

# Teaching on Fissured Ground: Preparing Preservice Teachers for Culturally Conscious Pedagogy

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How many times in my years of teaching have I stood before the blackboard guiding the abhorrent chalk carefully along a 30-degree incline to explain Freytag's triangle, that indispensable construct for mapping the ideal course of the classic novel: complications of character and situation creating a "rising action" that culminates in a climactic moment, which is followed in turn by the afterglow of denouement, the tying up of threads.

But other roads do diverge in the novel's yellow wood, one of them representing a structure quite different, in which the climactic event . . . takes place right at the outset, and the essential action can be described as "falling." The interest lies, significantly, in watching how characters act and react when the ground of the familiar has been fissured all around them. (Birkerts, 1998, p. 7)

From the first day of our preservice teacher classes in literacy and social studies, the emphasis is on divergent lines, and it is clear from our syllabus that there are no gentle angles here. Instead, by creating early climactic events, we work to upend traditional methods courses, particularly those of children's literature, to form new triangles for teaching. Recently, Goodwin (1997) stated that to prepare teachers for cultural diversity they must enter a phase of "conceptual and emotional disequilibrium [which] can engender thoughtful reflection and questioning [and force them] to re-examine what they thought they knew" (p. 18). In our classes, we call it "fissured ground."

In this article, Shelby (the course professor) follows the unsteady path of eight preservice teachers—including Lisa and Darcy, the two coauthors—as they worked with individual children of color and poverty over the course of one semester to learn to be teachers of literature. Our purpose is to demonstrate the pedagogical and theoretical implications of fissured ground, as well as how we work to support our teachers if and when they fall.

## Theoretical Framework

Studies have shown novice teachers' resistance in shifting from how they have been taught to new theories of effective practice, particularly for diverse children (Willis & Harris, 1997). This is especially true if we lecture on these possibilities without providing opportunities for preservice teachers to try out the ideas with children. As O'Loughlin (1995) argued,

Students come to us with embodied conceptions of teaching and learning—ideas they have built up not from learning about these topics intellectually but from experiencing them over many years of schooling. . . . Prospective teachers do not *think* teaching should be done a certain way; they *know* it from their lived experience. . . . A central tenet of critical teaching is the need for praxis—critical reflection that leads to action. We have failed in our responsibility to our students if we unveil possibilities for them, yet deny them opportunities to reinvent their teaching philosophies in action by seeing and doing the kinds of teaching we advocate. (p. 114)

Although there are several overviews highlighting features of effective multicultural education for teachers (Banks, 1993; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), these only partially lend themselves to the specific subject matter knowledge necessary to learning how to teach literature (Ríos, 1996). As Borko and Putnam (1996) suggested, “teachers with greater subject matter knowledge tend to emphasize the conceptual, understanding, problem-solving, and inquiry aspects of their subjects” (p. 675). For children’s literature, subject matter includes literary criticism and the importance of honoring children’s voices as they bring personal experience to their interpretations of text (Wolf & Heath, 1992). In addition, teachers need to have a solid understanding of multicultural literature that veers away sharply from stereotypes and brings new authors, styles, and narrative structures into a canon that is no longer set but shifting (Harris, 1997; Wolf, Ballentine, & Hill, 1999).

Still, subject matter knowledge is only part of the necessary work for teachers. To arrive at a better understanding of literary response, preservice teachers must be involved in immersion experiences with children and books. Thus, our theoretical framework involves both literary and human dimensions of learning with an emphasis on culturally conscious pedagogy—a combination supported by research. For example, Grant and Secada (1990) suggested that programs that highlight both academic training and fieldwork with different ethnic groups are most likely to change preservice teachers’ attitudes and teaching. Aguilar and Pohan (1996) also advocated this combination:

We propose that beliefs supportive of diversity and a sound multicultural knowledge base are enhanced through bi-, multi-, or cross-cultural experiences. . . . Without meaningful, direct, and positive experiences with diverse others, one’s knowledge and beliefs about cultural diversity may be limited to images (i.e., media) or the often negative experiences expressed by others or experienced by oneself. . . . [M]ore direct experiences tend to challenge those areas of negative images in a more meaningful way. Enhancing cultural competence through contact with others is particularly significant when you consider that the typical preservice teacher (i.e., white, middle-class, female) has limited culturally diverse experiences. (pp. 265, 268)

