an answer of a few words.... Although this process sounds quite mundane to me now, I remember actually liking our reading periods, probably because I was in the highest reading group and the teachers seemed to favor [those] students” (RA, 4-Oct-96). Still, in middle and high school, the “mundane” weight of these questions slowed her enthusiasm. Her “attitudes about reading changed substantially,” and she “didn’t enjoy reading as much.” Years in top reading groups provided pleasure, but also sharpened her ambition: “I basically read to survive, to pass the SATS and ACTS, and to ‘get the grade’ so that I could do well in school. I participated in honors English classes, but not because I wanted to read the books, [but because it] ... would help me get into a better college.”

At the university, she had occasional classes that rekindled her interest in reading, but years of fill-in-the-blank questions had snuffed her desire for deep discussion: “Sometimes I get frustrated when I’m reading a book that I can’t find the meaning.... I have to admit that sometimes when I get into the deeper stuff, I shy away” (1#1, 13-Sep-96). Clara’s emphasis on *the* meaning indicates a perspective more teacher-dependent than individu-

ally constructed, and the confident younger Clara who never let a moment pass without asking “what some sign said or meant,” had learned to “shy away” from signification.

Raised in an affluent ski town, Clara’s experiences with diversity were minimal: “My teachers didn’t have to worry about things like – we didn’t have much poverty. We didn’t have bilingual kids. We didn’t have a lot of the extraneous things, factors working in on us. We could just focus on being teachers and kids, and we developed a personal relationship right off” (1#1, 13-Sep-96). Clara’s description of poverty and bilingualism as “extraneous things” that teachers “didn’t have to worry about” shows a sheltered view of the world outside her small community, for without these “factors working in on us,” teachers and students could just be themselves, implying that children of poverty or those who speak two languages could not. Her comments indicate that teachers would not find it easy to form relationships across the chasms of race, ethnicity, and class – in other words, to connect. Yet, within a week of beginning the Literacy/Social Studies Block, Clara was asked to do just that.

Unlike many of her preservice colleagues who worked with children through an after-school tutoring program, Clara found Sam on her own. Eight years old and in the third grade, Sam was African American. He lived with his mother in the same apartment complex as Clara, and when she approached them about Sam’s possible participation in the project, “They both heartily agreed.” Sam’s enthusiasm did not flag over the course of the semester nor did his mother’s, though the work meant scheduling time for Clara to meet weekly with Sam, as well as her own interview with Clara.

Still, Sam’s African American mother was used to interviewing, because she was a university journalism major. She talked with Clara for over 2 hours, providing unique insights into her family’s history:

I loved my family and friends, but I had to get out of the South so that I didn’t fall into the trap of my girlfriends who were married to deadbeats by 18 years old.... My family has always supported me in breaking the norms of Southern life and I, in turn, intend to encourage my son to avoid the pitfalls [of] many African American boys his age. I want him to value his education and ... go to college. I don’t want him to fulfill the prophecy that he will be dead by the time he is 18 years old because he is involved in gang activities. (FN, 11-Sep-96)

After hearing the characterization of age 18 as a time for girls to marry “deadbeats” and boys to be “dead,” Clara did library research on the destructive images of African Americans in the media. She wrote, “I believe that the influences of Sam’s mother and home life help to exclude him from the stereotypes described [as well as] those that are *perceived* to be universal

truths by many other Americans” (AP, 21-Oct-99). She agreed with Sam’s mother that such descriptions were “pitfalls” to be avoided and “prophecies” to be altered through a strong focus on home and school life.

Although separated from Sam’s African American father, Sam’s mother felt that their goals were similar. He lived nearby, and he called his son daily to talk “for at least 20 or 30 minutes,” which she felt was critical: “Some kids whose parents live at home don’t get to talk [that long], where they have their undivided attention, where they are saying something to their parents and their parents are saying something back” (FN, 22-Sep-96). Sam’s parents also stressed the value of education: “We agreed a long time ago that the most important thing in our lives was Sam. We want him to go to college ... and get the best education that he can.... We are committed to doing anything to ensure that that happens.” His parents’ attitudes deeply influenced Sam, for when Clara asked why education was critical he stated, “So I can get a good job, and so I won’t end up in a gang or dead. My mom is in college, and I want to grow up to be smart just like my mom” (FN, 16-Oct-96).

Comments like these convinced Clara of their mainstream orientation, and her opinion was confirmed in a later interview when Sam’s mother told Clara about the importance of reading:

I read everything that was in print. You name it, I read it to Sam.... With all of those opportunities and all of those resources, I don’t see how Sam couldn’t have learned to read.... Yeah, I guess that Sam knew how to read by the time he was 4 years old or so. (FN, 30-Oct-96)

This view echoed Clara’s explanation of her own family’s reading, for Sam’s mother’s talk was filled with absolutes: *everything* and *all*. Her reading choices were as variable as those of Clara’s parents, encompassing “everything that was in print,” and she placed similar importance on the power of reflecting on what they read. Although the reading relationships between Clara and her mother and Sam and his mother were years apart, and their cultural experiences worlds apart, the emphasis on reading was strikingly similar, allowing them to reach over their differences to find a way to connect.

The connection was strengthened once Clara and Sam began to read together. Sam’s reading experience provided a foundation for their conversations, and from the first book they shared to their last, Sam surprised Clara with his literary insights. He read easily and with style, and when Clara read with expression, he lauded her risk taking. He made intertextual connections among books and directly addressed book characters, giving them advice. And he noted illustrative details and commented on the quality of the art work. While reading *Miss Spider’s Wedding* (Kirk,

1995), Clara asked him how he knew that the character of Spiderus Reeves was a “villain spider.” Sam replied:

Well, look at his face and his eyebrows. He has a smile like the Grinch. His eyebrows are all curly and mean. He smokes. And you can see the evil in his eyes. His eyes – Like they, um, talk to me. They tell me not to trust this guy. Plus the drawings make him all shadowy and evil looking, not bright and happy and honest. (FN, 6-Nov-96)

Sam’s Grinch comparison was typical of his text-to-text connections. And in his close analysis of the text at hand, Sam even noted how the “evil looking” drawings echoed the character’s personality, which led Clara to remark, “Sam uses the pictures in books as material support for his interpretations” (AP, 24-Nov-96).

Although Sam had a range of literary responses, Clara focused on three strengths. First, he had an extensive word bank, which he spent wisely. Reading a tale that described God as female, Sam asserted that he thought God was “a combination, a *hodgepodge!* God is everything” (FN, 30-Oct-96). Later, he used the term “metaphorically speaking.” “Astounded,” Clara asked for a definition, which Sam supplied: “‘Metaphorically speaking’ means you make a term up about how hot you are, how cold you are, or something like, ‘The sun was as yellow as a banana’” (FN, 2-Oct-96). Sam also liked to expand his word bank by questioning the meaning of words. Clara initially supplied the definitions, though she realized this was not effective pedagogy: “I immediately offered my opinion of what I thought the word meant,... and that probably wasn’t the best way to get Sam to think for himself” (FN, 18-Sep-96). Thus, she began to probe for his thinking. When reading a fable entitled “The Billy Goats” (which Sam compared to the “Billy Goats Gruff”), two goats met “head to head” on a bridge and refused to back down. Clara asked what the phrase meant, and he replied, “They’re facing each other so their heads are close to each other. Still, it is like when I go head to head with my mother about not wanting to go to bed. It means that we are both being stubborn, just like the goats” (FN, 18-Sep-96).

