HOW DID THE OSU M.ED. PROGRAM PREPARE TEACHERS TO BE MULTICULTURALLY COMPETENT?

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have explored teachers’ attitudes toward issues of equity and diversity, yet only a handful of studies have connected teachers’ attitudes with their subsequent classroom practice. Related to this question, there is a need to study how teacher preparation programs have helped teachers develop multicultural competence.

The research for my dissertation is situated within a larger program evaluation study within which I have participated during my doctoral studies. I will be using some of the survey and interview data from this larger project. This paper, however, describes the data collected from the case studies I have been collecting in the past three quarters.

Recent sociocultural theorists suggest that teachers are socialized to learn how to teach (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Social interactions are considered important to generate transformative knowledge that leads to real learning. These institutional elements are central influences in shaping social interactions and the individuals’ perceptions and behavior within them. Wenger (1998) categorizes these institutional elements as: enterprise, engagement, and repertoire. Enterprise refers to the domains of an institution (in this study, the M.Ed. program), engagement to the relationships among individuals in the program, and repertoire to the practices of individuals. Critical theorists bring forward the issues of power when investigating social interactions (Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Various forms of resistance can happen along with the social
interactions, especially there are different opinions between the new comers and old
timers in a particular institution. Postmodernists further problematize the learning
process by assuming the existence of multiple subjectivities that usually shift and change
within these social interactions (Giroux, 1998; Kumashiro, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to explore how multicultural competence was
defined, interpreted, and developed by three case study participants from the OSU M.Ed.
program. Related information or document about how the program has prepared
teachers’ practices in classroom was collected.
Dedicated to

My parents, Kong-Dow and Yu-Chin Hsu Chang,

and my sisters, Ei-Wen Chang and Mei-Ling Chang.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Considerable endeavors have been made to explore teachers’ attitudes toward issues of equity and diversity. Yet only a handful of studies have been done to investigate the influence of teacher education program on the teachers’ attitudes and practices in the years following their graduation (Grant, 1994; Sleeter, 2001). Related to this question, there is a need to conduct studies on how teacher preparation programs have helped teachers develop multicultural competence through the course of their learning. The research for my dissertation was situated within a larger program evaluation study within which I have participated during my doctoral studies.

Theoretical Framework

Though the languages of “culture,” “diversity,” “knowledge,” or “good teaching” are commonly used, the interpretations of these terms can vary, which consequently impacts the connection of theory to practice (Haynes et al., 2002). To gain a clearer view of contemporary multicultural theories and practices, researchers have created several conceptual frameworks. Some of the examples include Gibson’s (1976) typology for reviewing advocacy literature in multicultural education, Pratte’s (1983) typology for identifying the restricting level of research approaches, Lynch’s (1986) typology for

In this study, I reviewed the related literature and selected three theoretical approaches as the conceptual framework: constructivist theory, critical theory, and postmodernist theory. This theoretical framework will be used to: 1) explore multiculturalism in general; 2) enhance understanding of multicultural teacher education; 3) generate a stance for data analyses for this study. The following section is an introduction of the three theoretical approaches to multicultural teacher education.

One of the approaches, which is commonly adopted by recent educational researchers to challenge the conventional education system, is constructivist or sociocultural theory. In traditional approaches to education, American schooling is viewed as meritocratic. The failure of individuals or groups is considered to be “normal” because individuals have different abilities, goals, and levels of tenacity (Goodwin, 2001). The purpose of schooling is to help all students assimilate into the mainstream. From a traditional perspective, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression have been solved for the most part (Gay & Howard, 2000). High stakes tests and other standard measures are neutral and objective means for outcomes assessment.

In contrast, constructivists argue that the assimilation suggested by the traditional approach will not facilitate real learning. Learning occurs not in cognitive isolation, but “within the context of activities and social interaction likely informed by the day-to-day
contingencies of culture” (Meacham, 2001, p. 191). As Meacham asserts, learning is a process that includes imaginative and emotional elements that are shaped by the learners’ sociocultural backgrounds. With an emphasis on the social and cultural origins of learning, the constructivist and socio-cultural theorists view diverse cultures as important sources for knowledge construction.

Critical theorists not only acknowledge the importance of the cultural factors in learning but take a further step to contest the concept of assimilation in order to advocate for a real change in the social and education systems. The ideal of an “egalitarian, democratic society” (Kaufmanne, 2000, p. 5) is the distinctive characteristic of the critical approach. Like the constructivists, the critical theorists also consider knowledge to be constructed, not taught. Moreover, the researchers in this line of research question the history of knowledge construction. Students are encouraged to identify possible biases, conflicts, or problems, generated from the process of knowledge construction in history. From this perspective, teachers should provide opportunities for students to construct their own knowledge and reflect on how their personal experiences and positions will impact what they know (Banks, 1993).

Similar to the argument of the other two approaches introduced, postmodernist scholars view knowledge, truth, identity and meaning as socially constructed through the continual encounter with various forms of discourses or “cultural facets” (Holland, 1998), such as language, culture, experience, ideologies (Kaufmanne, 2000). Embedded within political, ideological, geographical or temporal referents, the cultural facts possess a changeable nature. Consequently, the meaning production involving these cultural facets is neither stable nor neutral (p. 5). Postmodernism rejects the idea that there is a single
truth, best solution, or universal rule, and argues that each individual holds multiple subjectivities, identities, and positions in society (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). Though this approach has long been criticized for its skeptical and idealist arguments, its influence on the contemporary theories is evident. With the help of postmodernisms, many educational researchers now tend to be reflective of their beliefs or assumptions, and especially to be cautious with claims about “scientific findings” (Pickering, 2003). To illustrate the differences among the three emerging approaches, a picture is provided below. The three sets of cursive lines refer to the three patterns of social interactions highlighted by different paradigms.

Figure 1.1: Three paradigms
As shown in the above illustration, in pattern A, the constructive/sociocultural theory tries to describe social interactions without particular attention to power relationships. They acknowledge differences and conflict, but see these as negotiable. (The stars between the cursive lines imply smooth social interactions without tension disruption.) Pattern B refers to critical theory which attempts to address power relations occurring in social interactions. (The sparkles between the cursive lines imply the tensions that take place among interactions.) The critical approach tries to problematizes the unitary categories residing in the existing assumptions (regarding knowledge construction, discourse production, subjectivity formation, etc.). Nevertheless, their approach to reality through historical evolution seems to assume the existence of realities that can be found through the investigation and critique of history. The pattern C refers to postmodernism which perceives a contingent nature in the occurrence of phenomenon. (Picture C implies the condition of “dependent arising” which involves complex interactions of different factors.) Acknowledging their limitation to “find” the truth, the postmodernists simply embrace the state of uncertainty while keeping a curious eye on the shifting realities of complexity. In spite of the fact that there are differences among the three approaches, there are no concrete boundaries among the approaches. A considerable part of the literature of multicultural teacher education has compressed the notions of various theories and utilizes them in different ways and with different emphases.

The current study used the three theories to look at different aspects of multicultural teacher education. Sociocultural theory and constructivism were used to describe the learning process and social activities. Critical theory was applied to examine the policies and political
contexts of educational environment. Postmodernism created space for the existence of ambiguities and multiple perspectives when reinterpreting signs, meanings, or social events.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how multicultural education was defined and practiced by the graduates of the OSU M.Ed. program. The perspectives of OSU M.Ed. graduates, from 1992 to 2002, were examined. How the program may have influenced teachers’ practices in classroom will be discussed.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to: 1) use survey data and case study to describe the teachers’ learning to teach; 2) examine the case studies and describe how multicultural education was defined and practiced by the teachers. In order to answer the first question, I describe the personal backgrounds of teachers, their beliefs, perceptions about multicultural education, their teaching environments, the resources, and the people with whom they worked. To answer the second question, I looked at the characteristics of classrooms which included the students’ family/cultural backgrounds, learning pattern, classroom activities, and the challenges the teachers faced. Finally, whether or how the teachers demonstrated multicultural competence will be discussed.

The above section provided background for the current study and the research questions, which are: 1) How were the M.Ed. graduates prepared to teach multiculturally?; 2) How did the graduates engage their students? The following are descriptions about related literature which can offer support to answer these research questions.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature related to both student learning and teachers learning to teach. In addition, selected issues, such as learning, knowledge, pedagogy, and achievement, will be discussed through the theoretical approaches mentioned in chapter 1 (constructivism, critical theory, and postmodernism). How these approaches to multicultural education are different from that of traditional educational system will be compared.

As Cai (1998) suggests, there are several views about multiculturalism. The first view considers the inclusiveness of many cultures as multiculturalism. The second views the issues related with racial and ethnic topics as the focus of multiculturalism. The third view is that “every human being is multicultural … and all literature is multicultural” (p. 313). His assertion about the third view of multicultural education is to eliminate the barriers between multicultural and the education of uni- or the dominant culture. Other multicultural scholars such as Banks (1993), Sleeter and Grant (1987), and Nieto (2000), add different concerns, such as knowledge construction, critical thinking, or social justice to the literature. Bennett (2001) generates 12 genres from the literature of multicultural
education, such as historical inquiry, curriculum theory, school and classroom climate, ethnic identity development, prejudice reduction, and so on.

One theme shared by most of the contemporary views of multicultural education is to help individual students to reach their full potential. In order to achieve that educational goal, students’ performance needs to be addressed with the quality of teacher education. The following are descriptions about the issues of multicultural education in respect to students’ learning.

*Issues about multicultural education: Students’ learning*

There has been debate in the literature about whether to infuse multicultural education into k-8 school curriculum. The opponents argue that overemphasis on multicultural education will create national disunity, ignore the negative side of foreign cultures, and eliminate an equal amount of other academic content that is considered as more important (Cheney, 1995; Schlesinger, 1992; Meinert & Winberry, 1998). Those who argue against putting multicultural education at the center of the learning process, assert that it will lead to problems of “ethnocentric separatism” and increase cross-culture conflict (Meinert & Winberry, 1998, p. 7). One concrete expression of this kind of concern is the legislation that has been established to make English the “official” or “common” language.

From a traditionalist point of view, multiculturalism is viewed as a political movement advocated by radicals who denigrate traditional European culture and want to replace it with knowledge that falls outside the “normal” life experiences. Moreover, they argue that the negative sides of other cultures are seldom included in the curriculum. Further, the introduction of cultural groups in multicultural classes may lead to students’
misconceptions about other cultures (Cheney, 1995). For some parents, it is hard to accept a curriculum which includes information about gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, classism, or ableism. They are not comfortable with their children knowing too much about conditions outside of their life experiences. For the other parents, they worry that teaching this unnecessary information will remove the time needed for learning other subject matters, which equip the students with the skills they need in a competitive job market (Hackman, 2000). For the above reasons, the opponents of multicultural education see a need to slow down the promotion of multicultural education.

Proponents of multicultural education disagree with the idea that the infusion of multicultural education will decrease the competition ability of students. Scholars who argue for “transformative learning,” such as Bennett (1999), Gay (1995), and Sleeter and Grant (1987), are included in this group. This group of researchers questions the effectiveness of school or mainstream knowledge in preparing students for their future careers (Rifkin, 1996). They believe that the personal experiences that students bring from their home cultures are important for knowledge transformation. They claim that the cultivation of multicultural competence helps not only in improving student achievement in school but also in transforming their learning of knowledge required for their future work.

Proponents of multiculturalism suggest that, when cultural diversity in the population is increasing, one of the significant employment requirements will be multicultural competence and the ability to respect and effectively communicate with persons or potential clients of various cultural backgrounds. If schools do not prepare students for these employment demands, students may find it difficult to adjust
themselves to the culture of future working places. Furthermore, multicultural education should help students understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within the society (Banks et al., 2001). With this understanding, the living styles, societal assets, multiple perspectives on some specific issues, effective ways to solve certain problems that surface within different cultures, can be valuable resources to share. Multicultural education is thus considered by its proponents as a means to improve the quality of life and future work skills, and as important for all students.

In spite of the fact that there are still some voices in opposition to multicultural education, many school districts have increasingly included multicultural content in the curriculum (Meinert & Winberry, 1998). Given the pluralism and diversity in the social context nowadays, the goal of education is to help students cultivate critical and creative thinking, and be knowledgeable and sensitive to other cultural perspectives.

Besides celebration or appreciation of cultural differences, there is another layer of multicultural education. For educational practitioners, multicultural education also means the implementation of educational programs which ensure that all American students have access to educational opportunities of good quality. Under the principles of equity and diversity, different models of curriculum are developed to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

This following section is a discussion of four models of curriculum development: traditional, constructivist/socio-cultural theorist, critical theorist, and postmodernist. The four types of curriculum design will be introduced in terms of their underlying rationales, concerns about knowledge construction, learning process, pedagogy, and student
achievement. In each of the discussion sections, perspectives of scholarship will be reviewed and research examples will be provided.

Curriculum. The recent multicultural education movement is a response to the calls for educational reforms aiming to affirm cultural diversity and to support human dignity. Because cultural diversity and human dignity are interpreted in complex and contested ways, multicultural education has become an “increasingly inclusive field” (Boyle-Baise, 1999). There is a lack of consensus about what should be included or excluded in multicultural education. The following discussion is to introduce four theoretic approaches to multicultural curriculum which have different principles for curriculum design.