Building on Shelby’s past research in transforming teachers’ understandings of the art of teaching literature (Wolf, Carey, & Mieras, 1996a, 1996b) with mainstream, predominately European-American children, the central question for this study asks: How can the combination of literary and human dimensions for learning impact the ways preservice teachers understand and ultimately teach litera-

ture through culturally conscious pedagogy? In the following sections, Shelby joins with two of the eight study members, Lisa and Darcy, to present the methods used to track the preservice teachers’ learning. We then follow their route as they traverse the landscape of learning about literature and the lives of children. We conclude with some reflections on the potential of culturally conscious pedagogy for preservice teachers.

## Method

### *Participants and Course Background*

The study’s subjects were eight elementary preservice teachers enrolled in Shelby’s children’s literature class in 1996 in a state research university, as well as the nine children with whom they worked. Whereas the preservice teachers were all European American and predominately female, the six boys and three girls were African, African American, Hmong, Mexican, and Native American. Table 1 presents descriptors of the teachers and children.

The preservice teachers were enrolled in a team-taught interdisciplinary set of courses, the Literacy/Social Studies Block, which included children’s literature as well as methods in social studies, writing processes, and reading concepts in the code and comprehension. Our team carefully created a literary dimension for learning by selecting academic textbooks and articles (e.g., Harris, 1993) as well as multicultural children’s literature (e.g., Curtis, 1995). Through these two kinds of texts, the preservice teachers began to develop their understandings of literacy and diversity for, as Brunner (1994) explained, academic texts define problems and state solutions, whereas literature works to illuminate possibilities.

We believe, however, that we will fail our students if we only have them read about cultures other than their own or listen to us lecture. Instead, it is essential for them to practice these ideas, for what is the use of *teaching about* culturally conscious pedagogy, unless we provide opportunities for our preservice teachers to *experience* it? Thus, the most important assignment in the class was the “Child as Teacher” project. We emphasized the child as the teacher because we feel that children have much to teach about how they learn and live their lives, if our preservice teachers are willing to listen.

Assigned to community centers with diverse children, our preservice teachers worked with a child of color or poverty for 2 hours a week for a semester. Instead of simply asking them to volunteer, we provided an explicit set of experiences. In terms of the child’s social world, the preservice teachers conducted a neighborhood tour and home visit. They interviewed the child’s parents to discover attitudes about and hopes for their child’s education. The preservice teachers also visited the child’s classroom to see language arts and social studies events. And finally, they did library research on the cultural background of the child.

In terms of literacy, the preservice teachers read and wrote with their children each session. They conducted running records of the children’s reading and

analyzed the children's development as writers. Most important for the purposes of this article, they kept fieldnotes on their children's literary response, which included the questions, comments, and activities of each session as well as their reflections on their own learning. They connected their findings to relevant research (often articles they had read in class) as they looked across the patterns in their fieldnotes and wrote analyses and final papers on selected themes.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected at the end of the semester and included the preservice teachers' fieldnotes and final papers. Each data segment presented here was taken verbatim from their written work and marked by the preservice teacher's pseudonym as well as the date of the passage.

Table 1

#### The Preservice Teachers and Their Children

Preservice Teacher	Child	
<i>Lisa</i> Female European American Post-B.A.	<i>Lena</i> Female Zairian Grade 6	
<i>Clara</i> Female European American Undergraduate	<i>Sam</i> Male African American Grade 3	
<i>Emma</i> Female European American Post-B.A.	<i>Lao</i> Male Hmong American Grade 4	
<i>Darcy</i> Female European American Undergraduate	<i>Chu</i> Male Hmong American Grade 6	
<i>Luke</i> Male European American Post-B.A.	<i>Reggie</i> Male African American Grade 4	
<i>Sohne</i> Female European American Post-B.A.	<i>Ale'Ishia</i> Female African American Grade 6	
<i>Spike</i> Male European American Undergraduate	<i>Shawn</i> Male Iroquois/ European American Kindergarten	<i>Yang</i> Male Hmong American Grade 3
<i>Varla</i> Female European American Post-B.A.	<i>Lucinda</i> Female Mexican American Grade 2	

Analysis of the data leaned heavily on literary theory, particularly on the ways stories are structured. We looked at the eight preservice teachers' written work as stories with plots that involved conflict and complexity, as they moved with their children through time, space, and adversity. To determine the patterns in each teacher's story, we asked: How is their plot structured? How does the resolution of an event lead to the next episode? Does the relationship of the preservice teacher with his or her child move unerringly forward or are there events that alter their course?