Clara felt Sam was also strong in predicting outcomes and relating stories to his experience. Sam knew the goats would not resolve their dilemma, and when they fell to their death, Sam shouted:

“See, I told you they would! They should have been not stubborn and just let [each other] walk across. But, noooo! They just had to be stubborn and that’s what they get. They have to be in horn heaven now.” [After this exclamation, Clara continued to write in her field notes:] I asked Sam how he would have chosen who would have needed to back up and he said in a fiery voice, “I would have backed up because I wouldn’t want to fall into a raging river. I wouldn’t want to be stupid!” After the story was finished, I asked

Sam what he thought the purpose of writing a fable was. He replied, "Hmmm. For little kids? To tell you how to be not stubborn, how to get out of predicaments." (I can't believe he said that word!) I told him that I thought that that was a very good answer. (FN, 18-Sep-96)

J L R
Wolf,
Ballentine,
& Hill

Not only astonished by Sam's word choice, Clara was impressed with his take on the stupidity of the goats. And as they progressed over the semester, Clara reiterated her admiration by labeling Sam's analysis of stories "sagacious," "keen," and "endearing," among other laudatory terms.

Sam's third strength concerned authors: "He repeatedly provides highly perceptive and lucid commentaries on author/illustrator intention, and even goes so far as to suggest how he feels an author is progressing professionally" (AP, 9-Dec-96). When they read Steig's (1969) *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, Sam questioned the efficacy of the art: "I can't quite see why these illustrations got the Caldecott Award. I mean they are pretty good.... Wait, let me look at the date on this book. Oh, I see, 1969 was a long time ago. Maybe these were the best illustrations in that year" (FN, 20-Nov-96). Sam's ability to consider the book in its time as well as his insights into how the Caldecott committee works with each year's books, helped him to justify the award, though he critiqued the art. Yet, his opinion did not deter him from finding other text qualities, especially the story development:

When Sylvester's parents decided to go on a picnic, I asked Sam where they might go. He said, "Well, the story is probably going to end soon, so they probably are going to go to Strawberry Hill because they will need to be near their son at the end of the story to make it all glue together." We came to the phrase "He was stone-dumb" and Sam laughed and laughed. He said, "Do you get it, 'stone-dumb'? He is a rock, another name for a stone. Get it? 'Stone-dumb'? That was a totally tricky joke, don't you think?" I agreed and read on. We came to the part where Sylvester turned himself back into a donkey and Sam looked at me proudly and said, "I told you he would come back again. The story would have been too sad if he didn't. The author did a good job with suspense though, don't you think?" ... At the end of the story Sam said, "Man, I liked that book. I'm so glad that I gave it a chance or else I would have missed out." (FN, 20-Nov-96)

Clara would have missed out as well, for making ample room for Sam's reflections allowed her to see his "sharp understanding of an author's craft" (AP, 9-Dec-96). Indeed, in their last reading session together, Clara was again struck by Sam's "ability to see inside the author's mind":

We came to the part [in *The Widow's Broom*, Van Allsburg, 1992] that told us how Minna Shaw assumes that the old discarded witch's broom she has

found is devoid of all its power and is now simply a run-of-the-mill house broom. Before I could go on, Sam quickly interjected with: "The author wouldn't have left the broom behind if something wasn't going to happen with it. If he did that it would be like putting a character in a movie and then not having them have to do with anything in the movie.... If you put something in a movie or book, especially a character, you had better do something!" (AP, 9-Dec-96)

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Clara was impressed with Sam's insights, because he knew that skilled authors did not drop in characters, even an anthropomorphic broom, without the intention of sweeping up all the details.

Still, Sam's insights went unnoticed in school. Both times Clara observed, the children were reading silently or quietly with partners. When Sam encouraged his peers to use expression, he was "ignored." In her second visit, Clara was surprised by the activity that took up most of Sam's time:

Sam was sitting at his desk with a sort of a pained look on his face. [The teacher] ... told me he was taking a beginning-of-the-year reading test so that they could figure out what level he was reading. He said that they would give him another test at the end of the year and ... compare the two sets of results to determine his progress. This struck me as odd because it wasn't the beginning of the year. The test that he was taking was also questionable.... [T]he questions ... just asked the reader to recall trivial facts at the comprehension level. (FN, 21-Nov-96)

"Metaphorically speaking," Sam was like Sylvester, a rock who went unrecognized. He could not access the magic within without opportunities for talk and reflection. The quiet of the classroom, the disinterest in expressive reading, the low-level questions to be addressed in isolation rather than more analytic discussion, extinguished the light that Clara knew Sam held when it came to books. After the second classroom observation, Sam said, "Will you read to me because ... I am tired of reading today. I really hated that test. I probably flunked it." Clara had never seen him so dispirited, and wrote, "I felt justified in my objections to the test he took. Not only was [his teacher] going to get a false impression of what Sam could read, he also had a dejected student on his hands."

Clara felt certain of her own growth in understanding the gifts and needs of this little boy. She commented that Sam had taught her to be a more expressive – willing to try on accents and sound effects. She was proud of the shift in her questioning, which moved from "known information" to more thoughtful queries. Most important, she was enlightened by the need for *relationship*:

When I first began working with Sam, I was quite impatient. I attended our

sessions with a rigorous agenda in mind and when we would stray from my intended path, I would become agitated... [Yet], some of my most treasured moments with Sam were ones of complete spontaneity. I learned that although rigorous agendas may appear to exude organization and preparedness, they make for a contrived and unhappy experience. Strict schedules and agendas may take away from developing ... a trusting relationship with your student, and if that rapport is not established, the student's learning experience will be compromised. (AP, 24-Nov-96)

When Clara began the project, she was skeptical that a child could be her teacher: "When you said you need to work with a child of color and/or poverty, I was like, 'Well, I'm just gonna have to save this kid.' That's kind of how I looked at it. I think a lot of us probably thought, 'They're [the professors] doing this because these kids are the ones that need help'" (I#2, 23-Jan-97). Laughing over the question of "who saved who?" Clara readily admitted that if there was a savior involved, it was Sam. In her last paper, she wrote: "Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would have found such a caring, sensitive, loving, comical, and intelligent friend in a third grade boy named Sam. If Sam receives from me only half of what he gave to me, I will be content" (AP, 19-Dec-96).

Luke and Reggie

Contentment is not a characteristic of our case of Luke and Reggie. Although Luke shared aspects of Clara's background, and Reggie, like Sam, was an African American boy easily engaged in literature, these surface similarities did not result in the relatively easy relationship established in our first case. Thus, although Luke and Reggie connected, their alliance was achieved over more difficult obstacles.

In his college years, Luke spent four summers as a recreation director in a camp for children with speech and hearing impairments. The children were "very diverse" in race, ethnicity, and ability. Many came from difficult family backgrounds, and Luke had to work with social services on several occasions. Despite these painful problems, he felt his camp experience was life transforming, and later, while working on his Master's degree in music performance, he began to think about becoming an elementary teacher: "These last 2 years I just kept thinking, 'What was the thing that made me the most happy in my whole life? You know, what do I love to do?' And I just kept going back to that camp. You know I'm like, 'It was that camp!'" (I#1, 3-Sep-96).