1. Traditional. In the traditional approach to curriculum design, multicultural education is viewed as a tool to cope with the learning “problems” of children from diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. These children are perceived as “deprived and disadvantaged.” The goal of education is to assist them to accommodate to the mainstream culture. In some modified curriculum, the attitudes toward diversity are more positive; and the values, language, and culture of the minority students are respected. But the students are still expected to give up their cultural heritage wherever there is a perceived need for maintaining societal harmony or national identity (cf. Forbes, 1973; Woodson, 1969).

2. Constructivist/socio-cultural theorist. For the constructivists/socio-cultural theorists, cultural diversity is not a source of learning problems. Rather, the diversity of values and perspectives generated from different cultures is considered helpful in facilitating learning. As Meacham (2001) asserts, “learning does not take place in
cognitive isolation, but within the context of activities and social interaction likely informed by the day-to-day contingencies of culture” (p. 191). Therefore, in line with this research approach, the home cultures of students are valued and respected. The design of curriculum should consider the range of beliefs and attitudes of individual students whose cultural membership is integral to the learning process (Davidman & Davidman, 1994).

Besides integrating students’ own culture and history into the learning process, the constructivists/socio-cultural theorists suggest utilizing this personal knowledge to socially and psychologically help students understand other cultural perspectives. The students should be provided opportunities to explore the worldviews of different cultures, how these views influence the thinking and life styles of the particular cultural groups, and in which ways the cultural groups’ contributions are significant and useful for the progress of society (Asante, 1991; Cornelius, 1999). For the constructivists/socio-cultural theorists, the emphasis on these cultural elements in curriculum design can help increase motivation and participation in learning.

3. Critical theorist. Like the constructivist/socio-cultural approach, the critical approach affirms diversity and recognizes the significant role of personal identity in learning. Besides that, critical theorists take one step further in challenging the traditional model for locating learning problems in the home cultures of students. From the perspectives of critical theorists, the traditional approach to curriculum, which is based on White supremacist notions, is a tool for cultural hegemony (Asante, 1991). The purposes behind the traditional curriculum, which ignores or suppress non-White cultures, are intended to “protect White privilege and advantage in education, economics, politics,
and so forth” (p. 171). For the critical theorists, the education system is a “political act inseparable from the material and ideological circumstances in which students are positioned” (Hodson, 1998, p. 777). It produces and reproduces inequalities based on differences in gender, sexual preference, religion, class, race, or ethnicity (Hodson, 1998). Implementing a curriculum with a critical perspectives requires teachers, on one hand, to detect bias in texts or instructional materials; on the other hand, to help students develop similar skills of critical analysis (e.g. detecting stereotypes revealed from fictions or motion pictures) (Gay, 2000; Cortes, 1995). One major goal of multicultural education is to assist students in recognizing the various forms of bias, stereotypes, discrimination, and oppression in contemporary society and take actions for social change.

4. Postmodernist. Similar to the critical theorists, postmodernists also affirm diversity but put more emphasis on how difference is formed, eliminated, and resuscitated within unbalanced power relationship (Giroux, 1988). Students are encouraged to understand particular issues from different perspectives and viewpoints. One main assumption of this approach to curriculum development is that there is no best way for teaching and learning (Kumashiro, 2001). Following the traditional norm of effective teaching and learning may hinder student achievement (Secada, 1995). One type of curriculum design based on the postmodernist principle is the transformative curriculum which focuses on knowledge deconstruction and reconstruction in the learning process (more discussion in later sections).

The above theoretic frameworks provide educators varied conceptual guides for developing multicultural curriculum. Despite their different focuses, there are some similarities shared by these approaches. Except for the traditional approach, the other
three emerging approaches all show appreciation of diversity. Affirmation of diversity is especially addressed in the critical approach. Examples of this approach include Hodson’s (1998) study about science education for sociopolitical action and Orfield’s (1988) case study about minority’s access to higher education. The constructivist/socio-cultural theorist approach focuses on the socio-historical origin of knowledge development. The studies of Gay (2000) and Takaki (1993) are examples of inquiry that rethinks the history of subject matters, like music, art, or mathematics (Bennett, 2001). Postmodernist curriculum developers put more emphasis on multiple perspectives. Studies under this theoretic framework include Beck’s (1993) claim for a democratic, dialogical approach in schools, and Schostak’s (2003) discussion of postmodernist curriculum.

Among the research studies on curriculum for multicultural education, the study of Starnes (2000) illustrates some potential problems in the implementation. Starnes, a professor in The University of Texas at Tyler, coordinated a curriculum package for Azeri parents who wanted their children to accept western education. The parents expected the program to help their children improve their educational and employment opportunities in their transition to schools back home. Many students in this program came with their families from different countries to Azerbaijan (east of Turkey) to work in oil exploration companies. They were from Scotland, England, Switzerland, Russia, Australia, Ireland, France, Turkey, Israel, Ethiopia, and the United State, to Azerbaijan.

Starnes found that the curriculum packages prepared in the U.S. were culturally inappropriate in countries such as Azerbaijan which has different natural and cultural resources. Many materials commonly used in existing curriculum from the U.S. were
either not available locally or inappropriate to use for cultural reasons. For example, sand was not easily accessed in the local area. Because rice and wheat are sacred in the Muslim culture, the teachers could not use food products made of these materials as substitutes for sand, either. Designing activities with concern for both the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the culture factors was a challenge for the teachers in that program. Starnes criticizes many activities in existing curricula because they are not culturally accurate and are sometimes offensive. She suggests developing long-term, intensive relationships with people from a variety of other cultures as a means for educators to develop a truly effective multicultural curriculum.

There is also some research showing the concerns of prospective teachers regarding curriculum implementation. For instance, Van Hook (2002) surveyed preservice teachers’ perceived barriers to the implementation of curriculum that integrates anti-bias education. The perceived obstacles were categorized into four themes: “difficulty discussing sensitive topics, policies and practices detrimental to diversity, difficulty implementing diversity curriculum, and the inability to recognize and accept diversity” (p. 1). 73% of the students expressed religion as a highly difficult topic to discuss in the classroom. 27% of the students identified controversy, in general, as a major concern for them when implementing a diverse curriculum. 45% of them identified policies and practices of schools, state and federal government as a barrier to diversity. 79% of the sample considered the inclusion of a multicultural curriculum as important, but they had some concerns regarding how to do it. For example: “My curriculum could have incorrect or developmentally inappropriate information.” “…The diversity of the society seems to be changing rapidly…” (p. 5). Time and financial
constraints were also identified as factors contributing to the challenge of implementing a diverse curriculum. 63% of the students identified biased attitudes of parents as preventing the discussion of diverse topics. The biased views in society and the inability of some narrow-minded teachers to recognize and accept diversity were identified as other obstacle in the way of implementing a diverse curriculum.

However, Van Hook concluded at the end of the study with his personal comments on the perspectives of the teachers.

The true barriers to creating a diverse classroom are the obstacles perceived by the teachers. Rather [whether] real or imagined, the teachers’ perceived barriers are the greatest deterrent to the inclusion of diversity. The investigation of teacher’s perceived barriers will assist teacher educators in the identification of themes for reflection. Preservice teachers need to consider the potential barriers to the implementation of a diverse curriculum. Reflection on one’s attitudes and beliefs will have an impact on the perceived barriers. One goal of teacher education should be the destruction of these barriers in order for teachers to integrate diversity in the curriculum. (p. 10)

In addition to research on teachers’ beliefs, some studies suggest that the limited practical knowledge of preservice teacher can be another source of obstacles for implementing multicultural curriculum. One example is a study about program effectiveness in preparing teachers to be multicultural competent conducted by Grant (1981). Seventeen preservice teachers were interviewed about their perspectives regarding issues of multicultural education after taking a multicultural course. A follow-up study continued for three remaining semesters in their teacher education sequence. Grant found that student teachers paid attention to the examination of curriculum materials when they were taking multicultural education courses. During student teaching, less than one-third of the students reported translating their knowledge into practice. Only half of the student teachers examined the hidden curriculum (e.g. ability
grouping) in their classrooms. Self-concept (personal identity) of preservice students did not receive major attention. Few student teachers spent time doing things to increase their awareness of multicultural education. They only included issues of diversity in their projects or assignments when encouraged to do so, but when the issues were not the focus in class, they did not pay attention to these areas. Enthusiasms about multicultural education gradually moved away during the time that the student teachers stayed in the program. Lack of time or guidance to be involved in learning or practices related to multicultural education “seem to be offered as an excuse when motivation and commitment are small” (p. 100).

The findings of Grant are supported by another more recent research conducted by Reiff, Neuharth-Pritchett, and Pearson, (2000). Their study investigated 103 pre-service teachers’ perceptions about how multicultural education should be implemented. The results indicated that, despite the course work and field experiences, the understanding of the student teachers regarding multicultural education were still limited to issues related to race and ethnicity. Only 16% of the student teachers showed strong understandings of multicultural education. Given the homogeneity of the student population being studied, the authors conclude that the moderate level of understanding of multicultural education may have resulted from their limited life experiences with diversity.

There is some positive evidence showing preservice teachers’ growth in the content knowledge of multicultural education. One such example is provided by a study about the perceptions of American Chinese preservice teachers conducted by Sheets and Chew (2000). Among the twenty-four participants in the research, fourteen student
teachers were the first or second generation of their Chinese-American parents. Six of them came to the United States at an average age of four. Most of the preservice teachers showed a strong understanding about the reality and complexity involved in the implementation of multicultural education. They also demonstrated abilities in reflecting and questioning their personal k-12 experiences and awareness of the issues of diversity inherent in public education.

As shown in the findings of above researches, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of current multicultural education practice is not consistent. There is a growing concern that teachers are not consistently prepared to teach students with diverse backgrounds. According to the report of the National Education Association (1997), only 20% of teachers expressed confidence in working with cultural minority students. How to help student teachers make connection between theory and practice is still a challenge for multicultural teacher educators. The following are extended discussions about four other aspects of multicultural education (learning process, knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement) which have some overlapping as well as interactive relationships with the design of multicultural curriculum.

Learning. In the traditional approach to learning, the relationship between teacher and students is asymmetric. The teacher defines and controls classroom discussions based on a set of prescribed learning goals. Criteria of relevance and appropriateness of students’ contribution to the discussion are set up, which privileges certain views and marginalizes others. Students are encouraged to provide the “right answer” rather than to think in alternative ways. In this line of approach, teachers’ instruction is the key to student learning. The social context, including the personal knowledge/values of students
and teachers, and the particular constraints of learning environments are ignored (cf. Holland et al., 1998; Hook, 1990; Nash, 1989; Goodwin, 1997).

By contrast, the constructivists/socio-cultural theorists recognize that social or cultural identity has considerable impact on individuals’ learning. Each student has a strong emotional commitment to some knowledge that has been well-established and applied successfully in their everyday lives. It is these sociocultural experiences that shape the students as unique individuals. A class consisting of individual students with their personal experiences creates a context for the formation of new social experiences which can be very different from the existing experiences of individuals. The differences require students to make adjustments when crossing the border (from familiar to unfamiliar “terrain”). For some students, the transitions are smooth and unproblematic. For others, the transitions are hazardous. Resistance may occur from difficulty of self-adjustment and result in no learning. Teachers with multicultural competence need a deep understanding of the complexity of the learning process (cf. Giroux, 1992; Hodson, 1998).

Critical theorists pay attention especially to the marginalized voices or silences resulting from the resistance identified by the above constructivists/socio-cultural theorists. Emphasis is put on empowering students to be aware of what is involved in the process of border crossing. Students are urged to exam the sociocultural origin of existing knowledge, to be aware of the context dependence of knowledge construction, and to reflect on the formation of their own beliefs or dispositions. The resistance to learning is assumed to be mediated by this reflective learning approach.
Aikenhead (1996) further suggests using the experiences of border crossing as training for critical thinking. In their teaching practices, students are asked to study their own life-worlds and contrast that with a critical analysis of the content knowledge of a particular subject matter in terms of its norms, values, beliefs, and conventional actions. The students practice consciously moving back and forth between life-worlds and the content-knowledge-world, and switching explicitly among various values, epistemologies, conceptualizations, or language conventions. Through this kind of training for critical thinking, students are prepared to construct new knowledge that helps support their actions for social injustice in the future.

While the critical theorists challenge the power relationships existing in the societal structure, the postmodernists question the new power relationship created by the critical approach in the classroom ecology. One of the postmodernist criticisms is the authority of teachers manifested in their intention to “empower” the students. The postmodernists emphasize the autonomy of students in the learning process. Students are expected to be granted the freedom to challenge the standpoint of their teachers and to express their own ideas. As Kumashiro asserts, “what is being taught and learned unintentionally and indirectly is as important as what is being taught and learned intentionally and directly” (p. 11).

Teachers play different roles in facilitating students’ learning interpreted from the four theoretic approaches. The traditional approach views the teacher as an expert who is able to pass his or her knowledge to students. The constructivist/socio-cultural theorist approach views the teacher as an experienced mentor providing students guidance for inquiry. The critical theorists view the teacher as an experimental instructor who
provides students help in a critical analysis of knowledge construction. The postmodernists view the teacher as a partner of the students in their divergent journeys of knowledge exploration.