Most important, we tracked the emotional response reflected in their written 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 more and more about children and literacy. Our analytic categories included: (a) features of language that marked the preservice teacher's cognitive or emotional reaction to the events of the project often signaled by mental state verbs (e.g., "The parent interview really frightened me because . . ." "I'm not sure what to do about . . ."); (b) understandings of the features of literary response such as personal connections and artistic expression (e.g., "I think my child likes to ask questions, not answer them." "This session went much better because I let her draw her response."); (c) understandings of how children live and learn in their community context (e.g., "My child is much more outgoing in his after-school program than in school." "My child's parents rarely get to see one another. Dad works the night shift and Mom the day, which means a lot more responsibility for the kids around the house."); and (d) insights into the value of multicultural literature (e.g., "This book really reminded my child of her own experiences in Africa." "When I read the Spanish words, my child's eyes lit right up!").

Moving from the analysis of individual preservice teachers to the group as a whole we then asked: How do the individual stories fit into a larger pattern of all the preservice teachers as they learned about literature and children? Thus we combined "formal criticism" of their field notebooks (looking at their descriptions of their interactions with children over time with attention to word choice, images, characters, and plot patterns [e.g., Keeseey, 1987]) with "reader response criticism" (attending to the transactions between the teachers, their children, and the texts [e.g., Rosenblatt, 1991]).

#### Results

A tradebook that the preservice teachers read in class was *Scooter* (Williams, 1993), the story of a young girl who likes to inscribe her life in acrostic poetry and images. One of the most compelling images in the book is her description of her diverse neighborhood's field day, which she terms a "zigzag day," full of ups and downs. Her image is a line drawing on graph paper marking the events and emotions of the day.

In tracing the plot patterns of the preservice teachers, we designed a similar image to portray the zigs and zags of their experience with the Child as Teacher

project. Figure 1 shows their ups and downs as they worked with the children over the course of the semester. The timeline shows child meetings, parent interviews, classroom observations, and assignment due dates. We used this figure as an organizer for our results because in graphing the plot lines of our preservice teachers' stories, we noticed a consistent pattern of ups and downs.

### Beginnings

The best word to describe the beginning of the project for most preservice teachers was *frightening*. Like the quote that began this paper, the climactic event took place at the outset; within days of starting class the preservice teachers were placed in an after-school tutoring program for children from local project housing. With the exception of Luke and Lisa, most of the preservice teachers had never worked with children of poverty, nor did they know much about diverse children. They knew nothing of the Hmong and their unique history and immigration to America. Few knew languages other than English, and they were challenged by the range of languages the children spoke with ease. They were shocked at the public housing, a neighborhood of small, uniform apartment buildings with its own police annex, which most did not know existed until they drove in for their first meeting.

Three of the teachers worked with children from different neighborhoods. Luke's child, Reggie, attended the community center, but lived outside the ring of project houses in a nearby condominium. Clara's child, Sam, lived with his mother in Clara's apartment complex in another section of the city. And Spike's child, Shawn, was someone he had met at a local school. When Shawn left in mid-semester to go into hiding from his abusive father, Spike worked with another child, Yang, who lived in the community center's neighborhood.

Notwithstanding the uniqueness of each relationship, the majority of the preservice teachers initially felt overwhelmed by the project. They called and e-mailed Shelby with nervous questions: "What do I do?" "How do I plan?" and "Where do I go from here?" Darcy, for example, wrote in her early fieldnotes, "I am still uncomfortable trying to guide the conversation after we read. I am not sure which questions are 'appropriate' open-ended questions. I don't know how to teach Chu how to tie his experience into a part of the story" (9/23/96). Similarly, other preservice teachers' fieldnotes were frequently marked by mental state verbs of hesitancy: "I don't know . . ." and "I'm not sure . . ."