As a result, Luke joined our teacher education program to earn an elementary license, with a goal of becoming a teacher in the inner city. In his first Block assignment – the reading autobiography – he discussed his background as a reader:

Reading has always been very important in my family... Both of my parents went to college and work in the medical field. They value education and place great importance on books. I remember my parents constantly reading... I also have three older brothers who ... read to me constantly while I was young... I always loved to read and to be read to. (RA, 4-Oct-96)

Like Clara, Luke's account is replete with absolutes: *always* and *constantly*. In his first grade's high group, he remembered "what it was like to be in the 'top' reading book, and what a stigma was placed on being in the 'low' group. I guess I learned at a very early age what the teacher wanted to hear, for I excelled in reading comprehension." Indeed, Luke learned to play the game, scanning the "boring SRA cards to find the obvious answers." He was placed in gifted classes from second grade on, and in fourth grade, he had two teachers who inspired him to read even more:

My [classroom] teacher got our whole class turned on to the Laura Ingalls Wilder series. She would read to us every day from those books. I absolutely loved them... My mom got the books for me and I would stay up until 2:00 AM reading them. In fourth grade the gifted and talented students got to go to the junior high one day a week. It was an amazing time in my life... We read [classic children's books] and even plays by Shakespeare. She tackled subjects like death and dying ... [and] we moved from comprehension questions to open-ended questions. She tried to relate the stories to our lives. (RA, 4-Oct-96)

Luke's narrative demonstrates a smooth reading path – his teachers used classic texts to link literature to life, and his family had the means to purchase the books he "loved" and the good will to let him stay up late reading. Still, he was reflective about top groups and gifted programs, explaining that his primary teachers "made it very obvious who was in the top groups and who wasn't... It is appalling for me to recognize what an impact a label has on a student." When he began working with Reggie in the Child as Teacher Project, his statement would prove to be painfully accurate.

Shelby helped connect Luke with Reggie through the community center. She met his Anglo American stepfather when he came to register Reggie, following the request of his African American wife who knew of our program. When Luke arrived at their house the first time, Reggie greeted him like an old friend – and this friendship included instant involvement in the family dynamics:

[Reggie's mom] yelled hello to me and then began, or continued, screaming at her husband ... about a check that had bounced... All the while, the kids just went about their business as if it happened all the time. Finally, she came downstairs and politely apologized as if nothing had really happened.

She said that they had “a little mishap” happen today.... She acted as if she had known me forever. Reggie and I were sitting at the kitchen table while she went into the bathroom to do her hair. She left the door open and talked to me the whole time ... [about Reggie] as if he weren't even there.... She informed me that she didn't think Reggie had any problems at all and that teachers didn't know how to teach African American boys ... [who] were very different than other children and needed constant stimulation and a firm hand. She was clear ... that [Reggie] had to do twice as well as everyone else if he wanted to succeed in today's White world. She would say something extremely positive about her son and then turn around ... and say how bad he was. Reggie ... didn't have much of a reaction at all to what she was saying. It was very confusing to me. (FN, 12-Sep-96)

Luke's confusion came from multiple sources, though his own upbringing was most influential. In his view, family arguments were private affairs, not to be witnessed by outsiders. To his surprise, Reggie's mother left the bathroom door open, instead of speaking with him and then attending to her hair in private. Beyond differences in civilities, he was most disturbed when she spoke openly about “how bad” her son was, and though Reggie “didn't have much of a reaction,” Luke did. Furthermore, at the end of their talk, Reggie's parents left Luke in charge of the children. He wrote, “I was really surprised that they left me alone with their kids after only talking to me for about an hour.”

Not all of Luke's shock stemmed from Reggie's family, for he was also surprised by his own reactions to their apartment which was neatly arranged with pictures of family as well as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela: “I guess because of my own stereotypes, I definitely underestimated Reggie's living situation” (FN, 12-Sep-96). Thus, Luke was forced to reflect on some of his own values and stereotypes. And in rethinking some of his assumptions, he realized why Reggie's parents might leave him alone with the children. They had hectic schedules, for Reggie's mother was a telemarketer at night, and his father had a day-shift making video screens: “The family was only all together and awake for an hour or so in the morning and [for about 45 minutes] in the afternoon,” and a lot of family life had to be compressed into those few hours.

This hectic pattern was made more problematic by Reggie's relationship with school. He came home nightly loaded down with worksheets he had not finished. He was shunted back and forth between his regular and resource classrooms – making it hard to concentrate in school. When Luke tried to contact his classroom teacher, she “never returned [his] phone calls.” After Luke persisted, she told him that “Reggie didn't really do any reading or writing in her class, and that it would probably be a waste of my time to observe her class,” a statement the resource teacher confirmed:

She didn't think Reggie had any learning disabilities, but more emotional problems. She felt that Reggie was invisible in his regular classroom. He would come and go to the resource room and [his teacher] would never even acknowledge that he existed.... She also told me that Reggie had to stay in most recesses to do work that he didn't complete. The problem that I could see ... was that Reggie always had a ton of energy. He would stay in the classroom all day long and then ... do homework all night long. No wonder he acted up! (FN, 18-Oct-96)

As one of only two African American children in the school, Reggie was a loner. He complained of being teased by kids who told him, “You are short, you don't match, you are bald” (FN, 26-Sep-96). In one observation, Luke watched Reggie on a field day when parents were invited – kids with parents ran with them, while kids without parents ran “in packs. Reggie, on the other hand, was running all alone” (FN, 18-Oct-96). Reggie's isolation and invisibility was made more apparent on another visit to school when Luke looked for him for almost an hour: “No one in the school knew where he was” (FN, 21-Oct-96). Still, Reggie became visible enough when he acted out with a substitute teacher and was sent to the principal. His parents were called. When Luke went to Reggie's that night, he walked into another family argument, with near disastrous consequences for their relationship:

Today was a very stressful visit.... [Reggie's mom] was screaming at the top of her lungs at [Reggie's father] ... telling him how worthless Reggie was and how stupid he was.... She was yelling the whole time. When she finally came down she told me that she “would have to cancel my services.” I just explained that they were helping *me* out, not the other way around. She said that she would think about it and let me know.... She told me that she was going to send him to New Mexico to live with his grandma because she didn't want him anymore. This went on and on ... and she was yelling the whole time.... [Then she] left with Reggie's dad. He did not say a word the whole time this was going on. (FN, 6-Oct-96)

The stress that Luke experienced with this visit was obvious. He characterized Reggie's mother as “screaming at the top of her lungs,” in an onslaught that went “on and on.” Her formal statement that “she would have to cancel [Luke's] services,” contrasted with the very vocal anger she expressed over how her son was doing in school. Yet, her statements seemed to come from frustration about how, when, where, and why her son should have help. He was already in the resource room, and now Luke was there to “help,” and nothing made a difference. Most critical, she later explained that she was driven by her belief that Reggie “has to do unbelievably well to get by because he's Black.”