One illustration of research on perspective teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning is a longitudinal study conducted by Artiles (1998). Artiles investigated the change of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge during their pre-service and in-service years. The results indicated a complicated and dynamic relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and decision making. When taking multicultural education courses, one preservice teacher, Anne, expressed her commitment to applying teaching strategies to educate children for social justice. In her first year of teaching, Anne changed to adopt an incidental approach to multicultural education. For she believed that, “…it shouldn’t be something that’s forced…. I think it’s more natural if the kids bring it up” (p. 10).

After participating in some professional development activities in her second in-service year, she decided to give up the incidental approach.

I thought for a long time that it was enough to just have a supportive nurturing environment where kids can share their experiences. I thought that through kids sharing their experiences, different cultural issues would come out.... I don't think that's enough anymore. I think that's sort of a passive role for teachers to take. ... That's really a teacher's responsibility to make the classroom more reflective of the student population that's there. (p. 11)

Artiles suggests classroom and school contexts may affect teachers' attempts to apply constructivist and social justice education principles. In addition, prior beliefs and experiences in the teacher education program (TEP) will contribute to how teachers perceive their role in facilitating students’ learning. The findings imply that it is
important for TEP to provide sufficient resources and opportunities for teachers to master and appropriate the components of good teaching for diverse learners.

As Irwin (1997) asserts, the role of the teacher is important for successful multicultural education. However, there are no definite answers in regard to whether, when, where, and how teachers might use their authority as a means to create an environment for effective multicultural learning. However, there is a consensus that a safe and nonthreatening atmosphere is necessary for growth and cooperative learning (though some radical multicultural approaches may sometimes make participants feel uncomfortable). No matter what role teachers choose to play in classroom, they may like to have all their children learning in an environment where relationship and trust are built. The issue of the teacher’s role brings forward the types of knowledge conveyed by the teachers’ role. The following is a discussion about the knowledge emphasized by different multicultural theories.

Knowledge. As mentioned earlier, in the traditional model, knowledge is transmitted to students and students are not expected to challenge or doubt it. This focus on knowledge transmission confines learning to classroom practices which is remote from real life experiences.

The constructivists/socio-cultural theorists consider social interaction and participation as important activities for facilitate learning. Moreover, the participation for effective learning demands appropriate cultural knowledge, which includes “shared understandings, belief and language, codes of behavior, values, and expectations of the group” (Hodson, 1998, p. 781). One important task of teachers is to recognize the
cultural resources that individual students bring with them and to use the resources to socialize students into the learning activities.

In critical classroom practices, the teacher attempts to equip students with the ability to analyze how knowledge is constructed. As Freire (1995) claims, knowledge “emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 53). Through the process of deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge, students can transform themselves by internalizing new knowledge and applying it in their daily lives.

The postmodernists encourage students to question all knowledge created by others. From this perspective, knowledge is not neutral and is constructed within a dynamic of power relationship, which is usually changeable, shifting, and imbalanced. For postmodernists, one major goal of education is to help students become aware of the complexity of reality and to develop an open mind to face an uncertain reality.

The above theoretic approaches provide different views of knowledge and knowledge construction. Except the traditional approach, the other three approaches all consider knowledge a social construction. While the constructivist/socio-cultural approach emphasizes the social interaction in the process of knowledge construction, the critical theorists focus on “transformative academic knowledge” (Bank, 1993, p. 11), and the postmodernists challenge the assumptions underlying all academic knowledge.

An illustration of teachers’ understandings about the nature of knowledge is provided in two joint case studies conducted by Jennings (2002). Jennings investigated two groups of preservice teachers’ conceptualizations of multicultural education, which
resulted in notions of knowledge transformation, after five weeks of courses. In the first case study, Amy, one of the preservice teachers being observed, wrote about what she learned from the multicultural class,

> Student must be empowered to effect changes in school and the work world beyond; empowering student to act on meaningful issues and to value their own and others’ cultures prepares them to work toward social equality and structural pluralism. To become socially and politically responsible citizens, students need the knowledge of social inequalities and the skills to challenge them. (p. 10)

In spite of the expression of a critical approach, Jennings found that the student’s lesson plan provided few strategies for realizing these educational goals. What were included in the teaching practices were instructions for a play about cultural diversity and a pen pal exchange. Neither of these activities seemed to have direct impact on gaining knowledge of structural inequality. Moreover, though Bank’s notion of knowledge construction was frequently cited in Amy’s lesson plans, the conceptions were not really understood. In her plans, Amy did create activities to involve children in meaning making. However, though the children were taking active roles in constructing their own knowledge, they were not initiated into reflection on the process of knowledge construction. The picture of how existing knowledge was dependent on social and political contexts—the essential part of Bank’s notion of transformative knowledge—was not demonstrated in Amy’s teaching practice.

On the contrary, in Jenning’s second case study, another student, Cynthia, having taken three courses about culturally relative teaching created a plan of inquiry-based multicultural lessons and successfully increased children’s participation and knowledge about the subject matter. Compared with their peers taught with teacher-centered activities, the children in the inquiry-based project offered responses with more insights
and connections with their personal life experiences. In her self-study of the inquiry-based project, Cynthia reinvented her own knowledge about the implementation of transformative curriculum. Her emergent thinking included the idea that transformation comes from continuous reflection and revision. For instance, when writing research questions about cultural groups, children provided questions like, “What kind of clothes did they wear?” with an indirect reference to the dominant, European culture. Finding the problem, Cynthia asked the children to be more specific about the cultural group for their investigations. In addition, three cultural groups were offered as an alternative topic for cross-cultural research. At the end of the project, the children showed their appreciation for the challenge in doing cross-cultural comparisons.

The second insight noted by Cynthia was that dialogue journals were a powerful tool in the construction of transformative knowledge. Through writing journals, children were able to communicate with the teachers about their questions, to ask for help, or to express their frustrations when confronted with difficulties. The journals also gave the teachers some insights about the students’ thinking. Discussion or exchange of ideas among teachers about students’ thinking revealed from the journals helped to improve the teacher’s teaching strategies. As Cynthia reflected, “transformations have occurred as teachers have become learning partners with students, as teachers have become learning partners with a teacher-researcher, and as a university professor and a teacher-researcher have become learning partners.”

Finally, Cynthia recalled that the critical theory introduced in the multicultural courses was helpful in modifying her teaching:

…the revised unit for third grade went far in cultural relevance but did not help students address or question the social and political practices
that continue to cause the same kinds of oppression that cultures such as African American and Native American groups were experiencing in the early 1800s. (p. 20)

Jennings (2002) concluded that time, action plan, critical inquiry practices, dialogue journals, and partnerships are potential factors to contribute to different understandings of the preservice teachers toward multicultural education. In contrast to the learning results of one-shot instruction (completion of course work), the long term learning experiences of Cynthia included her commitment to take action, using critical theory to reflect on practice, applying strategies (journal writing) to interact with children, and collaborating with other teachers, professors, and administrators. Together they shaped this successful example of multicultural education.

The knowledge that different multicultural education theories advocate for children to learn is so sophisticated that unless teachers undergo a transformation themselves first, it will be difficult for them to assist the children to achieve the same transformation. All the emerging approaches to multicultural education emphasize the connection between knowledge and the learners’ experiences through participation, transformative knowledge, or border crossing experiences. How to make such connections happen is a challenge for both teachers and teacher educators. The following section introduces some strategies used by teachers in multicultural education.

Pedagogy. Regardless the various focuses of different multicultural approaches in terms of knowledge, the home cultures students bring with them into the classroom are considered valuable resources for learning. It is the different levels of emphasis on equity that makes the use of cultural resources in the four theoretic approaches distinguished from each other. The traditional approach utilizes the cultural resources in
the learning process with little emphasis on issues of equity. The constructivist/socio-cultural approach emphasizes equity by respecting and affirming the home culture of each child. Critical theorists view social change as a necessary means to bring about equitable education access and participation. The postmodernists challenge the assumptions of existing knowledge and theories that may hinder efforts toward equity in education (cf. Bennett, 2001, Secada, 1995). Therefore, pedagogy based on the three emerging multicultural theories is culturally relevant and with a particular focus on equity.

An illustration of preservice teachers’ perception about multicultural pedagogy is a study on community service by Barton (2000). Barton had eight of her students in a teacher education program teach science to children in a homeless shelter from 1996-1998. This was volunteer teaching work. The student teacher got course credit for the teaching and it fulfilled some course requirements. The preservice teachers were required to meet with Barton, their course instructor and co-teacher, at the shelter each week to plan and review their teaching practice. The curriculum design was problem-based, authentic, and had connections with the lives of the students within that community. Beside the science classes, the teachers needed to spend time with the children at the shelter in other kinds of activities to develop a better understanding about the children and their community. Though relating learning activities with students’ backgrounds was emphasized in this multicultural pedagogy, some teachers expressed some fears regarding this concern. One female student reflected:

I can see how this is really important, to make science connected to their lives, their experiences. But the other day I was thinking about how you also have to start with the teachers’ experience. I mean I was talking to my dad, and I told him I was doing this work at a homeless shelter in [this part of the city] and he said to me, ‘I don’t want you going to [there]!’ and ‘I didn’t send you to Teachers College to have you...
endanger yourself in those parts of the city!’ This is my father. I don’t believe I have the same beliefs as him, but I was nervous the first day that I went, and I can see now how these kinds of home experiences are influential. I mean, before I even met the children, I was, well, afraid of them and their community. (p. 21)

The community service experiences had several impacts on the preservice teachers. These experiences provided the teachers with opportunities to reflect on “science, teaching and students separate from ‘schooling’, and therefore, separate from their perceived expectations of schooling” (p. 815). The barrier between the dichotomous categories, “science education” versus “multicultural education,” long existing in the formal school system, turned out to be not so solid within these practices. As a black student teacher commented:

Well, my definition has been broadened. It has been enriched. As a teacher, if you are doing multicultural pedagogy, which I think all teachers should, I don’t think you can separate multiculturalism; you cannot even call it multicultural pedagogy, because all pedagogy should be multicultural nowadays. [You] have to come to appreciate where your students are coming from, to appreciate your students’ culture, to appreciate your worldview, to appreciate and then to really believe it—not just to create fake spaces for them, where they can, oh-yeah, do things, and then you know, feel like, oh-yeah, feel like, oh-yeah, you did this just because he is colored or whatever, he’s black, or he’s Indian, or whatever. But you actually participate in it too. You actually believe in what this child is doing—to actually enter their worlds, and to come to appreciate it, and that means letting go of your world, transforming yourself, and that’s a big part of multicultural education. (p. 808)

Though not every student teacher moved beyond an “add-on” vision of multicultural education, the majority did, and in ways that significantly influenced their pedagogical decision making. However, Barton noticed one interesting thing about the professional growth of her students. “As the preservice teachers began to broaden their visions of multicultural science education, they also tended to become less certain of and more
questioning of their knowledge-base and subsequent actions” (p. 809). Barton viewed this shift in a positive way. The feeling of uncertainty, a shift from knowing to not-knowing, allowed the prospective teachers to be more critical of their own actions, which may reflect a reversion of traditional teaching; and to become more inquisitive of the students, pedagogy, and the nature of science. In other words, she argued that the perceived uncertainty can be a place where theory and practice are more likely to be connected.

The research example demonstrated the transformation that the student teachers underwent when applying a culturally relevant pedagogy in their community teaching service. Their understanding about multicultural education had been significantly strengthened through the field experiences in the local community. As Ziechner (1996) comments, community field experience is one of the most common strategies advocated in the literature of multicultural teacher education. Such shift of “the center of the gravity of teacher education…to the community, including extending field experiences beyond the boundaries of the school” (Ziechner, 1996, p. 534) is another way to bridge the theory with practice for multicultural education. The next section is a discussion about the student outcomes related with the equity pedagogy or culturally relevant pedagogy.

Achievement. In the traditional approach, student achievement depends on the extent to which individuals are assimilated into the dominant culture. However, one important learning outcome valued by the constructivists/socio-cultural theorists is how students can function comfortably in other cultural contexts while retaining their familial worldview and values (Bennett, 2001). Moreover, as mentioned before, the development of ethnic identity or cultural knowledge is the prerequisite for this level of achievement.
In the postmodernist approach, there is no requirement that all students should acquire certain standards of knowledge. Students are encouraged to think, read, and learn critically. For critical theorists, students are expected to develop a critical consciousness for challenging social injustice. Whether knowledge can lead to social change is one significant indicator of student achievement. There are four levels of achievement advocated by the critical approach: 1) recognizing culturally determined aspects of knowledge; 2) being aware of the individuals’ interest and political factors in knowledge construction; 3) developing one’s own knowledge; 4) preparing for and taking action for social change (Hodson, 1998). Within these various focuses, the theoretic approaches inform teachers’ expectation for student achievement in different ways (cf. Meacham, 2001; Goldberg, 1994; Duarte & Smith, 2000).