However, one of the things the teachers were absolutely sure about was that they did not want to talk with their child's parents. Some viewed it as an invasion of privacy, whereas others worried about language differences. Varla, for example, wrote, "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 previous feelings of well-being vanished along with any Spanish that I could possibly remember" (9/12/96).

When Shelby stressed the importance of home visits for any good teacher, the preservice teachers were skeptical. Yet, within the first three visits they began

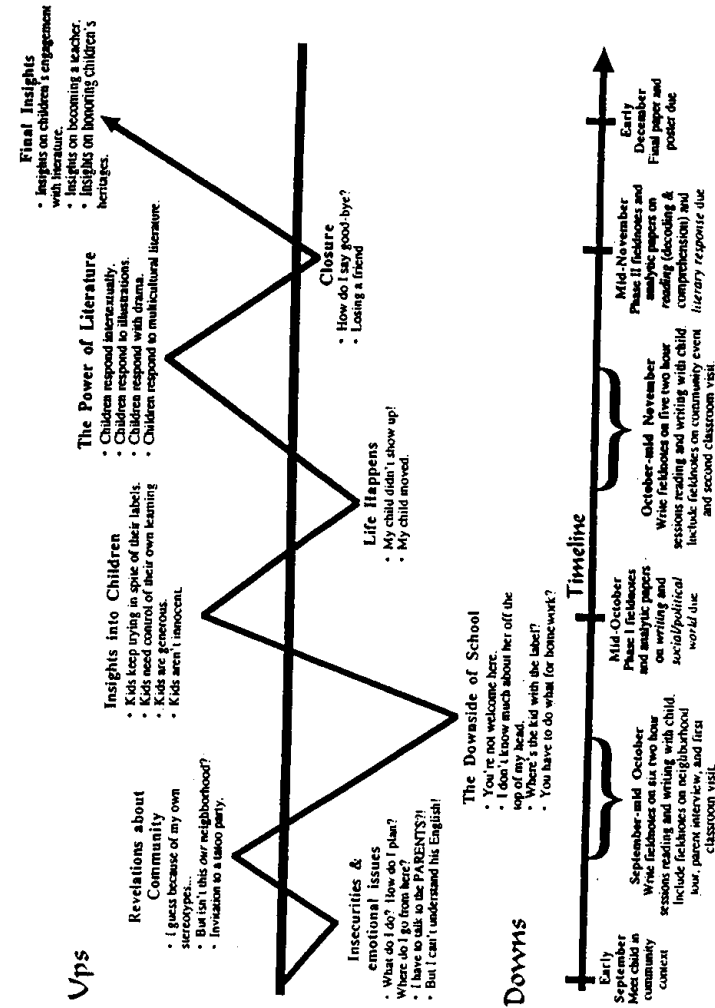


Figure 1. The Zigs and Zags of the Child as Teacher Project.

to feel more comfortable with the children and their parents. Luke, for example, was "pleasantly surprised" by the neat arrangement of Reggie's home with numerous family pictures as well as ones of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela. Luke admitted, "I guess because of my own stereotypes [I had] definitely underestimated Reggie's living situation" (9/12/96). Varla, who had been so worried, received such a welcome from Lucinda's parents that she began to conduct all her meetings there. In fact, invitations from parents and children made the teachers feel less cynical of our emphasis on understanding a child's community. When Clara (10/2/96) asked Sam to take her around his neighborhood, he replied, "Sure, but isn't this *our* neighborhood?" Spike was invited by Shawn's mother to a tattoo party, explaining that the other invitees were "recovering alcoholics and drug addicts . . . who are now clean and have rid themselves of their destructive lifestyle." Spike told her he was not worried, and later wrote, "She was concerned about me and what sorts of preconceived notions I may bring with me when I see her friends at the party" (9/28/96).

Yet, just as things started to pick up, the preservice teachers met with the steepest descent of their plot line: school, the place they expected to do their practicums. Indeed, many did not understand why they had *community* rather than *school-based* practicums, but when they made their first visits they began to see. They discovered that their children's classroom teachers did not want them there. Many failed to return phone calls, or when arrangements were made the preservice teachers would show up to find that there was an assembly that hampered their ability to see their children in everyday instruction. Varla played telephone tag with her teacher for weeks before obtaining permission to visit. She wrote, "After finally reaching Lucinda's teacher, I got permission to visit the classroom. Of course, when I arrived I learned that there was to be a substitute that day. Why is this so hard?" (11/13/96).