After she left, Luke stayed because Reggie was “crying,” which was only

made worse when his mother called to say “she was serious about sending him away.” When Luke had to leave for class, Reggie’s stepfather was still not back – a pattern Luke noted, for he was often “saying he’ll be gone for ‘5 minutes’ and returning 2 hours later.” During their talk, Reggie “asked a bunch of questions about New Mexico. He didn’t even know his grandma... I told him that people say a lot of things they don’t mean when they are angry and that sometimes you have to ‘listen through the angry things’ to find out what the person is really mad about.”

Initially, Luke was so “blown away” that he himself could not listen through the angry things Reggie’s mother said to get to the motivation for her rage. He was shocked that the school would call her if they knew what her reaction would be: “If they know his parents, I don’t understand why they would call. I don’t think I would call home” (FN, 6-Oct-96). And though the principal had “yelled at” Reggie, Luke concentrated on the mother’s anger, perhaps because he was the partial recipient of her ire and had not witnessed what occurred in school. Indeed, at this early point in the semester, Luke had not yet visited the school, and did not yet know just how hard school was for Reggie.

Reggie’s mother relented, and Luke returned. At her request, he agreed to help Reggie with “paying attention” and “goal-setting exercises.” But Luke felt more motivated by her statement that teachers didn’t know how to address Reggie’s needs, and went to Shelby for advice. They discussed the mislabeling of children, and she recommended several articles that might aid his understanding. Luke was particularly struck by the lack of opportunity for Reggie to talk about texts in school:

[The resource teacher] told me that they read little SRA cards and that the stories weren’t very exciting, but they were short enough that each student could read the whole thing him/herself... This related to an article written by Richard Allington [1991] [who] ... mentioned that the kids that needed to be reading quality literature in pull-out programs were spending a lot of time working on skills and comprehension, while “good” readers were getting time to read to themselves. It all made so much sense to me. [So] I brought Reggie books that he was interested in,... stories he could relate to his own life. (FN, 18-Oct-96)

Knowing the stories Reggie read in school “weren’t very exciting,” Luke brought the most intriguing texts he could find, and he was motivated as well by Reggie’s enthusiastic response. He brought *Just a Dream* (Van Allsburg, 1990), the story of a boy, Walter, who learns hard lessons about ecology. Initially, Walter cares little about the environment, and Reggie’s reaction was immediate: “He understood Walter did something horrible by throwing a bag on the ground. He started saying, ‘Oooooo’ and then

pretended to grab the crumpled-up bag from the picture and throw it out” (FN, 19-Sep-96). Reggie’s penchant for literal as well as figurative interaction with text was striking. He talked to the characters, evaluated their actions, and even handled the objects on the page, acting “as if he were a part of the story.” As the text progressed, Reggie became even more involved. Walter dreams of a world where litter is everywhere, traffic is snarled, and smoke stacks belch. Each time he dives under his covers to hide from one hideous scene, he opens his eyes to another:

When I showed Reggie the picture of Walter in his bed with two men holding a saw waiting to cut down the tree Walter was caught in, Reggie got really excited, as if he were watching an action movie. When he found out why the guys were going to cut down the tree (to make toothpicks) he thought it was a “dumb idea.” He thought they could find something better to “pick their teeth with.” ... [Next] Walter was sitting on top of some smoke stacks. Reggie yelled, “Walter, you better get back under the covers!” He knew that every time Walter went under the covers ... he ended up in a very different place. (FN, 19-Sep-96)

Reggie followed the plot like “an action movie,” but rather than just watch, he made his opinions clear, judging the quality of an action (“dumb idea”) and shouting out warnings to the protagonist.

The link between action movies and books became more apparent when they read *Jumanji* (Van Allsburg, 1981) – a tale that places its central characters, Peter and Judy, in a wild jungle adventure game that cannot be stopped until one player wins. Reggie had seen the film and discussed “all the similarities to the movie” while they read, and his memory was vivid. Indeed, he “would get upset when the story wouldn’t correspond exactly to the movie. It was almost like the book was ruining his reality” (FN, 26-Sep-96). Perhaps because of his media orientation and vivid imagination – envisioning “Jumanji II” – Reggie rarely sat calmly for Luke’s reading. He was up and out of his seat, enacting small textual scenes, and telling his own life stories.

Based on his engagement as well as his status as one of two African Americans in school, Shelby asked Luke to read more multicultural literature. One of the Block’s assigned texts was *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* (Curtis, 1995), and after Reggie’s mother threatened to send him to his grandmother’s, the story seemed most appropriate. The Watsons are an African American family, and like Reggie, the narrator, Kenny, is in the fourth grade. His family is extremely stable, and Kenny’s mother, Wilona, lovingly helps her children with their problems. Still, there are points of crises, since her oldest son, Byron, is a “juvenile delinquent.” He causes a ton of trouble, doing poorly in school and beating up kids on the playground,

which forces his parents' decision to send him to his grandmother's in Birmingham. Yet, none of his delinquent behavior is more worrisome than his interest in matches. Wilona is most upset, for she experienced a fire as a child, and the memory strikes fear in heart. She warns Byron that if he plays with matches again she will burn him! One day, the threat moves close to reality when Byron is in the bathroom lighting wads of toilet paper, which he pretends are Nazi parachuters shot out of the sky. Catching him in the act, Wilona slams into the bathroom, hauls him downstairs, and goes for a fresh book of matches. Luke began with this scene, because he felt it would give Reggie a chance to talk over his mother's threats to send him away.

Reggie's reaction to this scene was palpable, though he was "disappointed at first because [the book] had no pictures" (FN, 17-Oct-96). Still, when Luke showed him the author's photo and read the biographical blurb, Reggie "was pretty excited that a 'Black man' had written the book." They "talked a little bit about what had happened during the last visit," and Reggie said, "He was doing a lot better in school." Once they started reading, Reggie sat close to Luke, grabbing his arm and requesting that he "reread many parts because he thought they were so funny." Certain sections inspired Reggie to respond vociferously, especially when Kenny warned Byron to "get out of here":

- Reggie: I would of left that place when she went to go get those matches. I would of unlocked that door and ran out of there. I would of ... said, "MOMMA, I ain't getting burned. BYE! I would of been "SEE YA, WOULDN'T WANT TO BE YA!"
- Text: "Momma was carrying a piece of paper towel, a jar of Vaseline and a Band-Aid in one hand and a fresh, dry book of matches in the other" (p. 69).
- Reggie: ... She had that Vaseline. (Yelling) I would of just SMACKED my Momma and ran right out that door!...
- Text: [When Wilona tries to burn Byron's fingers, his little sister blows out the matches. Frustrated, Wilona tells him that if he ever plays with matches again:] "I will burn your entire hand, then send you to juvenile home!" (p. 74)
- Reggie: (Angrily) She's STUPID AND MEAN! My Momma would never do that to me. She - That Momma's insane!
- Luke: Would your Mom ever get mad and send you away?
- Reggie: Not to juvenile hall! Just to my grandma's. Actually, she would give me a warning first and say, "Don't do that again. Okay, son?" And I would say, "Okay" and I wouldn't do it anymore! (FN, 17-Oct-96)

Reggie's engagement is clear, for he placed himself in the story, though in

contrast to the characters. Byron stayed, whereas Reggie "would of been gone." Byron was silent, yet Reggie talked back forcefully and humorously. Most importantly, the text allowed him to compare his own mother's hypothetical anger to Wilona's and to create a more positive maternal reaction. Luke wrote, "The image that Reggie dramatized was very different from the situation that I had encountered the previous week. He even gave his story a somewhat happy ending" (AP, 26-Nov-96). Reggie felt that his mother, though angry at times, deeply cared about him.