The learning experiences of Cynthia introduced earlier is an example of a preservice teacher’s concept of student achievement from the viewpoint of critical theory. Reviewing her lesson plan, Cynthia noticed that one of her teaching units for a third-grade history class went far into cultural relevance but did not convey a critical notion of knowledge construction (including deconstruction and reconstruction). She would have liked to take a further step in helping students address the social and political factors that continue to cause the same kinds of oppression that cultures such as Native American groups had experienced since the early 1800s. Not sure about the appropriateness in applying the critical pedagogy at the third grade level, she turned to use it in a fifth-grade history class. With a collaborating fifth-grade teacher, Cynthia tested her approach by asking the students to address some questions in each chapter of the new text. “Whose perspectives are left out?” “How would the story be different if those voices had been
included?” Based on what they may have learned from this testing, Cynthia and her teaching partner planned to develop a social studies curriculum for the fifth grade students. The curriculum was to infuse African American history throughout the year with a goal to help students “deconstruct and interrogate knowledge” (p. 476).

According to the story of Cynthia, the goal setting of a curriculum relies on not only the expectation of the teachers, but also the feedback from children during the classroom activities. Moreover, her habit of critical thinking seems to have had an impact on her expectations for student outcomes. She reflected on her learning after a multicultural course:

I no longer read a book or an article, listen to a presentation or lecture, teach a class, or conduct an observation without looking at the social and political implications for both myself and my students. I inquire about power and equity issues involved in new mandates from the district and state level and consider what actions I might need to take. (p. 475)

Cynthia’s concern about student achievement demonstrates a connection between her knowledge about critical theory and classroom practice. Richardson (1996) asserts that teachers accept new practices only if their beliefs match the underlying assumptions of the practices. The learning experience of Cynthia has another implication: teachers effectively apply new practices only after they accept and internalize the practices. The kind of learning opportunities helpful for preservice teachers to internalize knowledge necessary for multicultural education is an important issue for the teacher educator.

The above section reviews the literature about different approaches to multicultural education regarding learning process, knowledge pursued, development of pedagogy, and expectations of student achievement. The discussions reveal some practical concerns for education practitioners. First, comprehensive multicultural
education should consider both the issues of diversity and equity at the same time. As Cai (1998) asserts, multicultural education which focuses on diversity without addressing equity may be counterproductive. For instance, at a “Multicultural Days” activity, a school teacher found some children were criticizing the dish and culture of others using their own value judgment. By this example, Cai argues that if diversity is not presented with mutual respect, the multicultural activity may increase cultural barriers rather than eliminate them.

Second, with the principles of equity and diversity, multicultural educators can be informed by the different theoretic approaches in various aspects. One criticism of multicultural education is the lack of definition of its boundary (Boyle-Baise, 1999). However, with the calls to move teacher education into the community (Grinberg & Goldfarb, 1998), there is a necessity to broaden teachers’ views about the complex reality of teaching and learning from multiple theoretic perspectives. While some theory focuses on mainstream academic knowledge, some emphasize the social contexts of learning environment, others emphasize political issues and social actions, yet others focus on foundational questions regarding ontological issue. All the theories can be used as helpful tools for teachers to reflect and create their own practices.

Third, besides coursework, teacher education program must provide a variety of opportunities to socialize teachers to become multiculturally competent. The activities can include field experiences in different cultural contexts, community services, school-university partnership, and so on. Feedback to teachers’ self-study and reflection is also critical for professional growth. In addition, teachers’ beliefs, cultural knowledge, and perceived professional role should be taken into account for their learning to teach. In
other words, the concepts of multicultural education need to be included at all levels of teacher education programs to help teachers achieve knowledge transformation. How to integrate these concepts into the curriculum of teacher preparation programs will be elaborated through the same theoretic dimensions as mentioned before.

Issues of multicultural education: Teachers’ learning to teach

Gay and Howard (2000) identify reasons supporting the need to strengthen multicultural teacher education: 1) the increasing divide in respect of race, culture, and language between teachers and k-12 students, and 2) the fear and resistance of preservice teachers to taking and dealing with the issue of equity and diversity. There is a demographic divide that comes from the fact that although the student population is becoming more diverse, the teacher population has not changed much and continues to be lacking in diversity. Research has found that teachers reveal their fear of teaching students of color and have resistance to dealing directly with race and racism in classroom practices (Goodlad, 1990). Those who appear to be more receptive to the concept of teaching for diversity retain a superficial level of understanding about the related issues. These are added reasons why both white teachers and teachers of color must be taught thoroughly during their preservice training how to be effective multicultural teachers of ethnically diverse students (Pewewardy, 2002).

Ladson-Billings (1994) has asserted that it is impossible to decontextualize multicultural teacher education (MTE). The issues related to multicultural education (ME) and multicultural teacher education (MTE) are inseparable. In examining the current literature in MTE, the following section will continue to discuss multicultural teacher education in the five aspects that have been used for the deliberation of
multicultural education in the previous section: curriculum, knowledge, learning process, pedagogy, and achievement.

Curriculum. How should a plan for guiding instruction in multicultural teacher education be designed? What are the principles for planning? The curriculum proposal of Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggests six strands for preparing culturally responsive teachers: 1) gaining sociocultural consciousness; 2) developing and affirming attitudes toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds; 3) developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change; 4) understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching; 5) learning about students and their communities; and 6) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices (p. 26). Zeichner et al. (1998) further suggest that the curriculum design should be undergirded by the notion that all teacher candidates bring strengths to their experiences of learning to teach. Concern for students’ backgrounds, learning styles, and communicative modes should permeate plans for instruction. Cochran-Smith (2001) adds that the curriculum design for teacher preparation should be based on a view of teaching as a journey of inquiry and life-long learning. Moreover, she asserts that the role of teacher educators and teachers is to challenge and interrogate the racist assumptions that underlie courses and curricula in the society and in the educational system.

As mentioned in the curriculum proposal of Villegas and Lucas (2002), helping teachers develop sociocultural consciousness is an important theme in the current literature on multicultural teacher education. The first step in building sociocultural consciousness is understanding one’s own cultural experience and “develop[ing] more clarified ethnic and cultural identities” (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996, p. 530). Through
examining the cultural assumptions they bring to the classroom, teachers can have a
good understanding of their own cultural positions, reflect on the consequences of their
assumptions, and consider alternative attitudes and values. (Spindler & Spindler, 1993;
Banks, 1991). Studying the class assignments of student teachers for the development of
cultural identity, Pewewardy (2002) argues that culture identity developed through
critical reflection will facilitate cross-cultural understanding. One important goal of
teacher education, as Hollins (1990) claims, is to provide a learning environment which
socializes the preservice teachers making connections between their personal experiences
and our culturally diverse society.

There are several examples of teacher preparation programs. For instance, The
Teacher College, at University of Nebraska, established a 2-year program focusing on
teaching diversity. The program provides Saturday seminars, online learning
communities, and intensive summer classes for full-time educators to complete a master’s
degree. The curriculum in the program stresses the concept of teaching as action-praxis-
action, the social, cultural, and political contexts that influence teaching and learning, and
the mutual infusion of practice and theory. The teacher education programs at the
University of Wisconsin and the Emory University are also designed explicitly to prepare
teachers to teach students of diverse backgrounds (Benett, 2001).

The influence of sociocultural, critical, and postmodernist stances is apparent in
the various assumptions and goals of these curriculum designs. With different theoretic
focuses emphasized in the programs, the teacher’s role can be viewed as that of a
“cultural agent advocating sociocultural consciousness” (Spindler & Spindler, 1993),
“change agents working for social justice” (Inquiry and Social Justice Reform Group,
1997), or life-long learner searching for multiple perspectives. The shared core value beyond the diverse formats of curriculum design lies on the commitment to improve social welfare, and the appreciation of the cultural heritages brought by everyone into the classroom.

Knowledge. Traditional approaches to teaching for diversity establish a knowledge base for teachers to learn and to teach. Underlying the list of required knowledge is the concept that as long as the knowledge gets transmitted from teacher educator to preservice teachers, good teaching practice is ensured. Recent educational theory questions the sufficiency of transmissive knowledge in supporting higher levels of cognition. Fasheh (1990) asserts that those teachers who have been educated within a hegemonic educational system are used to seeking to gain consent from their students with culturally diverse backgrounds. Without efforts to assist teachers to uncover and critique their own beliefs and teaching, the teacher education program will continue to produce teachers who have negative stereotypes or prejudices about their culturally diverse students (Bryan & Atwater, 2002). With an orientation toward transformative multicultural education, an emerging focus is put on “transformative academic knowledge” (Bank, 1993, p. 10) which consists of three cyclical stages of knowledge construction: uncover, deconstruct, and reconstruct.

The uncovering stage involves the exploration of “how knowledge is formed,” “how social, economic, and political factors may influence the formation,” “and how cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and the biases within a discipline influence the ways the knowledge is constructed” (p. 11). After examining the formation of knowledge, at the stage of deconstruction, student teachers are provided with
opportunities to reflect and challenge the assumptions of the historically generated knowledge. Finally, at the stage of reconstruction, student teachers will learn to create their own knowledge, as well as uncover and challenge the assumptions behind their own beliefs and perspectives behind the newly developed knowledge.

Baptiste (1980) suggests three types of knowledge which are helpful in supporting the reconstruction of teacher knowledge: 1) cultural experiences in both contemporary and historical settings, 2) theories of teaching and learning in school settings, and 3) a rationale of multiculturalism. Cochran-Smith (2000) emphasizes the necessity to include cultural knowledge for knowledge reconstruction. She defines cultural knowledge as: “the meaning of culture, the influence of culture on learning and schooling, the ways in which schools and classrooms function as ‘cultures’, the nature of ethnic, racial, and urban cultures different from their own, and the role of culture in patterns of socialization, interaction, and communication” (p. 6).

Winfield (1986) found that in some teacher education programs, graduates leave teacher education programs with little or no intercultural experiences, still retaining the concept of self from their own sociocultural background. On the other hand, some studies show that student teachers do change their attitudes after exiting the program. The teachers who used to believe that students of color were less eager to learn than their white peers changed their minds after several visiting in suburban schools for their method classes (Aaronsohn, 1995). Artiles et al. (2000) found student teachers transcended their concepts of culture after several activities with peers.

Other research efforts focus on the relationship between teacher knowledge and their cultural identity. Au and Blake (2003) studied the impacts of teachers’ background
(ethnicity, social class, and community membership) and their learning to teach (Sleeter, 2001). The conclusions of these studies found that regardless of their cultural backgrounds, the student teachers of color do not differ from their mainstream peers in respect to knowledge construction. The study also implies that there was no difference in the need of the student teachers for well-designed courses and field experiences. However, the students’ motivations and their learning styles will influence their ability to benefit from the learning opportunities. The higher motivation to improve oneself and the greater competence in critical reasoning that the preservice teachers bring with them into the programs, the more their teacher education courses have a positive impact on their learning. Moreover, experiences in local community facilitate teachers’ understanding of the issues of diversity and equity and of the potential obstacles students face (Au and Black, 2003).

The current perspectives and studies about teacher knowledge, introduced above, seem to reach a consensus about the important role of reflection on knowledge construction. The emphases on the different aspects of reflection discussed in these studies are parallel to the three theoretical paradigms. A sociocultural approach is interested in identity development, a critical theory perspective emphasizes the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge, and postmodernists pose questions about process of reflection (e.g. the pros and cons of cultural identity development, or the possibility to over address dualism in the critical reflection process). All three approaches provide helpful suggestions about how to facilitate productive knowledge construction through reflection.
Learning. Given the important role of transformation, Wenger (1998) argues that transformative learning is most likely to occur through the formation of membership and identity within a community of practices. There are three suggestions for developing identity and membership in a learning community: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Each element facilitates a different sense of belonging which is crucial in the learning process. This section borrows Wenger’s idea of the three modes of belonging for the discussion of teachers’ learning to teach. Comparison of this sociocultural approach of learning with critical theory and modernism will be discussed at the end of the section.

The term “modes of belonging” is used by Wenger (1998) in an explanation of participation and non-participation which shapes one’s identity. His theory is rooted in a socio-cultural origin of learning, which defines learning as “the transformation of participation over time in a community of practice” (Artiles, Hoffman-Kipp, & Trent, S. C., 2000). In this line of theory, changing participation is the central part of learning process (Lave, 1996). Wenger discusses non-participation and participation based on the three modes of belonging. The first mode of belonging, engagement, is defined as “the ways we engage with others, and the ways these relations reflect who we are” (p. 189). Engagement involves both production and adoption of meaning. The interplay between production and adoption facilitates learning. Like learning language through the conversations with their parents, children will produce their own sentences on the bases of the inputs from their parents. On one hand, the language production is not a 100% invention for it consists of some ingredients from the input. On the other hand, language learning does not rely on 100% adoption of the input, for the participation of children in
conversation may influence the content of input to some degree. Through the practices of adoption and production, both parents and children share ownership of the meaning, and develop identities of participation (p. 189).

In some situations, engagement may also result in the identity formation of non-participation. If production and adoption consistently remain separable, there will be uneven ownership of meaning which may result in both marginality and non-learning (p. 203). The assignment of journal writing in a M.Ed. course is an example of engagement with possible impacts on both participation and non-participation. When some personal ideas or experiences that the student teachers put down in their journals are consistently ignored or not responded to appropriately, learning does not happen and the voices of students are marginalized. An identity of non-participation follows such marginality.