The preservice teachers were even more upset by how little some classroom teachers knew about the children. When Lisa asked about Lena's literacy, the classroom teacher "said he wasn't sure 'off the top of his head.'" Even more disturbing, "He did not know that she had relocated here from Zaire [nor] that Lena had just learned English two years ago and said she was doing 'outstanding if this was the actual case'" (10/17/96). The invisibility of children was the most disquieting in Reggie's case. When Luke came for his first visit, they could not locate the child. Luke wrote, "No one in the school knew where he was" (10/21/96). When Reggie was finally found, Luke only had time to greet him and then leave for his own classes. A week later he observed Reggie in the resource room, but he was discouraged by the instruction:

Because he has been labeled a slow reader, he even spends less time in his class and has been stigmatized by his regular teacher and classmates. The quality of education he does receive . . . is also obviously targeted for the remedial reader. He has no direct contact with chapter books or quality literature. He spends most of his reading comprehension time using questions from S.R.A. type materials. He rarely is asked open-ended questions or to even elaborate on a story. (10/27/96)

The kind of traditional material Reggie worked with was typical for the other children in the study, too. Most had multiple worksheets for homework that seemed to invite little critical thinking and added to the burden that most second language learners already found difficult. Indeed, the convoluted English in some of the homework instructions stumped the preservice teachers as well. As Darcy wrote: "Chu read the directions to me, but after he was finished, neither one of us understood what we were supposed to do" (11/18/96).

### *Middles*

Perhaps the reason the preservice teachers were disturbed by inappropriate homework as well as the invisibility of their children in school was because it did not match their own developing insights, and their ability to see their children's intelligence helped them climb upwards to more positive views. For example, they saw that their children worked hard in spite of their labels. Emma discussed Lao's persistence: "Someone must have instilled the importance of education for him to persevere with so little reward. He struggles relentlessly with his homework, however does not seem to make the connections with it" (9/17/96). Yet when they provided activities that allowed the students to express their thinking, the preservice teachers were amply rewarded. Over time, Lisa gave Lena more voice in their discussions: "I felt good about the changes I made in reading with Lena. I attribute this success to my relinquishment of power. . . . I went with it more, letting Lena take control of the book and interpretations. It was a very pleasurable experience" (10/2/96).

In addition to a greater understanding of children's academic abilities, the preservice teachers discovered how generous children were. Varla marveled: "After all, she doesn't know me, English is not her first language, and she is only seven years old. The fact that she volunteered to work with some gringa college student is something I never would've had the guts to do at seven or even seventeen" (9/19/96). Another insight into children was something they had seen repeatedly in their readings and had talked about in class: children are not innocent or ignorant of the social world around them, including issues of race and class. They talked openly about the reason for the police annex in their neighborhood. Some disclosed worries over having to return to Mexico to avoid repercussions from their undocumented status. Others talked about financial worries, especially if a parent was unemployed. Varla wrote: "I know that the Cordovas do not have much money and they have a lot of kids. I have seen five. Lucinda is very money conscious, not that we all are not. Yet, at seven years old, I don't remember thinking about money as much as she does." Turning to racial issues, some of the Hmong children confided that others teased them about their "Chinese eyes." Sohne's child was teased as well:

Ale' Ishia explained to me that she had never met her real father and never would, [and that] it was hard to be in school when you did not know your father. "I really don't care if I ever meet him," she told me. Ale' Ishia went on to say that her brother came from a different father too, [and] that all of the men her mom

meets hurt her. I asked her if she liked her [step]father now. She said, "No way." Ale'Ishia said that some people tease her about having a "white" father and a "black" mother but she just tells them, "So, your point is?" (10/1/96)

The point for the preservice teachers was made as they read literature that revealed deep social issues. Initially, they thought that children's literature should be uniformly positive. They found books like *Baseball in April* (Soto, 1990) too frank about poverty, and wondered if kids would like stories without a happily-ever-after ending. But the conversations they had with children about literature and their lives led them to rethink these earlier positions.