For the rest of the semester, Reggie and Luke continued to read *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* though they started from the beginning. Luke was ecstatic about Reggie's involvement and wrote, "If I let him, he would have wanted to talk about every sentence I read. Reggie acted as though he was 'set free' when [he interacted] with the stories we read" (AP, 26-Nov-96). Most important, Reggie's enthusiasm caused his mother to comment that Luke "allowed him to learn in a way that she thought was more appropriate for African American boys."

However, the interaction with Reggie's parents was still fraught with uncertainty. Reggie often missed their meetings, and his mother's excuses did not match Reggie's. Yet, in his interviews, Luke made it clear that some of what was happening in Reggie's home was a marker of a particular family frame. The mother's yelling and her husband's passive-aggressive resistance were less emblematic of their "culture," then of their own struggles to make their way through life. Luke suggested, "His parents [were] wanting to be so involved but not really having the time to do it. It wasn't that they didn't care" (1#2, 31-Jan-97). And Luke realized that a part of his difficulty with their choices lay in the fact that his own family, as an upper-class professional family, had the opportunity to choose other paths:

I never understood how Reggie's mom talked to him the way that she did, but I ... started realizing towards the end that ... maybe it wasn't as degrading and awful as I was perceiving it. To me it was the worst imaginable thing, and I would never talk to a child that way. And my parents would have never told me they were going to send me away. (1#3, 9-Jun-97)

Luke's realization shows his understanding that interpretation of another's family life is always filtered through personal experience. As for issues of culture, Luke reflected on Reggie's mother's views that "African American boys could not just be expected to sit still in a class all day long [and] ... having those expectations for Reggie were ridiculous" (AP, 26-Nov-96). She sometimes pondered moving to a city where her son would have more "Black peers," but she felt that "it would make him a stronger person for going to school with primarily White people" (FN, 21-Nov-96). Still, she knew what strength that would demand, for as Luke's work indicates,

his teachers tended to “ignore him” (AP, 11-Dec-96). Despite all this, Reggie’s obvious engagement in story led Luke to conclude:

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Incorporating a child’s mind, body, and spirit into education is essential in making connections between the child’s experiences and the material being taught. [When] teachers ... repress his movement, his verbal responses, and his flamboyance, they are also inhibiting his comprehension and fluency... When Reggie’s mother told me the first day that most teachers don’t know how to teach African American boys, I really didn’t understand what she meant. This semester I have come to understand her statement... By allowing children to interact with quality literature, reading and writing through drama, open-ended questions, body movement ... art, music, and a range of other subjects, I will give my students techniques that allow them to effectively read the world around them. (AP, 11-Dec-96)

Luke, too, was learning to read the world. In the beginning of the semester he had written, “It is appalling for me to recognize what an impact a label has on a student, whether it be negative or positive” (RA, 4-Oct-96). But thanks to Reggie, he now knew some of the reality behind the rhetoric.

Varla and Lucinda

Varla, like Clara and Luke, was a born-and-bred reader. She defined herself as a “voracious reader,” and when she met Lucinda, she was eager to share her literary passion. But the background of books so common for Varla was new to Lucinda. More important, Lucinda was a second-grade Mexican American, learning to read in Spanish and English, whereas Varla’s Spanish, as well as her knowledge of bilingual texts, was minimal. Yet, Varla was determined to connect, for she had been raised in a family of readers:

I’ve always been surrounded by ... reading, be it books, newspapers, or magazines.... My house was a very literate place. My mother, father, and grandmother read to my sister and me as toddlers, until we learned how and wanted to do it ourselves. It was rarely difficult to convince my parents to buy us books, or to take my sister and me to the library. When visiting my grandmother, I always wanted to read whatever she read. (RA, 4-Oct-96)

Varla’s school experience was also filled with books. Placed in the top reading group in first grade, she continued as a successful reader throughout her school career. She believed “nothing [was] more relaxing” than listening to a teacher read aloud, and silent reading was “a great treat.” Like her grandmother, teachers who knew her love of reading made “literary suggestions.” Varla wrote, “I still hold admiration and warmth for the teach-

ers who put in the extra effort to know me and to really consider what I would enjoy reading.” Still, she knew not everyone was equally enchanted:

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I realize that for some reading is difficult, elusive, boring, and even painful. I know that my mere presence in the classroom will not be enough to make every student a successful reader... As I write this I am thinking about how I can facilitate my child’s literary growth in the Child as Teacher Project. She enjoys listening to stories, but is somewhat apprehensive about reading by herself. Somehow I need to help her enjoy the reading process and find her literary strength. I realize that this time with her is crucial because I will soon have a whole classroom of students. Many of them, no doubt, will be in the same situation as she is. It is essential, therefore, that I – the teacher – build a bridge to literacy for these students. By creating the type of fun and exciting reading environment I was raised with, I am hopeful that each child will cross that bridge successfully. (RA, 4-Oct-96)

Still, Varla had her own bridges to cross, and the first was her decision to work with a bilingual child: “I’ve decided to take a risk by working with a kid who speaks Spanish and English. So that’s kind of scary... I know I’ll be a better person for it. I need it. I *need* it, and I *know* that, but it’s still scary” (i#1, 10-Sep-96). Still, Varla’s past volunteer work helped her see children’s potential: “I always learn more from children. Everything I’ve been in, I feel like, ‘God these kids are great. I’ve learned so much. I wonder if they learned anything...’ So yeah, I’m for her being the teacher definitely.” Varla’s openness was essential, for when she first arrived at the center, she got an earful from a staff member who described Lucinda as “difficult,” “loud,” and who “had trouble focusing”:

She sternly advised me not to be fooled into thinking that Lucinda has no homework.... Well, by this time I was totally frightened and ready to flee.... [Yet after meeting Lucinda] I was reminded of how everyone’s perception can be so different. It’s hard to not be affected by what is said about someone, but it reminded me just how important it is, as a teacher, ... not to be influenced by what you hear. Every child has the right to come into the classroom as a positive entity, without negative baggage trailing behind them. (FN, 12-Sep-96)

Varla’s reflection showed her willingness to take the lead from the child. Though negative comments made her feel “ready to flee,” she stayed to meet Lucinda as a “positive entity” rather than a label. And despite her missing homework, Varla found Lucinda “quiet,” not “loud,” and eager to focus.

Varla’s book selections also demonstrated her openness. After her first interview with Shelby, she stayed to “talk books,” especially bilingual texts. Shelby spoke of publishing companies committed to multicultural

literature and loaned her several well-known picture books. Equipped with excellent texts for their first meeting, she still found her own questions slight and Lucinda shy to respond:

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I suggested reading one of Shelby's books.... I guess we were both pretty nervous (or at least I was) because I could think of very few questions ... and I did not feel that any of them were very in depth. Most of Lucinda's answers were "I don't know." ... [Then] I read *Angel's Kite* by Alberto Blanco [1994].... Again I received similar answers, but what did I expect from my uninspired, nervous questions? (FN, 12-Sep-96)

Instead of blaming Lucinda for her "I don't know" responses, Varla looked inward. She admitted that she could think of "very few questions," and those she did were "uninspired." Though she was a bit hard on herself, her self-reflection allowed her to choose a different tack.