Besides engagement, negotiation of meaning can happen through imagination-- the second mode of belonging. Devices such as making stories or play can “transport our experience into the situations they relate and involve us in producing the meanings of those events as though we are participants” (p. 203). In Boal’s (1992) Theatre of the Oppressed and Freire’s (1972) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, imagination is the key to integrating experiences from role playing into the participants’ identity and personal experiences. The participants play roles in an imagined world where they are facilitated to try out their own ideas about how to react to oppression. Identity of participation is developed through the “vicarious experiences” (Wenger, 1998, p. 190) through the collective work of imagination. On the contrary, an identity of non-participation can also be generated through the process of imagination. When there is lack of access to a practice, learners may assume a certain aspect of knowledge is unattainable or owned by
somebody else. This assumption contributes to marginalization and creates a position of non-participation.

However, as Wenger notes, the identity of non-participation is not necessarily a bad thing. It is a position that learners hold when they accept the existence of meanings without an attempt to share their ownership (p. 205). This is a common situation that many student teachers may have in their initial involvement in schools. While finding the school culture is different from what they have experienced in their M.Ed programs, the identity of non-participation may leave some space for the student teachers to observe and interpret the differences between the cultural experiences they have had in the university and school contexts. In such a way, the identity of non-participation creates a space of dynamism and opportunities for change in the field experiences of student teaching (cf. Wenger, 1998).

The third mode of belonging is alignment—through which negotiation of meanings is conducted in larger context. For instance, the discussion of students’ journals in a teacher preparation course can be seen as a process of alignment. A skillful teacher educator can initiate the discussion toward a comprehensive vision of multicultural education through involving different voices of individuals. The definition of multicultural education in a broader sense can be presented to the class through this process of alignment. Wenger suggests that the process of alignment requires coordination of actions and thus provides relatively more opportunities for the encounter of multiple perspectives than other modes of belonging. Still, both identities of participation and non-participation can be generated within meaning negotiation.
Returning to the example of journal discussion, the process of alignment can either involve or not involve negotiation, which consequently influences the identity of participation. A conclusion about essential concepts of multicultural education can be reified and memorized by the student teacher without any effort at negotiation. Without negotiation, the student teachers could still get some ideas about issues of diversity and equity discussed in the class. However, they may not share the ownership of meanings and still retain their old beliefs or attitudes in teaching—an identification of non-participation.

The three modes of belonging discussed above is a sociocultural approach which considers teacher learning as collective as well as individual activities within a community of practice. Similar to critical theory, the sociocultural approach talks about reflection, a combination of imagination and engagement, in the learning process. But critical theory stresses more the awareness of the oppressor-oppressed relationship and tries to empower the victims of racism to dissociate themselves from the oppressors. Like postmodernism, Wenger’s sociocultural model of learning also considers the role of power in the negotiation of meaning. However, power is discussed in respect to one’s efforts in enforcing belonging within a community of practice. How the shifting of subjectivity influences the change of power relationship is not mentioned in Wenger’s model of learning. While both critical theory and sociocultural theory hold a more static notion of subjectivity, the postmodernism perceives subjectivity as multiple, which makes the activity system seem more complex. In spite of the differences, conceptualizing inquiry as a way to prepare teachers is a common thread woven through the core concepts of the three paradigms.
Pedagogy. Grasha (1994) proposes five distinctive styles of teaching: 1) knowledge transmission (teacher as expert); 2) discipline establishment (teacher as source of authority); 3) “hands-on” approach (teacher as role model); 4) knowledge transaction (teacher as facilitator); 5) development of student autonomy (teacher as resource person). Similar concepts about the purposes of knowledge transmission, transaction, and transformation in different types of pedagogy are widely discussed in the related literature (Zeichner, 1980; Gay, 1992). Though there is a trend to emphasize the knowledge transformational purposes of pedagogy, Gay (1992) asserts that multicultural education should include three types of teaching: 1) knowledge transmission which allows teachers to know about the basic ideas regarding the meaning of culture, 2) knowledge transaction which provides opportunities for teachers to engage in the field experiences of cultural diversity, and 3) knowledge transaction which facilitates teachers to critically reflect on their own beliefs and practices toward a change in action. The following section offers examples about how the three theoretical approaches attend to these concerns.

A study by Cole, Bennett, and Thompson (2003) provides an example of critical pedagogy. The study is designed to investigate the initiations of fifty minority students participating in both “critical mass” and “all minority” classes. The major difference between the two classes was that while all minority classes consisted of no non-minority students, the critical mass class has both minority students and non-minority students so there was “a sufficient concentration of students of color” (p.17). In both of the classes, small group discussions, debate, case studies, and problem-based learning were used as the primary teaching techniques. One of the educational goals for both classes was to
create a sense of community where student sharing and collaborative learning were the essential themes. Students’ perceptions of their experiences in each class were examined through their written reflections and personal interviews.

The minority students reported that they felt more comfortable but slightly intimidated in the all-minority class, while they felt pressed but had more interactions in the critical mass class where they had non-minority peers. The pressure in the mass critical class occurred when the white peers expressed insensitive racist misconceptions. The feelings of intimidation in the all minority class came from the feeling that the minority peers were experts in issues of multicultural education. They felt relatively more challenged by other students of color than by their white peers regarding their performance in class. Except for the uncomfortable feeling when confronting challenge, the students of color looked for supportive resources from the all-minority class where they provided psychological scaffolding for each other. Cole et al. (2003) found most of the participants in the project developed a stronger sense of ethnic identity.

The study of Ryan (2003) about student assignment demonstrates an example of postmodernist pedagogy. Ryan suggested to her students who had a hard time understanding and appreciating the values of other cultures to see themselves as Other. By ‘Othering’ the self, students began to question the ‘natural’ superiority of American culture, came to see the quirky and peculiar stereotypes of American culture, learned to appreciate that the everyday practices of other cultures are at least as complex and diverse as our own, and gradually realized that their opinions of other cultures were based on very limited data” (p. 1). The assignment aimed to help the students cultivate strategies for analyzing work activities that they may never have examined and to hear the varied
interpretations of these activities offered by other students. One of Ryan’s students wrote:

I wonder how much we’re aware of all the contradictions we show by what we do. For example, I thought about how untrusting Americans seem to be in a lot of their behaviors, like by keeping our distance from people we don’t know and locking our cars just to run into the drugstore for a few items. On the other hand, we tend to expect honesty from employees like maintenance workers that enter our apartments to do repairs. Another example is that most shoppers don’t bother to look at the price being rung up for their groceries at the checkout, they just expect the store to treat them fairly. (p. 10)

A final example from a sociocultural pedagogical approach is proposed by Schulte (2000). Schulte uses discussions as a tool to facilitate the process of transformation. The belief guiding this pedagogy is that “the dialectical nature of discussion allows participants to share and interact with multiple perspectives in a way that written reflection does not provide” (p. 7). With this dialogic technique, students are encouraged to draw upon their experiences for critical reflection. They are also granted ultimate control over what they decide to accept. In such a way, the instructor can nurture the students’ confidence in their ideas, and the students will feel comfortable in expressing, reflecting, and rethinking their own views. Genuine sharing of voices, the power differentials and their impact on what is sayable and doable in the specific class contexts is the focus of this approach. In her self-study, Schulte tries to reflect on the changes in discourse patterns in her own instruction, the intentions behind her questions, and the assumptions she made about students’ beliefs and the merits of transformative pedagogy.

The research examples above show different approaches to knowledge transmission, transaction, and transformation. In the postmodernist approach, the knowledge transmission process is initiated by the directives of the demanding teacher educator. The
instruction facilitates an alternative way of imagination in viewing things from a view of “others.” The uniqueness of the critical pedagogy is its attempt to create an environment of safety and activities for knowledge transaction. Students are engaged to develop their ethnicity during the interaction. The socio-cultural pedagogy focuses on the negotiation of meanings to ensure the transformation of knowledge during the process of alignment (activity of discussion).

Achievement. The answers provided by different approaches regarding what should be the consequences or outcomes of teacher preparation vary. While the socio-cultural approach expects teachers to be conscious of the differences in the culture resources their students bring into the classroom, the critical theorists would like to see the competence of “conscientization” beyond “consciousness” (Au et al, 2003). According to Freire (1996), “conscientization” refers to the ability to think critically. For example, being conscientious of class differences includes the knowledge of the social and political contexts which result in class differences. Therefore, a teacher with the competence of conscientization will not perceive “hunger” as a state of no food to eat, but the result of uneven allocation of resources which reside in social and political contexts within the history of the civilizing process (Freire, 1996). The study of Cole, Bennett, and Thompson (2000) found that students who have demonstrated competence of conscientization at the entrance of a teacher education program signal an interest in using what they learn in the class to make sense of their formative experiences. On the contrary, students who showed a consciousness level of competence made little change in their understanding about the political dimension in the system of education.
The postmodernists expect teachers to development an ability to question or problematize the perceived realities and to cultivate multiple perspectives in viewing things (Bank, 1993). In Ryan’s study on the “self-Othering” assignments, the students were helped to think about “where and with whom Americans as a cultural category tend to place their trust reveals much about individual and collective values regarding gender, ethnicity, class, and institutional reliability” (p. 10). While some students’ comments did reveal an understanding about the multi-layers which comprise cultural identity, some students still retained objective reasoning of individuals’ behaviors and beliefs.

The above discussions illustrate how the assumptions of different theoretic approaches guide the curriculum development of multicultural teacher education. The sociocultural curriculum focuses on raising sociocultural consciousness in student teachers; a critical curriculum emphasizes action for social justice as the ultimate goal of multicultural teacher education. The postmodernists put fluid multiple perspectives as the important theme in curriculum development. The established goals of curriculum consequently influence views about teacher knowledge, learning process, achievement, and plans for activities in different approaches. Despite differences in the view points, all three approaches share one assumption that cultural diversity is a resource of value in the process of teaching and learning. The three approaches also provide assistance in uncovering the existing assumptions of teachers. Synthesized categories of the concerns raised by the three approaches about a teacher preparation program which is multiculturally relevant are illustrated below.
Critics assert that a lack of an agreed-upon definition of multicultural education results in competing interpretations and notions (Grant & Tate, 2001). The literature review in this study helps clarify the theoretic assumptions that may lead to different policies and practices. Comparisons among programs were offered with concerns about the theoretic assumptions which guided various programs. However, all these perspectives and concerns about multicultural teacher education are related to other contextual factors which create complexity and makes program analysis difficult. Moreover, there are only a few studies documenting the consequent impact of the teacher education program related to multicultural teacher education. Without evidence of progress in the teaching profession, it will be hard to tell whether a learning environment is created to support long-term learning of teachers, or merely short-term learning.
In order to analyze programs’ features systematically, the research for this dissertation adopted Wenger’s (1998) Community of Practices which proposes a framework to classify program features into three categories: repertoire, engagement, and enterprise. Enterprise refers to the domains or educational goals of the program. Engagement includes all forms of relationship development that facilitate the fulfillment of program goals. And repertoire indicates the practices that manifest the domains of the program. Each program category can be studied within the three paradigm approaches discussed above (sociocultural, critical, postmodernist). The other contextual factors, such as institutional capacity and mission, government/non governmental regulation, and social/political contexts (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Bronfenbrenner, 1976) will be referred to when necessary. Through such a systematic approach, the complexity added by the different perspectives will generate a holistic view of the program studied, rather than increase the difficulty of analysis.

The above section reviews the related literature about multicultural education regarding teaching and learning. The following chapter is to describe the research design and data analysis of this research.
CHAPTER 3

HOW I PERCEIVED WHAT I SAW: THE INTERPRETER, INQUIRY POSITION, AND INTERPRETATION TOOLS

The purpose of this study was to explore in depth three case study teachers’ learning and practices of multicultural education. The issues of equity and diversity have long been the main focus in the field of multicultural teacher education. One major emphasis of the OSU M.Ed. program was to prepare multiculturally competent teachers in urban schools. That emphasis on multicultural education was a response to the growing population of underrepresented students in the inner city schools. The current study investigated teachers’ learning and practices in both university and school settings. In this chapter, I describe my positions as a researcher, my theoretic lens, my research assumptions, the OSU M.Ed. program, the student teacher population and participant selection, my ways of discovering, and data analysis of this study.

Who Am I?

I was born in a traditional Taiwanese family. My father worked for the government as a computer programmer. He had a dream (or stereotype) about family life and wanted his wife to stay at home as a housewife and to serve his parents. However, my mother was an outgoing person who liked to take adventures and have her own professional career. She was a school teacher for 20 years, and later became a business
woman. I was the eldest child, with two younger sisters. Because my father did not have any sons, my grandparents passed on less inheritance to my father than to their other children. Though a little upset about the decision of his parents, my father tried his best to provide us opportunities for education. He said that what he paid for our education would be our wedding gifts. He considered education the key to our future welfare. His thought was supported by my mother. They used to disagree with each on many issues because of their different personalities. High expectation for their children’s educational achievement was one of the few things about which they agreed. I grew up with my parents’ affection in our small home. However, gender inequity was always one part of the larger family tradition which was reinforced by my grandparents and other male family members/relatives.