Indeed, as they continued to read with their children, the power of literature became more evident. Still, their upward climb was broken slightly when the lives of their children impacted their meetings. Reggie was absent for several meetings and the excuses the mother made did not match Reggie's. Absenteeism was something almost every preservice teacher confronted. However, the most difficult break occurred in Spike's plot line, for Shawn and his mother moved when his father was released from jail. Spike worried about the impact of the move on Shawn and felt it would "set him back . . . mentally and emotionally." He wanted to continue to work with Shawn for he felt he was "making a difference in his life." He wrote, "I don't want to lose this. I really do hope they stay in touch, but I can't force them to if they don't want to." Although Shawn's mother said that she would give Spike their new address, she ultimately changed her mind. Disconcerted, but still enthusiastic, Spike began to work with Yang, a Hmong American child at the center who requested a university partner.

Although this shift was not easy, at this point in the semester Spike knew enough about literature that he did not have to start at square one. In fact, it was here that most preservice teachers were having "Aha!" moments about literary response. They were most impressed with children's engagement when they could relate the stories to their lives. Sohne wrote of the differences in Ale'Ishia's response when she "elicit[ed] life experiences" instead of "asking single-answer questions that were dry and boring":

Ale'Ishia was more attentive, asked leading questions herself, and participated more than ever before. As teachers we can learn much about our student's life experiences through literature, if we learn to listen, and allow time for students to respond. It is then we can come together for a better teaching experience and student growth. (11/12/96)

The preservice teachers also discovered children's connections to the artwork in the story. In a conversation with Sam, Clara asked him why he referred to the illustrations when she asked him questions about the story. He said, "It is easier to remember a specific picture than to remember all those words. Pictures make you have a memory, and they are pretty. Words all look the same to me and they aren't really too pretty" (10/30/96). The children also chose to dramatize stories. Luke wrote, "Reggie incorporated drama and movement into most responses to text I read to him. . . . He would reach for the pictures and pretend to act like different characters in the books we read" (11/18/98).

Most important, the children enthusiastically responded to texts that resonated with their lives. Whereas the preservice teachers had read about the importance of multicultural literature in their textbook (Harris, 1993), their children brought the concepts to life. Reggie loved Curtis's (1995) African-American fiction, and Lucinda responded eagerly to Latino books. In sharing a text about Swaziland, Lisa read that the children without earrings kept bits of straw in their ear holes, and that the girls only wore skirts and dresses:

The whole time I was reading, Lena was nodding her head [and] saying "Yep." She remarked, "I have seen the straw in the ears, and I still am only allowed to wear skirts or dresses." . . . We got to the "good African hint for saving pencils." You cut the pencil in three small pieces . . . and wear one on a string around your neck. If you lose your pencil you will be losing only one-third of it! Lena knew this hint and looked at me very seriously and said, "You should do that with your pencils so you don't lose them like you said you do." I told her she was right! (10/24/96)

Indeed, the children were often *right* about literature when they recognized familiar characteristics of individuals, details of culture, and plot lines.

### Ends

The preservice teachers' plot lines fell toward the project's end, especially when they had to say good-bye. The semester was closing, and they were moving on to new obligations. Although Varla decided to work with Lucinda for the remainder of the year, the rest said farewell to their child teachers, although not without concern. Darcy, for example, talked about how Chu relied on her and worried about what would happen when she could not be there. Spike was particularly sad to have lost two children: "Working with Shawn was very rewarding. I enjoyed giving this project a deep personal touch. I will miss this. . . . I feel the same way with Yang. [When I] told him the next week would be my last at the Center, I felt like I was losing a friend" (12/4/96).

Although they lost friends, they gained new understandings about the importance of their experience, and in their final papers their plot lines took a final upward slant. They had learned about the lives of children and how important it would be to their future teaching, especially in terms of literature. Darcy reflected back on an exciting conversation she had with Chu about *Lon Po Po* (Young, 1989) where he took on the wolf's position and plotted how he would "capture the girls in the story." Darcy wrote, "I know I have just touched the tip of the iceberg working with Chu, but at least now I have expectations and goals. I have an idea of what getting to know an individual student is all about and what it entails" (11/18/96). Getting to know children led to changes in how the preservice teachers viewed themselves:

While I was reading I noticed something about myself. . . . I realized I had become more patient and tolerant and I found myself asking questions we learned in class such as: "Why?" "What would you do?" "How do you know?" "Does that make sense?" much more often. I found myself giving Sam more time to

ponder the questions I put forth to him. And the biggest change I noticed was that I saw myself as being a great deal more confident and natural in what I was doing. (Clara, 10/30/96)

In connection to their insights on literature, they grew in their understandings of the importance of children's lives. For example, Sohne reflected on her rereading of her class textbook by Takaki (1993), particularly a passage where the author related an incident when once again it was assumed he was an outsider because he "did not look 'American'" (p. 2). In thinking about her own interactions with Ale' Ishia, Sohne wrote: "I believe as teachers we have a great opportunity to explore all of our students' cultures with them without making them feel like they are not truly Americans. The trick is to do so sensitively and with respect to their heritage" (12/11/96).

#### Discussion

In her end-of-the-year reflections on the project, Varla wrote:

When I began the Literacy/Social Studies block I had a vague notion of how to create a literate and socially active classroom. This course has transformed my view in connecting children to their schoolwork and to the outside world as well. Working with my student in the Child as Teacher project has been the most enlightening, constructive, and frustrating enterprise that I have ever undertaken. While instructional philosophies and abstract theories have their place, nothing can compare to the "sink or swim" situation that one is faced with working with an actual student. (5/10/97)

Varla's juxtaposition of "enlightening, constructive, and frustrating" and her comment about "sink or swim," reminds us of other opposites in this project—ups and downs, zigs and zags. Yet, teaching teachers about culturally conscious pedagogy is rarely a stable enterprise. Still, the opening quote of this piece contains the key to our results for "the interest lies, significantly, in watching how characters act and react when the ground of the familiar has been fissured all around them" (Birkerts, 1998, p. 7).

Although our preservice teachers' plot lines fell in the beginning of the project, and took a dramatic slide when they saw their children in school, their own actions and reactions rose steadily, with some dips, over time. Throughout the semester they were guided by our emphasis on *culturally conscious pedagogy*—teaching that honors and amplifies children's literary worlds. Within this overarching view we stressed *participative pedagogy*—reading, writing, and learning with students rather than simply teaching them skills. Finally, we highlighted *proactive pedagogy*—teaching that evolves thoughtfully from the juncture of theory, practice, and social action. Still, as Freire (1990) so wisely suggested:

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and

political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk . . . of preaching in the desert. (p. 85)

The pedagogical worlds that we describe are not the dry spaces and flat horizons of the desert, nor of solitary voices crying in the wilderness. Instead our work focuses on the "yellow wood" of teacher education where the voices are not singular but multiple, and the stances are not preaching but learning and teaching.

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## Learning to Read the Research: How Preservice Teachers Come to Terms with Cognitive Versus Holistic Models of Reading

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In this study we explore the ways that 26 preservice elementary teachers, who were enrolled in three sections of a sophomore-level reading course titled "The Reading Process," formed their own opinions about the research and rhetoric that surrounds the current public and professional debate about reading (Dressman, McCarty, & Benson, 1998), and subsequently about what reading research implies about the practice of early literacy education. Specifically, we followed these preservice teachers' responses to two texts with opposing views of the reading process and its implications for literacy teachers, *On Reading* (Goodman, 1996) and *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* (Adams, 1990). These texts were read together and discussed in class over a 6-week period. The analysis of the students' journal responses and class discussions suggested that our method of having students read two opposing texts in tandem had a significant impact on their thinking about literacy acquisition as a process, and that the nature of this impact was more multidirectional and complex than we had originally anticipated.

The decision to have students read two different points of view was a political response to Texas's effort to make reading education courses "more research-based" (i.e., focused on the subcomponents of the reading process)—a push that carried with it the presumption that preservice teachers could and should be "trained" in phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Our own perspective on this issue (we were one assistant professor and two doctoral students of school literacy) was that skills are most effectively taught and acquired when they are "embedded" within the context of reading and writing extended texts. More importantly, however, our experience was that the preservice teachers we worked with were bright and opinionated individuals who had a right and responsibility to weigh the evidence for themselves and form their own opinions about how people acquire literacy and how best to promote that acquisition. By including both the Adams and Goodman texts in our course, we hoped simultaneously to respond to state initiatives and to preserve the intellectual integrity of teacher