I asked her to draw me a kite from the book, *Angel's Kite*. In Spanish, kite is *papalote*. She seemed hesitant, perhaps assuming that I wanted some particular type of kite that she would have to guess to get right. I told her that I wanted her to draw a kite that she would like, just like Angel did in the book. She seemed pleased ... [and] went to work. I certainly learned tonight that Lucinda likes to draw hearts. Her kite was loaded with them. She also added some flowers. When she finished her kite, she seemed to be looking to me for approval. I told her how much I liked it and asked her to sign her work. She asked me to write my name on a piece of paper so she could dedicate the picture to me. (FN, 12-Sep-96)

In the Block, we had discussed theoretical research which showed how teachers predominately ask "known information questions" with answers that the teacher *knows* and the child must *guess* (e.g., Wolf, Mieras, & Carey, 1996). This guesswork for the right answer can paralyze children's abilities to think for themselves, and even to draw in ways that *they* want. Still, hearing this theory in class is one thing; seeing it played out in the hesitancy of a real child is quite another. And Varla was quick to understand the implications for Lucinda. Thus, instead of encouraging her to draw a kite like the one in the story, she encouraged Lucinda to follow the book character's actions and draw what *she* liked. Varla's encouragement resulted in not one, but three drawings, all dedicated to Varla, first in English, and then, significantly, in Spanish.

The role of Spanish in Lucinda's life was key, yet Varla did not initially understand how to unlock its significance. When she walked Lucinda home after their first session with the intention of meeting her parents, she was in for a surprise: "Just as we reached her doorway Lucinda dropped her bomb ... her parents did not speak any English! I was dumbfounded and

panic-stricken all at once. My ... feelings of well-being vanished along with any Spanish that I could possibly remember" (FN, 12-Sep-96). Still, Lucinda's Mexican American parents helped to put Varla more at ease. Rather than be shocked themselves with an unexpected visitor, they "tried to make [her] feel welcome by smiling a lot." And fortuitously, there was a gentleman present who spoke English: "Lucinda explained who I was and that I didn't speak Spanish. The man sitting at the table introduced himself and offered to translate. I am not sure if he was a friend or a relative, but I was grateful that he was there."

Although Varla was encouraged to try out her own rudimentary Spanish with Lucinda's parents, she arranged for a translator when she conducted her formal interview - an aspect of the Child as Teacher Project that Varla most dreaded. Yet, when Varla and her translator arrived for their appointment, Lucinda's parents were welcoming once again, though "a bit shy." They seemed pleased when Varla thanked them "for allowing this interview" and explained that her "experience with Lucinda and this interview were to help [her] become a good teacher." When Varla asked them about school, they were enthusiastic - their daughter "enjoyed school," especially math, and was "very studious." However, when Varla probed for details they grew quiet and explained that they "had not visited the school nor spoken with Lucinda's teacher." Indeed, Lucinda's father became even more soft spoken and revealed that neither he nor his wife could read or write, and that although he spoke some English, his wife did not. Varla described them as "very hesitant and uncomfortable," but serendipitously at this point, Lucinda came into the room, chatting about how much she liked math, and the tension eased:

I had the translator ask what their goals were for Lucinda. Somehow I was a bit surprised that her father said, without hesitation, that his goal was for her to do what she wants to do with her life. Her mother agreed completely with this sentiment. [The translator], who was impressed with the fact that Lucinda enjoyed math so much, asked her if she wanted to be an engineer. Lucinda told us, with a grin, that she wanted to be a math teacher. When we asked what Lucinda liked to do in her spare time, her parents helped her to understand the question, because she wanted to answer it. It was established that she likes to read and play hide-and-go-seek with her friends. We asked her parents what makes her unique and special. They told us that becoming educated is what makes Lucinda very special. They felt her learning to read and write was the most important thing. (FN, 10-Oct-96)

In her field notes, Varla made little commentary about the weight of the information she had been given. She found it "strange" that Lucinda's parents were so enthusiastic about school without direct contact with the

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institution. Still, their emphasis could have stemmed from their hesitancy about their own literacy, which they transformed into strong goals for their daughter. Indeed, rather than question why they had not been to school nor talked with Lucinda's teacher, Varla might have questioned if the school or teacher had contacted them. Perhaps Lucinda's parents felt that what their daughter *said* was most important, for what could be better proof of Lucinda's enthusiasm for school than the fact that she wanted to be a math teacher? Furthermore, Lucinda's parents were well aware of her other accomplishments. When Varla asked about Lucinda's strengths, they emphasized "her concern for her family's well-being. She is always helping to take care of her little brother if he needs something [and] she will go to the store for her mother to get it." It seemed likely that if a part of her family's well-being depended on her education, Lucinda would get that as well.

Lucinda's parents also seemed willing to do what they could to guarantee her education. Though parts of the interview were hard, they were enthusiastic to have Varla continue with their daughter: "When I asked if I could come over on the weekends [Saturday afternoons] to work with Lucinda, they seemed quite pleased" (FN, 10-Oct-96). The fact that Lucinda's parents sacrificed weekend time surely marked "the importance of schooling in their minds," for they had told Varla about their extended family of "cousins, aunts, and uncles" and how "they spent a lot of time together on the weekends." Such a commitment meant careful arrangements, but they were willing to do it. In her nervousness, Varla forgot to "ask if [the upcoming] Saturday would be okay," but Lucinda's family was there for her. When she arrived, they were all watching a TV program, but "Lucinda seemed very glad to see me, and marched me straight into her room to get busy" (FN, 12-Oct-96).

In contrast to this welcome, Varla had a difficult time making contact with the school: "I have had no luck in contacting Lucinda's teacher" (FN, 17-Oct-96). After repeated attempts, Varla was "finally able to reach her teacher and receive permission to attend one of her classes" (FN, 9-Nov-96). However, the teacher's permission did not match the reality of their appointment: "When I arrived I learned that there was to be a substitute that day. Why is this so hard?" (FN, 13-Nov-96).

Still, Lucinda was pleased with Varla's presence: "She seemed very excited to have me in the class and . . . pointed me out to the other kids. Yep, I am her very own grown-up." Another positive aspect was the collection of bilingual texts: "The classroom has so many books in Spanish and English, that it almost made my eyes pop out. . . . I hope to have a classroom with wall-to-wall bookshelves like [Lucinda's teacher] someday" (FN, 13-Nov-96). Still, the books on the shelves were the only hint that Varla had about classroom pedagogy, for her "final excursion into the elusive world

of [school]" had offered little evidence of Lucinda's relationship with the institution.