Studying in college was the first time that I had the experiences of liberation in my life—I started to make decisions and to be responsible for myself. I moved out of my home and lived with three roommates in a college dormitory. My major was English and American Literature. The required courses included: Greek mythology, English literature, American novel, modern English, applied business English, and so on. Ironically, my enthusiasm grew more in learning about Eastern rather than Western literature or cultures during my learning in college. I read books written in old Chinese about Confucius and other philosophers like Lao Zi and Mong Zi. It was interesting to know how their theories were applied in education, politics, science, and human relationships. Sometimes, I wondered whether I had chosen the right subject for my bachelor degree. However, time flew. Soon I found my classmates starting to prepare for job applications or different kinds of examinations. At the end of the sophomore year, I was still hesitant to think.
about what I really wanted to do in the future. After my graduation, I got a temporary job at the same university and had a basic salary which was just sufficient to pay for my daily expense. One of my friends kindly offered me her place to stay. Already at my 22\textsuperscript{nd} year, I assumed that I could have “free will” to choose my own life style—which was simple, not ambitious, a little bit isolated, but liberated from the social norms and standards. Nevertheless, as Rahula (1958) suggests, “free will” seems to be something that depends on many factors. One could not really have “free will” if any of the prerequisite factors did not go right—the factors related to salary, friends, or sometimes, the family. I lost my “free-will” soon after my mother called my office and demanded I move back home. I enjoyed my “pseudo liberty” totally for four years (in the college) and two months (at the temporary job). From time to time, I still encounter young people who hold different values from the majority and want to lead life in their own ways—which always makes me recall my college life. I admire their bravery and hope one day I will regain the same courage to do something really meaningful to me.

After going back home, I stayed to help my mother’s business. But I did not feel that the position as a saleswoman was a good fit for me. Meanwhile, my other part time job as an ESL tutor did not seem quite productive either. I was unsure about how to connect what I had learned into the real world, so two years after my graduation from college, I decided to go to the United States for further studies. On my way to the U.S., besides a couple bags, I Mayad with me a hope to pursue knowledge for practice, a “Chinese” pride, assumptions about the Western world, and a continuous search for liberty.
The experiences of studying abroad were full of surprise and excitement. I sensed a unique energy on this foreign land, for example, the effective network and communication, the large quantity of resources, the nature and wildlife in a colorful landscape, and so on. Consumerism produced a variety of pleasures and high tech seemed to ensure a better quality of life—happiness and prosperity were my first impression about this part of earth. Furthermore, the distance between my family and me generated more space for communication. I wrote letters, e-mailed, or talked by phone with my parents and sisters. I felt more comfortable to express my concerns to my parents and we had more conversation with an increase in both depth and breath of content. I also had friends with different backgrounds. I called my elder friends with their career or social titles (as we did in Taiwan), Professor Lee or Principal Wang. However, our relations were more equitable than hierarchical—they were now schoolmates of mine regardless of what they did in their home countries. They shared with me their stories of school, family, or their previous jobs. I learned how to cook, take care of babies, check car problems, and many other things from these friends. The friends, relationships, and knowledge that I knew or developed in the new world gave me different ideas about how to lead my life here.

My study for the master degree in Teaching English as a Second Language was an interesting experience. We had a study group consisting of three to four Taiwanese students, sharing notes and class information. The other Taiwanese students in the same program who came to the U.S. earlier kindly provided us their experiences and notes, too. Despite receiving little attention from my advisor [I met her only for a couple of times in the whole year], my study was a pleasant one with mutual support from friends. Upon graduation, as my school-sisters had done, I passed my (accumulated) class notes to the
other Taiwanese students and asked them to continuously pass them to the new students. Later I found that the exchange of class notes, which was an important tool to establish trusting relationships among Taiwanese students in the TESOL master program, was not necessarily accepted by other foreign students. I was criticized for borrowing notes from another Taiwanese student in another program. I also saw some good friends break up friendships because of similar issues. Weren’t international students supposed to have empathy and help each other? I then realized that some people were just used to being protective of their knowledge, especially the doctoral students, and that the Taiwanese student group with whom I stayed was probably an especially generous one.

After I finished the master degree, I continued my studies in the doctoral program in Educational Measurement. The PhD coursework was more advanced and the students seemed to be more independent. I had two good friends from Thailand who were college teachers in measurement and came to the program for professional development. In contrast to my study group in TESOL where we socialized mainly for academic purpose, my friends in the doctoral programs gave each other spiritual support but we did our academic work separately. We conducted our own studies in different fields, like teacher evaluation, gender differences in testing, or missing data treatment. We tried to encourage each other and understood our own limitation of knowledge in the others’ fields of study. I found it difficult to understand the expectation of one of my committee members toward my learning and decided to transfer to another program. Fortunately, I found an opportunity to meet my current advisor and to be accepted in the Integrated Teaching and Learning program.
When I moved into the new doctoral program, I was not as naïve as I used to be—I had more knowledge about the challenges in life. I kept all my past to myself and did not talk much to other classmates in the program until one day when a Korean student invited me for lunch. She later told me that she did that because she saw me isolated and wanted to know more about me. Young Ah was a social activist from whom I learned a lot about concepts of social justice through her concerns and passion in supporting disadvantaged groups. From Young Ah, I met another Taiwanese student, Shwu-Meei, and a Japanese student, Fusako. We became good friends and provided both spiritual and academic support for each other. While having different individual research focuses, we were all interested in multicultural education. The group discussion helped professionalize my knowledge about the issues of equity and diversity—an important resource for my later research.

Looking back over my learning experiences in the U.S., I think the structure and socialization of my learning communities influenced my learning in many aspects. The student community in the TESOL program had access to resources and information (from more experienced classmates), the ITL study group involved the members in real tasks or research projects, while my friends in the measurement program set a professional example for me. According to Wenger (1998), the members of a community being responsive to real practices and the availability of support systems are important factors to nurture communities of practice. It was those learning communities that helped me connect my previous life experiences to the theory and practice of education and redefine my study goals. The next section is a discussion about my existing belief system and the theoretic framework that shaped those beliefs.
The Position Where I Started the Research

A search for the meaning of liberation was the starting point of the current study. Different from my earlier interpretation, liberty is neither equal to “free will” nor dependent on some external factors, such as salary or support from friends or family members. Rather, in order to be fully liberated, one needs to have an awareness of the interdependence of social factors (instead of linear causal relation), recognition of power relations and existing inequity in society (instead of power- or color-blindness), and an open mind to different opinions (instead of single-mindedness). Withdrawing oneself from the society can not guarantee freedom. Actually, isolation can make one more vulnerable to the influences of politics. Recognizing the conditioned nature of social phenomena, I learned to view things with concern about the contextual factors which are usually inter-related. Because of the dynamic nature of social contexts, I have learned to see things from multiple perspectives and tried not to become trapped in dualisms. In contrast to my earlier concept about liberty which was passive, not constructive, my current understanding about liberty is action-oriented and closely related with multicultural education. I perceive liberty as the core of multicultural education.

The definition of liberty at the micro-level is freedom from ignorance about the realities of Self and Other. This sense of liberty welcomes subjective approaches to personal experiences, cultural identity, belief systems, social relations, similarities/differences among individual or cultural groups, and the influence of social or political environments on identity formation. Through critically examining the formation of a personal belief system, one can realize how viewpoints are culturally-bound, context dependent, and subject to change from individual experiences. At the macro-level, liberty
refers to an exemption from the influence of the over-arching factors in society that contribute to discrimination, oppression, or suffering of the unrepresented or disadvantaged groups.

Multicultural education is one way to help the Self and Others pursue liberty based on the awareness about hidden assumptions, power relations, dynamics of socio-political contexts, the interdependence of these contextual factors, and the changing nature or conditionality of phenomenon, ideology, beliefs, or identity formation. In other words, liberty can be viewed as an attitude or concept about life; and multicultural education the practice of the liberalized attitude. I hoped I would become more liberalized and capable of taking action for social justice through conducting this research.

I gained a new understanding about liberty and recognized its connection to multicultural education from my reading about three theories, postmodernism, critical theory, and sociocultural theory. These theories not only provided me with ideas about the prerequisite knowledge for liberalization (critical thinking, interdependence of social factors, and multiple perspectives) but also provided guidance for my research design and data analysis. The next sections include an introduction to these three approaches and how they shaped the assumptions of the current study.

Theoretic framework

Among the theories that have shaped my research positions, postmodernism is the one that most matches the philosophy of my early interests with this study. Since my sophomore year in college, I had become interested in the ontological questions discussed in some Eastern philosophy traditions, such as “Are the perceived real or illusive?” “Is
there any stable or unchangeable truth that exists beyond our perceptions?” These philosophical questions continuously inspired my learning about postmodernist theory. The postmodernists consider realities to be constituted by a symbol/sign system with which individuals interpret what is their truth. This symbol system, or discourse, is by nature inseparable form its individual users and is freighted with the values or worldview of them (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Therefore, the truth is always viewed by a distorted lens, and is never knowable. The ambiguities that are generated in communication allow space for meaning negotiation. It is the continuity of meaning negotiation, instead of consensus based on familiar rules that is the focus of the postmodernist approach.

Regardless the rigor of inquiry, both what I perceived in the American culture or in classroom teaching, is more a “culture-bound” view than “a scientific discovery” (Pickering, 2003). Therefore, multiple perspectives toward one single event, which vary with the viewers’ backgrounds, are understandable and acceptable. Instead of trying to search for a universal truth or rule, postmodernists are more interested in questioning every potential problem or bias that can occur in the process of knowledge construction (McHale, 2003). By using the lens of postmodernism to interpret teachers’ belief and practices, I tried to be aware of my own views that might have been influenced by personal cultural or learning backgrounds.

The sociocultural theory is another approach that I found helpful in my inquiry. For sociocultural theorists, realities are multiple, subjective, and collaboratively constructed. Researchers in this approach aim to understand the world from the perspectives of the participants. Discourse is encouraged in order to construct meaning. The people who are studied are no longer considered “alien, foreign, and strange,” but
“valued others” (Belenky et al., 1986). They are partners with the researchers in the process of meaning construction. The researchers are more inclined to participate in the activities of the subjects being studied in an interactive way. In this close contact, the researchers may change their existing worldviews and find new things through the eyes of the people who are studied. Similarly, the participants may be influenced by the value systems of the researchers. Communication is viewed as a process of transaction, where the participants inform and influence each other. In interactions, the “airtight distinction” between the knower and the known collapses in the sociocultural or so called constructive approach (Sipe & Constable, 1996). The concept of interdependence among the participants in the process of knowledge construction gave me ideas about how to play my role as a researcher in my study.

Compared to the sociocultural theory, another theoretical approach, critical theory, has more interest in the complexities of the socio-political environment and shows more assertion in actions for social reforms. The theorists in this line of approach have developed their particular political sensibilities through disasters, sad events, or crises happening in the world, such as World War I, economic depression in postwar Germany, and the failed strikes in Central Europe at the same period of time (Kincheloe & Mclaren, 2000). Seeing the tragedies, the critical theorists began to raise questions about the contemporary social and political systems. Examining the historical events, the critical researchers recognize “the competing power interests” embedded within the social interaction (p. 281). Sharing the ideas of the constructivists/sociocultural theorists that there are multiple realities, the critical theorists further assert that reality is subjective and constructed on the “basis of issues of power” (Sipe & Constable, 1996). They argue
that privileged groups tend to support the existing social system in order to protect their own advantages. Assuming all discourse is entangled with some hidden political purposes of those who speak or write, critical theorists raise questions regarding whose voices are presented in a discourse, for what purposes, and who are the privileged. The critical theorists use studies of privilege in order to undermine the political problems which prohibit the progress of human life and to think of resolutions for those problems. For the researchers with a critical stance, all features of reality are subjective but the “socio-politico-economic” aspect “is taken as objectively real, and not dependent on the perspective of the observer” (Sipe & Constable, 1996, p. 158). The structure of power relationship is “out there” and “found” (p. 158). The purpose of knowing is to figure out what is just and fair and to take action for improving human life.

The postmodernist, sociocultural, and critical theories helped me reflect on my reading about multicultural education and design this research. The following paragraph explains the assumption of the current study in the light of the theoretic framework reviewed above.

Assumptions of the Study

This study is my first attempt to learn about the education of liberty through exploring multicultural practices in classrooms. Drawing upon my personal experiences and multicultural theories, I have several assumptions about this study. First, this research tried to interpret teachers’ beliefs and practices and whether or how their practices were connected to multicultural education. The methods selected for data collection were to enhance this interpretation, rather than to summarize a single truth or make judgment. Additionally, I acknowledge that my understandings about the teachers’ practices were
influenced by my working experiences and learning backgrounds. On the one hand, the
discussion could be confined by my role as a researcher but not a teaching practitioner.
On the other hand, this study was enriched by the critical questions from my position as
an outsider. Finally, the current research assumes that there are different layers of
multicultural competence. In the data analysis I adopted the categories suggested by
Nieto (2000), which range from cultural celebration to action for social justice.

*The Questions in Mind*

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of this study was to investigate how
multicultural education was defined and practiced by the graduates of the OSU M.Ed.
program. The perspectives of these OSU M.Ed. graduates, from 1992 to 2002, are to be
examined.

Objective. The objectives of this research are, through case studies, to: 1) describe
teacher preparation in the M.Ed. program and how multicultural education was defined
from the perspectives of the graduates; 2) describe how multicultural education was
practiced by the graduates. The following are the research questions designed to approach
the objectives of this study.