To find out more, Varla turned to a Mexican American tutor in the community center who used to work at Lucinda's school and knew Lucinda and her parents quite well. She said that although Lucinda had high verbal skills, she had difficulty with reading and was "tracked" into "programs for below-level readers." She suggested that this grouping, combined with "the fact that there is no literacy support at her home, demonstrates an obviously difficult situation." Varla continued:

[Her tutor] told me that most Mexican American parents believe that all of their children's literacy needs will be met at school. Teachers are viewed as the sole experts, making parental interference or participation unnecessary. . . . [After I told her of the "pride and hope" Lucinda's parents held for her future, the tutor assured me] that her situation is not unique. Many Mexican American parents want their children to excel educationally. Unfortunately, they either do not or cannot act instrumentally in helping their child to achieve that excellence. She even told me that her own mother followed that pattern, even though she had been born and raised in the U.S. But she also said that Lucinda's parents would probably get involved if they realized how much their help was needed. (AP, 21-Oct-96)

Because this information came from an experienced tutor with "insider" status, Varla listened closely to the insights she provided. Still, she was troubled by the implication that it was the job of Lucinda's parents to "get involved," rather than the school's job to work toward involvement.

As a result, Varla began to research Mexican American history, reading relevant chapters in her class textbooks as well as library articles. She explored inequities that stemmed from racist policies: "the Anglo population did not want Mexican Americans patronizing their establishments, [yet] they were more than happy to hire them as cheap manual laborers." Varla also cited statistics about the low number of Mexican Americans with a diploma, though Lucinda made these figures come to life:

Working with Lucinda reminds me how strong this legacy of inequality still is. Issues like the disbanding of bilingual education and making English the only official language of the U.S. will only perpetuate the educational inequality in our country. That Lucinda attends a bilingual school seems very much to her advantage. Because Spanish is her first language, being able to speak it at school will help her to become fluent in two languages. It will also boost her self-esteem to know that her first language is not viewed as inferior to English. Unfortunately, Lucinda is struggling to read and write in either Spanish or English. . . . I know that she has been tracked and now seems frustrated about reading and writing. (AP, 21-Oct-96)

Varla's analysis reveals a beginning understanding of Mexican American issues, and her reading helped her take a political stand. She praised her Takaki (1995) textbook: "You know I like anybody who says, 'This is what you've been taught all the time and guess what? There may be another perspective'" (I#2, 5-Feb-97). Still, she was more influenced by her human interactions: "Lucinda was born in the United States and is Mexican American. Although her family still has ties to Mexico, they are Americans. They live and work here, trying to provide the stable family life that we all strive for. They want Lucinda to get a quality education and look forward to a successful future" (AP, 22-Nov-96).

But how was Lucinda to achieve that future in her current reading track in school? Even though Lucinda stated that she liked to read as much as play hide-and-seek, Varla found that she tended to hide from reading as well. Thus, Varla began to seek ways to draw her into reading. She read with panache to show "the drama and excitement of the written word" (AP, 22-Nov-96). And after loans from Shelby's collection, she began to search the public library for bilingual texts. In her enthusiasm, she sometimes made faulty choices, but the lessons she learned made a strong impression. Once she chose a library book that she did not read in advance: "[As I began to read] I was a little concerned because the book contained, as characters, some 'banditos.' I had not read it before today. I also had not looked at the copyright, which said 1962. This was obviously very telling. I mean, in a book about Mexico, banditos should always be included, right?" (FN, 12-Oct-96). Though her planning missed the mark, her sarcastic comments about the placement of stereotypical "banditos" in a text about Mexico were on target. The issue continued to "bug" her over the upcoming months, even to the point of our final interview: "What was that book called? It had all this stuff with 'banditos.' Maybe someone else wouldn't notice it, but it bothered me. And I thought, 'I better read books before I read them to her. What am I thinking?' But it really woke me up" (I#3, 9-Jun-97).

Another awakening occurred when she realized how hard it was to get a discussion going. Part of the difficulty came from Varla's uneasiness with questions and part from Lucinda's hesitation: "I just couldn't think of questions to save my life. And the only thing that really worked was if I really didn't say anything and let her.... [S]he talks more now. It's just taken a long time" (I#2, 5-Feb-97). Lucinda's brief responses during reading contrasted to what occurred in her play. After one quiet reading session, Varla saw that Lucinda was distracted by the center's new play set. Conceding that the slides and wobbly bridge were a greater attraction than the book, they went out to play:

When we were on the bumpy bridge ... [I told] Lucinda that I liked it the best. We shook it and jumped on it. Then Lucinda said that the bridge reminded her of that story about the goats and the troll. I was thunderstruck. She began to pretend that she was one of the goats, and pleaded with the troll to let her go across.... I think that perhaps playing with Lucinda one-on-one may elicit more responses ... and help our interactions in general. (FN, 17-Oct-96)

Although Varla was "thunderstruck" by Lucinda's insight, it is the rare beginning teacher who comprehends the power of play in children's response to literature.

Still, of all the revelations Varla made, two were most critical. First, with encouragement from Shelby and Lucinda's tutor, Varla decided to read more books in Spanish. Her own conversational Spanish was limited, but she could read it fairly well, and her errors allowed Lucinda to be the expert. In fact, when she switched to Spanish she found Lucinda much more willing to share the reading: "No longer is my voice the only one heard.... Lucinda is taking the risk.... She now chooses the pages or paragraphs that each one of us is to read. It is strange to think that, not too long ago, I had to practically twist her arm to get her to read a few sentences" (AP, 22-Nov-96). Reading in her own language allowed Lucinda to take the risks involved in reading. In addition, Varla felt that her positive encouragement of Lucinda's every attempt helped to fortify her venture.

The second major understanding for Varla was the importance of text illustration. Lucinda constantly touched the pictures on the page, and her hands-on method guided her interpretation:

When we read *La Piñata Vacía* by Alma Flor Ada (1993), Lucinda was instantly struck by this story. She touched the illustrations of candy with her hands and gazed at the picture longingly. At one point in the story, the little girl is ... carrying a little pouch. When Lucinda saw this illustration, she stated, "That is her money bag." Even though the text indicated that the pouch contained candy, it looked similar to a pouch that Lucinda uses for a wallet.... The book *Abuela* by Arthur Dorros (1994) also brought Lucinda's hands and comments to the text.... At this stage, the illustrations are more her text than the actual text. They tell her a story and give her clues to what the written text is trying to denote to her. (AP, 22-Nov-96)

Varla's insights show the power of the illustration in Lucinda's engagement. The visual images drew Lucinda's "hands and comments to the text" and helped her feel what it was like to be a reader.

Lucinda's need to see, not just read, books is an apt metaphor for Varla's own experience, for she too needed to see what all her academic reading

meant in the life of a real child. When the semester's project was over, Varla continued to read with Lucinda every Saturday throughout the spring. When asked about this unexpected commitment, Varla responded, "She wants me to, and I can't say no to her because she's reading!" Varla also felt that she was just beginning to understand Lucinda's engagement with literature, and she expanded on this in her critique of the Child as Teacher Project:

I sort of cursed you guys for the assignment in the beginning, because it's hard. It's really hard, especially if you've never done it. [Yet] I think it was really valuable. The only thing I started to regret about it was that by the end I was getting to know her better, and I thought, "Now I'm ready to do it. OKAY! Now she trusts me. Now we can do it!" (1#3, 9-Jun-97)

Varla's difficulty with the project stemmed from a critical question: When would she know a child well enough to engender trust and then to teach? And although the project was "hard as hell," she felt that future teachers should have the experience. As for the strong emphasis on diversity, she said she knew some students felt "I don't need to hear it anymore," but she could not get enough. In fact, her bottom line for the need to stress diversity in the Block was emphatic: "I'm gonna be on the side of you can never have enough. Just, you know – RUN IT INTO THE GROUND!" (1#3, 9-Jun-97).