1. How were the ECC/M.Ed. graduates prepared to teach multiculturally? In this part
of the research, teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ learning in different settings are explored.

1.1. What are teachers’ beliefs related with multicultural education?

1.2. How did the teachers learn to teach multiculturally?

1.2.1. In the M.Ed. program

1.2.2. In the working environment
2. How did the graduates engage their students? This part of the research will investigate whether teachers’ practices demonstrated competence of multicultural education. Their knowledge and skills to engage students with different cultural backgrounds and various learning needs are described.

2.1. What were the techniques and knowledge that the teachers applied to engage students in diverse classrooms?

2.2. Did the teachers’ practices demonstrate multicultural competence? If yes, how?

The OSU M.Ed. Program and the participants

One major characteristics of the OSU M.Ed. program from 1992 to 2002 was its close work with the professional development school (PDS). The PDS was a program that aimed to facilitate cooperation between school and university. The cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and faculty got together once a week for discussions about administrative work and to make collaborative decisions about a variety of issues. The themes of the discussions included democratic classrooms, multiple perspectives, communities of practice, social justice, politics and policies in educational system, issues of equity and diversity, inquiry or action research, and so on (Johnston, 1996). Through these discussions, the participants reflected individually and collectively on the school-university relationship and practices. Besides PDS, there was a cultural consultant group in each cohort since 1996 to 2000. Students of color voluntarily participated in meetings to share their ideas and learning experiences. The cultural consultant group was a place where underrepresented students could voice their opinions and provide mutual support. The PDS program and the cultural consultant group were two among other efforts of the M.Ed. program to prepare teachers for urban education.
Student teachers’ learning experiences varied with changes in activities, program structure, and contextual factors within this M.Ed. program. The year 2001 was a year when the cultural consultant group did not meet. The students felt that they did not have time to meet and talk outside their M.Ed. course and study requirements as well as job and family commitments. The 2001 cohort was also the first group of new graduates from the M.Ed. program that had to cope with the impact of the new policies related with the No Child Left Behind Act. In addition, the 2001 cohort was a group of teachers who had some experience, but were not too far from their graduation. Because of these interesting characteristics, the 2001 cohort was selected for this research. Three graduates from this group cohort were invited to participate in the current study. The selection of those participants was based on their availability and willingness to participate. The three teachers were Morgan, who was a white teacher, Nicole, an African American teacher, and Melissa, a Jewish American teacher. Their shared knowledge about the program and their learning experiences in different educational or sociocultural contexts were helpful in presenting multifaceted views of the M.Ed. program.

The Methods

Timeline. An all-day classroom visit occurred each week, a total of 8 visits in one quarter. By staying with the class whole day, I tried to capture the rhythm or routines of a particular school day. I tried to visit the class on different week days so that I could have a sense about the differences among the days. In the 2003 fall quarter, I went to visit Melissa’s class. In the 2004 winter quarter, I met Nicole in her class. In the spring quarter 2004, I visited Morgan’s classes and sometimes Melissa’s classes. In the 2004 summer quarter, I went back to Nicole’s summer class in a different school. Throughout the year,
I occasionally visited their classrooms and/or talked with them by phone or email. The classroom observations in total lasted for four quarters. Spending one quarter in each classroom meant that I concentrate on keeping notes for one classroom and having more in-depth data about the teacher, students, and the school.

Observations. Classroom visits consisted of three activities: pre-observation meeting, classroom observation, and post-observation meeting. The purpose of the pre-observation interview was to get background information about the objectives and content of the lesson plan. The purpose of the post-observation interview was to confirm the data collected and to explore the rationales for certain teaching practices (Malzahn, 2004). Before the observation, I took notes about the instruction on the board and asked the teacher about her plan for the day. I would decide on sections to be the focus of observation or to collect contextual information.

During the classroom observation, I video-taped some classes (where I could obtain permission), audio-taped other classes, and took fieldnotes on every observation. I video-taped some classes if there were special projects or critical events. I audio-taped to have a clearer record of conversations between the teachers and the students. I shifted my role from an observer to an active participant in some situations. Participation in the classroom activities helped me better understand the influence of the teacher on students through interacting with them. Observations gave me a picture of the whole classroom and the flow of activities.

In the post-observation, the discussion was related to the rationale behind particular activities. The teacher would explain her understandings about individual students and how she attended their special needs.
Interviews. Kayaoglu (1994) distinguishes structured interviews from non-structured interviews. The aim of the former maintains the focus on a given set of issues. The latter can be used to provide general understandings about the topics being studied. There was one structured interview in the beginning of quarter with each teacher participant in the study. The content of the interview was about the teachers’ concepts of big ideas in teaching and learning, such as curriculum, testing, definition of multicultural education, and so on (see Appendix). The teachers were asked to talk about their perspectives toward specific issues in education in the beginning and then to connect their opinions with the concept of multicultural education.

Other artifacts. Other artifacts included research journal, teacher’s writing samples, students’ homework, and lesson plans. I participated in an art festival, fieldtrip, music class, student assembly, after-school programs, and other school or classroom activities. Different patterns of socialization were noted and compared within or cross these contexts. The books or articles about the history of the M.Ed./PDS program were also important data sources that informed my knowledge about the program. I also audited a social studies methods class to get a feeling for the classroom experiences the case study teachers had in the M.Ed. program.

Other informants. By staying in the school for a whole day, I had the opportunity to watch different activities and to talk with parents and other staff and teachers in other classrooms. These informal conversations gave me additional information about the school contexts and the teachers’ relationships within the school.
The Path of Understanding

Data analysis. The interviews at the beginning of the quarter were transcribed, coded, and summarized with analytic memos (Pushkin, 1997; Glesne & Corrine, 1999). I initially attempted to code my data using typical qualitative procedures but found this approach problematic. While it helped me to identify similarities and differences across the three cases, it was difficult to capture changes overtime for individual teachers. I decided to use a more narrative format (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991) in order to better describe each teacher’s unique history and ways of demonstrating multicultural competence. Besides the descriptive categories generated from the content of the interviews, I constructed themes based on the theory of community of practice (Wenger, 1998), such as domains, relationship, and repertoire, in order to theoretically analyze specific aspects of teachers’ beliefs and classroom activities.

I looked for evidence of teacher knowledge about the political contexts in the local settings, school district, and higher levels of educational authorities. For example, the teachers’ discussions about the testing system or curriculum standards were perceived as their knowledge about politics of education. A cross-cases analysis was then used to search for the elements of democratic classroom, evidence of openness to multiple perspectives, concerns for individual differences, and other related characteristics of multicultural education.

The teachers’ classroom practices were compared with their responses to the interview and the survey questions. Their responses collected from the survey instrument and other artifacts were analyzed to gain a sense of the coherence of their views about the
M.Ed. program. Commonality and differences between the views from the teachers are discussed.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness and rigor of the study were developed through triangulating the findings across time, instrument, location, and the role of participants. As shown in the following table, the congruence and dissonance of teachers’ perspectives were examined through the data collected from observations, survey, interviews, critical incidents, and related documents collected in the four quarters.

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Table 2.1: Data Collection

I hesitated to do member checking. I was not confident about my views about the classroom observations. I thought my comments might sound naïve to the teachers. After doing the member checks, however, I think that member checking is a great thing for meaning negotiation. I did the member check first with Melissa. We went out for lunch
and read the paper together. She put comments at the margin of my writing and helped me clarify some of my ideas. I audiotaped our conversation. In the meeting with Nicole, we did not have enough time to finish the reading. She e-mailed me back her comments. Then I modified the method of member checking when I met with Morgan. I e-mailed my paper to her in advance so she could read it before we met. In the meeting, I asked her questions for clarification. After I went home, I revised my paper based on the content of our conversation and sent it back to Morgan for review. The comments that I got from the process of member check this way were like the colorful bits decorated on a piece of plain black lint—they made the data talk better. During the member checks, the teachers corrected facts (e.g., numbers, names), discussed some misinterpretations from their points of view, discussed their thoughts about more general topics, or just provided some corrections of my grammar. I thought the interaction like this was one of the most wonderful parts of my research. I also enjoyed the communications with my committee members about this study.

I really hope all of these dialogues continue after this work. At the end of this paper, I copied some of their comments as a memory of our collaborations. Some examples of these important conversations follow (the underlined words were the changes made by the teachers):

1. Unexpected violent behaviors, in different degrees, created tension in the classroom. It was also a major source of challenge to the teaching practices.  
   (Nicole emphasized the degree of challenge)

2.1. Original sentence: They were dressed appropriately at school—for example, most of them put on socks.

2.2. Revised sentence: They were dressed appropriately at school—for example, most of them had on socks and clean clothes, which was not always the case at Clinton Elementary.
(Nicole knew better about what I was trying to say than I did and she fixed my grammar.)

3. The teaching assistant and another teacher came to help, reluctantly. (Nicole added something to my interpretation that I did not understand from just observation.)

4.1. Original sentence: She listened to students’ voices when they were troubled but not forcing them to obey the rule.

4.2. Morgan’s response: I don’t agree with this comment, “but not forcing them to obey the rules.” My students had to obey the rules. (Morgan’s feedback to my misinterpretation)

5. At the other end of the classroom there were four computers and several electronic typing machines [they’re called AlphaSmarts]. (Morgan provided more detailed information)

6. Morgan used this time to read the students’ computer files and arranged to put the students’ work on the wall. [You might want to mention that this was the only hour of planning time that I would get each week.] (Morgan added more meaning to my observation.)

Communication and interaction were essential elements of the data analysis process in this study. The above sections described the research design of this study. The next chapter describes the learning histories of the three case study teachers and their teaching practices. The teaching practices and the school backgrounds are to be described in the form of vignettes. These vignettes consist of selected events or facets that I chose in order to capture the important aspects of the case study teachers’ classrooms.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter explores how the teachers learned to teach in the M.Ed. program and how they practiced what they had learned in their student teaching classrooms and subsequent teaching experiences. The first section includes the education experiences of the three teachers in this study. The second section describes selected facets, themes, or events that present the characteristics of their classroom practice.

Section 1: Learning How to Teach

Case 1: Nicole

Nicole comes from a biracial family (African American and Italian). However, her identity as it is perceived by society, is African American. Given that identity, she has had many personal experiences related to equity and diversity. Nicole’s family’s religious background is Christianity. She taught in a church for community services and had her wedding in the same church where her brother’s funeral was held.

Nicole’s mother had been a teacher for more than 30 years and was a trained Reading Recovery teacher. She described the influence of her mother on her:

My mother taught me how to read. I was four years old when I started kindergarten. I was at home sitting on her lap in a rocking chair. She read to me all the time and in a way I wanted to be like her. I probably was mimicking her before I actually started to read. She was a Reading Recovery teacher and she probably used me as a guinea pig for what she learned about teaching children to read. (Feb 8, 2005, writing on Reading Recovery conference)
When given the opportunity, Nicole introduced Reading Recovery to her colleagues. She attended the 2004 Reading Recovery conference by herself and brought two other colleagues to attend the 2005 conference. Eager to be trained as a Reading Recovery teacher, Nicole was discouraged to know that there would be only five of the Cleveland Public Schools that were to get funded for this reading program during 2005-2006. Her current school is among the ones that will discontinue the program in the next school year. In spite of that fact, Nicole absorbed a lot of knowledge through her own reading. Nicole is a self-motivated learner. She mentioned her goal: “Next year, I will submit a paper and present it in the National Reading Recovery Conference” (personal conversation, April 14, 2005). When she told me this, the sparkle in her eyes reflected an ambitious expectation for the future. The following are descriptions about Nicole’s perspectives about multicultural education and her experiences of teacher education at the M.Ed. program. The data sources are from the first interview on January 5, 2004 and the 2002-2003 survey data.

**Equity and diversity.** Nicole gave straightforward definitions for multicultural related concepts. “Multicultural means many cultures.” “Diversity means many different things.” “Equity is a whole other matter topic. You could teach about culture and then you could also teach about equity and society, equity within a culture, equity between cultures” (first interview, January 5, 2004). In regard to the relationship between equity and multicultural education, the only thing Nicole considered important was, when teachers were doing multicultural education, they should try to be as equitable as possible,” because equity means, “equal, not being biased for one group of culture.” Multicultural education with a concept of equity is “not just doing like, all South
American cultures, or North America, or European… you are doing different cultures” (first interview). Nicole emphasized the diversity between countries and equality and fairness in respect to the coverage of all cultures.

Nicole was not quite sure about the relationship between multicultural education and student achievement at first. She gave an initial effort to make a connection. She thought that teaching multicultural education was to present knowledge of another culture (first interview). With this knowledge, the students could respond to the questions related to cultures in the tests. Therefore, according to her thinking, multicultural education contributed to student achievement by introducing cultural knowledge. She later added that, through multicultural education,

students could have more knowledge of where they came from, have a sense of pride in their culture, feel a pride in themselves, with a belief in themselves that they could do whatever they want to do, whatever they want to be, … (first interview, January 5, 2004)

In other words, multicultural education would impact student achievement through raising self-esteem. She further suggested that doing comparisons among different cultures could stimulate students to think about what society, particularly in this American culture, expected them to achieve, and to reflect on what they needed to do in order to meet that expectation. In such ways, multicultural education could help students understand “why they were at school, what were the goals of education, which was not babysitting, not day care” (first interview). During our first interview, Nicole gradually explained her perceptions about how multicultural education was related to student achievement, from its direct impact on test scores, to the indirect influence on students’ learning motivation and views toward education.
Nicole’s expectations of her 2nd graders at Clinton Elementary were revealed in her concepts about multicultural education. Though it is difficult to tell whether or how Nicole’s current beliefs about multicultural education were shaped by her experiences in the OSU M.Ed. program, her perceptions of the program will be described in the next section for future interpretation.