Discussion

Although an emphasis on diversity was a critical characteristic of the teaching and learning in the Literacy/Social Studies Block, it was not our intention to "run it into the ground." Rather, we wished to create common ground, a place for preservice teachers and children to "only connect!" In the Block, we tried to provide challenge and support for this common ground by asking our preservice teachers to *look within* in the reading autobiography assignment and then to *look about* in the Child as Teacher Project. Like Goodwin (1997), we felt that "making the transition from self to others starts not with knowing others but rather with knowing ourselves" (p. 22). We agreed with Carter and Doyle's (1996) "premise that the act of teaching, teachers' experiences and the choices they make, and the process of learning to teach are deeply personal matters inexorably linked to one's identity and, thus, one's life story" (p. 120). Even more important, we felt that *self-knowledge could be transformed through the sharing of stories* – the combination of stories on and off the page that would allow the preservice teachers to reflect on both literature and life. Still, transformation cannot occur without some "emotional disequilibrium" (Goodwin,

1997, p. 18). Before common ground can be established, there may be a necessary period of "fissured ground" (Wolf, Hill, & Ballentine, 1999) – an unsteady place where the ground of the familiar falls away, and one is forced to question the assumptions by which she or he has lived a life. For our preservice teachers, there were three places in particular where the ground shifted and took them to new levels in their thinking.

The first was their realization that their passion for the written word might or might not be shared by others. All three had remembrances of things past that revolved around books. Their consistent portrayals of mothers and grandmothers, as well as other family members, ready to read at the slightest request were madeleines of memory, sweet awakenings into their literary pasts. They remembered talking about texts, ferreting out the mystery of certain novels, and staying up late with yet other books to stay a chapter ahead. And their use of "every," "always," and "never" were markers of the universal – voiced presumptions that this was the way it was or at least should be among parents and children. Yet, the fact that this was indeed the way it was between Sam and his African American mother took Clara by surprise. She went into the project assuming that when we asked her to work with a child of color, her job was "to save this kid." But Sam and his family taught her that *mainstream values are not the automatic property of a certain race or class, but instead are choices that families can sometimes make over the stereotypes that mark them.*

For Varla and Luke, the situation was quite different. Varla, who could not "imagine *not* reading," learned to stretch her imagination to the shape of a family that did not read – both Lucinda's parents were illiterate and Lucinda herself was just learning and found it a painful process. Through their year-long relationship, Varla began to learn what it would take to truly "build a bridge to literacy." Finally, Luke found himself confused by a family that did not read together, and even more concerned by the ways in which they communicated. But he was most struck by Reggie's mother's opinion that her son had "to do unbelievably well to get by because he's Black." And it was her adamant and repeated opinion that made Luke look more critically at Reggie's reading instruction in school.

School was the second major site of shifting ground for the three preservice teachers. All three had tremendously successful school experiences – top reading groups as well as special classes for the gifted and talented. But both Reggie and Lucinda were unskilled in reading and the result was tracking, resource rooms, short and simple texts that could fit neatly on a worksheet. Reggie's case was particularly tragic, for he was caught between a classroom teacher who took no responsibility for his reading and writing and a resource room teacher who designed her curriculum around the length of a passage. In observing Reggie in school, Luke came to see the

reality of his mother's comment that expecting "African American boys ... to sit still in a class all day long [was] ... ridiculous," and he realized that her frustration with an educational system that either ignored or punished her son drove her to rail against the system.

Though not as drastic, Lucinda's situation was also difficult. Placed in a bilingual school that valued her Spanish language, she was still tracked for reading and felt frustrated and fearful as a result. Yet she did what she could to get the education her family wanted her to have. Indeed, the "mixed message" between their enthusiasm for school and what they actually knew about Lucinda's school nudged Varla into researching the history of Mexican Americans and reflecting on how they might feel welcome or unwelcome in public institutions. As a college-educated woman, Sam's mother could much more easily help her son fit into the structure of schooling, but even Sam had difficulties. Although his decoding was smooth and his insights into literature extensive, Clara only observed him in quiet reading or involved in reading tests that seemed oddly timed for the academic year. Attempts to read with style were unappreciated by his peers, and his teacher had no insights into Sam's vast verbal ability when it came to talking about books. Thus, through their observations, Clara, Luke, and Varla learned how their somewhat idyllic recollections of school might not be shared by all children and their parents.

The third major site of shifting ground came in the preservice teachers' weekly interactions with their children and books. Through books the children talked, and talked, and talked some more, or, as in Lucinda's case, really began to talk. Sam liked to ponder the meaning of words and question the author's intention. Reggie liked to dramatize scenes from stories as well as use text to reinterpret the drama in his life. Lucinda liked to reach into the pages of a book, relying on the pictures to understand the message in the words. The preservice teachers' reactions to their insights were strong; they were "surprised," "astounded," and even "thunderstruck" that children as small as theirs had so much to say about books. As Luke commented, "Reggie acted as though he was 'set free' when [he interacted] with the stories we read." Although the preservice teachers initially began their conversations with what Varla termed "uninspired, nervous questions," the children soon taught them to loosen up and ask the questions they were truly interested in rather than the ones that simply tested comprehension. Even more important, the children taught the preservice teachers that literary engagement, although heavily centered in talk, is also heightened by the visual and the dramatic. As Luke concluded, "Incorporating a child's mind, body, and spirit into education is essential in making connections between the child's experiences and the material being taught."

What was also essential was the fact that what the preservice teachers

so emphatically remembered in their reading autobiographies was highlighted in their interactions with children. Just as their parents and grandparents had read books with style, patiently asked and answered innumerable questions, and taught them to read the signs all around them, so too did Clara, Luke, and Varla learn at least a part of what it means to engage children in literary interpretation. Although their school experiences had been positive, not all their interactions with books were so rewarding. Over the years of school, Clara had lost much of her curiosity about signification and "read to survive ... and to 'get the grade.'" Luke quickly learned to scan the "boring SRA cards to find the obvious answers." Varla, too, learned to play the game of school, but began to wonder what it might be like to look on reading as "difficult, elusive, boring, and even painful."

When they met children who had had few positive school experiences to balance the negative ones, the preservice teachers were challenged to combine what they knew from their own early years with what they were currently learning in their university class. Stories are more inviting when read with panache. Creative and genuine questions can help children make connections among stories both on and off the page. Illustrations work like magnets, drawing children into story, supporting their comprehension, and strengthening their connections. Opportunities for expression through drama and art provide children with multiple modes for response. And children's literary engagement will be magnified when they are in connection with teachers who care about them as literate as well as human beings.

Still, engagement in literature and learning is not simply the domain of children; it belongs to teachers as well, especially if teachers are willing to reconsider their life stories in reading. As Goodwin (1997) suggested, "New understandings and actions necessarily change one's own story. Autobiographies are dynamic and fluid; new chapters in each person's book require further and continuous examination. The model recycles and begins again." (p. 19). Although we acknowledge that the building of a "rainbow bridge" (Forster, 1921) to literacy is a tentative task, the colors and light contributed by their child teachers moved Clara, Luke, and Varla to new stories of children, schooling, and literature, allowing them, once more, to "begin again."

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