*Experience in the OSU M.Ed. program.* Reflecting on how the program prepared her for teaching, Nicole felt that the math methods courses helped her a lot (2002-2003 survey). The instructors taught specific ways of teaching math and different strategies that would work for all students with various needs. However, in regard to social studies, “there was just one topic and we weren’t really taught different ways to approach one topic” (first interview). Nicole used Thanksgiving as an example, a holiday when people are celebrating the pilgrims and Native Americans. The textbooks presented one perspective on the history, but the true story, according to Nicole, was that the Europeans took Native Americans’ land and let them die. “I need to learn more about how to approach it from different angles…. How to teach a class this [Thanksgiving] in a non-biased way” (first interview). For this reason, Nicole thought “a lot of the things in the M.Ed. program, as related to multicultural education, were still very biased” (first interview). Alternative opinions about multicultural education or specific topics were seldom explored, in her opinion.

Nicole considered collaborative learning as one strength of the program (she gave a “strong agree” to the corresponding survey item). However, she did not think that the collaboration resulted in generating diverse opinions. She viewed the structure of the
homogeneous student body as a potential factor that hindered the liberty or free speech in the classroom.

There were 30 or 31 in my group. And there were like six African Americans. The rest were white. I am not saying that all white people come from the same culture, but it is still like a power versus non power. (first interview, January 5, 2004).

In a group where the majority of students were white, Nicole believed the underrepresented students hesitated to “speak up or say the way they really felt about the issue.” “Because there were so many of the other cultures that you thought that either you wouldn’t be understood from your point of view, or no one would agree with you.” “There were times when you did not want to share, because you felt like no one’s gonna agree with me, why I going say what I really think?” (first interview). Besides herself, Nicole observed that there were other minority students being quiet in classes but talking outside of the classes. She thought the minority students were quiet in classroom because their experiences were hard for the majority students to understand. It was not easy for them to gain consensus within the big group either. “You can understand from outside in but you cannot understand from inside out” (first interview). Nicole noticed that at times when the black students made comments, there was seldom any further discussion in the group. In contrast, some comments made by the white students seemed to make no sense, but “they will think that was the greatest thing!” (first interview). Perceiving the invisible imbalance of voices in the classroom, Nicole said that she chose to play a passive role and to be a silent figure in the group, like the other students of color.

In spite of the feelings of marginalization, Nicole seemed to have great learning experiences in her field placement. “My cooperating teacher did not just tell me what to do. She modeled and explained what she did in the classroom. She allowed me to try
things that I wanted to without telling me no” (open-ended survey question). After a few weeks in the fall quarter, while other student teachers were still observing and taking notes in classes, Nicole’s cooperating teacher asked her to prepare and teach some lessons for the second graders. She provided Nicole opportunities to try new ideas or mistakes. Nicole said that today, she still used several strategies that she had learned from her cooperating teacher. She especially like the idea about pairing or grouping students based on selected traits, which could be personality, learning style, individual strength, and so on (first interview).

Nicole’s positive attitude toward her field placement was also revealed in her response to another survey question which asked about the collaborative relationship with others. She considered her connection to the mentor teacher as “strong,” while indicating few or no connections with OSU instructors, school colleagues, or university supervisor. [Note: the survey was filled out when she was at Clinton Elementary. Her relationship with school colleagues seemed to be closer after she moved to the other school in 2005—the administrative contexts could be a possible factor for this change. In her current school, Nicole works closely with two other teachers who teach different subjects to the 1st graders.]

Nicole was satisfied generally with her learning experiences in the M.Ed. program. In the program evaluation survey, she gave positive ratings (“agree” or “strongly agree”) to most of the questions asking about the strengths of the program, such as planning, instructional pedagogies, cooperative learning/collaborative learning, curriculum development, and so on. She also appreciated the program in helping her learn about the assessment of student achievement. “It helped me understand the
importance of aligning curriculum to the test” (open-ended survey question). She understood from her experience in the program that “high stakes tests should also not be the only tool used to assess a student’s performance” (open-ended survey question). With that belief, Nicole said that she tried to pay close attention to those students who failed standardized tests but showed talents in other ways (first interview). She found alternative ways for the students to show their abilities and help them develop their potential. For example, Denis was an intelligent student who did not do well in formal tests and received special education services. Nicole tried to give him similar academic challenges as the other students who had been recognized as gifted. She gave him assignments extended from the lessons as she did with the other high achieving students. For Christopher and Cynthia, two low achieving students, she allowed them more opportunities to show their talents, which were not always academic talents (first interview).

Still, there were some fields that Nicole did not perceive as the strengths of the program. These included: fostering social development of students, preparing her to be a change agent in schools, and knowledge of politics of schools (survey). She particularly felt challenged by her perceived lack of political knowledge:

My greatest challenge as a teacher was learning the politics that come along with teaching. They can make or break a first year teacher who is not knowledgeable. I did not know my rights as a teacher. The program gave no attention to this and I was not prepared at all for them (Open-ended survey question).

As Grossman and Thompson (2004) assert, beginning teachers’ work is influenced by a large number of teaching-related policies initiated in different contexts, including state, district, school, and departmental environments. The disconnection between the district polices and the M.Ed. program can be a potential challenge to
beginning teachers. On the other hand, if the M.Ed. program can prepare teachers to learn about and critique policies, and if the policymakers can support teachers’ needs for their professional development, beginning teachers may have become more productive in their teaching practice. In Nicole’s case, school policies might be more frustrating than supportive to her practice.

Though she perceived that she was not well prepared for school politics in the program, Nicole felt very competent about her current knowledge in this field (survey). However, her competence in political knowledge did not necessarily lead Nicole to perceive herself as a change agent in school. In a response to a survey question, she indicated that her current competence as a change agent in her school was “weak”, and the M.Ed. preparation in this field was “very weak.” It is unknown whether her perceptions of inadequacy as a change agent resulted from the pressures of school politics, students’ behavioral issues, or insufficient teacher training. To portray the contextual factors for a better understanding of Nicole’s beliefs, perceptions, and practice, more information about the school environment will be provided next. The sources of data include the first interview with Nicole and the 2003-2004 school report card.

School. Clinton Elementary was located in an urban area with few shopping centers, grocery stores, or fast food restaurants, and no movie theaters. Its location is an area with a high rate of crime and poverty. In the teachers’ lounge, there were pictures of criminals to alert the staff. Some students’ relatives or the students themselves were the victims of crime. Teachers needed to be careful when staying late at school. Most of the buildings around the school were older homes.
In a 120-point Performance Index, Clinton Elementary had a score of 52.3 and was placed on School Improvement Status for two years (2003-2004 school report card). School performance was evaluated by “baseline” scores on achievement tests. Students’ test scores for a particular year were set as the baseline for performance evaluation in the following school year. If the school performance did not improve for three continuous years, the students were allowed to move to other schools. Also, the school’s budget would be reduced because of the decreased number of students. School staff would be replaced if the individual school stayed in Improvement Status too long. Clinton Elementary was one of the schools facing the stress of these potential consequences.

The resources were limited at Clinton Elementary. Many library books were old and not replaced. The nurse was on duty only two days per week. The school psychologist came to school one time a week. There was no summer school, while the students’ basic needs for food and learning lasted the whole year. Teachers needed to worry about losing their jobs regardless of how much they had done for the students. There was no reliable accountability system that could guarantee good teachers keeping their jobs (first interview). The principal hesitated to reveal facts about the school to the teachers and the public (this was the only school in my case studies that I could not video tape in the classroom). The lack of communication at school resulted in teachers’ feelings of dissatisfaction. According to Nicole, teachers’ satisfaction level at Clinton Elementary was one of the lowest among the Cleveland public schools.

*Students.* 97.4% of the students at Clinton Elementary were economically disadvantaged as indicated by the free and reduced lunch count. 93% of the students were African American. 6.2% were white. 26.3% were students identified with learning
disabilities. Student achievement was generally lower than the district average. Only 10.3% of the 4th graders, for example, were above proficiency in math, 17.9% above in reading, 43.6% in writing, and 10.3% in science (2003-2004 school report card).

Nicole viewed her class as a “unicultural” rather than “multicultural” environment, for the majority were African American students. She thought that this uniculture was one potential obstacle to the students’ social development.

It is hard, because if they spend their whole life around all African American, and then they go to a college and there is one African American in the whole classroom,…it is whole another thing…I really don’t know how to prepare my students for that. That is what I struggle with (electronic conversation, March 10, 2004).

From her own experiences in white dominated institutions, Nicole worried for her African American students’ future learning in diverse contexts. However, she had a solution for the problem of a unicultural classroom.

If they could have more field trips--that would solve a lot of the problems. We’re trying to teach multicultural education…cause you think about even the field trips, like if we go to the COSI, there will be kids from all different school districts, and the kids interact with them because they’re playing, they’re learning, … that could be a way of teaching (diversity)…. If you do not provide it in school, they don’t get it. (Interview Dec. 9, 2004)

In her classroom where some students hadn’t had a chance to ever see a movie, field trips could be a tool to help make different type of connections, either between the unicultural and multicultural contexts, or the classroom learning and real world experiences. Unfortunately, the principal at Clinton Elementary decided to have only one field trip in spring per year. Fieldtrips in general had been cut in the district in order to put more emphasis on academics.

In spite of her ideas of how to address the unicultural issue, in her interviews, Nicole reported that she did not have many opportunities or resources to help her fulfill
her ideal. She responded to the school requirements and attempted to catch up on the prescribed curriculum, while dealing with students’ behavioral issues every day. Few parents attended school meetings. Nicole felt she needed to figure out how to help the students by herself. Fortunately, Nicole had colleagues with whom to share her ideas and complaints. They used to chat in the lounge room, to share information, or to provide help to each other. Nicole worked with the special education teacher by exchanging some students to make the class inclusive. She gave her lesson plans to the teacher next door who taught another 2nd grade class. She provided rides for colleagues to go to professional development classes. When some teachers were sick, she expressed willingness to take care of their classes. She also participated in the teacher union regularly to gain new information and knowledge about teachers’ rights (data source: classroom visiting).

Above are descriptions of Nicole’s perceptions about the M.Ed. program, her family background, and the school environment. Though she felt she did not have enough resources or support to help the students effectively at Clinton Elementary, Nicole kept trying different ways to empower herself and to create learning opportunities for herself and colleagues. With the continuous efforts, she gained more confidence about her teaching competence. In one survey question, she chose “very strong” to describe her current ability to work with culturally different children. How Nicole engaged students with different cultural backgrounds in learning will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. The following are descriptions about Melissa’s learning history.
Case 2: Melissa

Melissa was a white teacher who had a stronger sense of her religious identity than of her ethnic identity. Like Nicole, Melissa felt that she was sensitive to minority students because of her personal background. “My strongest identity is not as a white person. I have a much stronger identity as a Jew, which I think makes it easier to understand a minority perspective.” It was her religious belief that led Melissa to the teaching profession:

As a group, Jews tend to be more liberal socially and conservative economically. We believe very strongly in social action and "Tikkun Olam" which roughly means repairing the world. So in a sense, I chose my job because I wanted to help people who really needed my help. All children need teachers -- poorer kids need something more.” (electronic communication, January 10, 2004)

The Jewish culture played an important role in Melissa’s life and formed a basis for her beliefs, decision making, and teaching practice. She reported being actively involved in activities of the Jewish community, such as retreats, book clubs, and religious discussions. In class, she told stories about Jewish holidays and taught students about games or characters in ancient Hebrew. As such, her religious identity was revealed in many aspects of her life and classroom. Being white and Jewish, Melissa had questions regarding how people thought of her identity:

Although from the outside, most people would not know that I am Jewish, sometimes not knowing if people know that I am Jewish can make it more difficult when interacting with them. I don't know if they do know and are treating me a certain way because of my culture/religion, or if they are treating me a certain way because I look white, etc. (electronic communication, January 10, 2004)

Melissa’s questions seemed to be similar to the questions that other ethnic minority people might have—whether they were treated differently because of their cultural
identities or individual factors. Developing “a sense of minority,” Melissa tended to socialize more with friends from different ethnicities than with her peers who were white.

As a Jew, I have an over-developed sense of minority compared to most other "white" people I know. Since high school and graduate school, I have tended to have more friends who were in some way also a minority: Chinese Americans, Indian Americans, Gay/Lesbians, African Americans, and other Jews (electronic communication, January 10, 2004).

Melissa said the reason it was rare for her to develop a close friendship with people who were “white and Christian” was because she did not think they could always understand “what people who are not part of the dominant culture go through” (electronic communication, January 10, 2004).

Equity and diversity. Melissa distinguished multicultural education from issues of equity and diversity by their different concerns. She related the former to different cultures and the latter to a variety of sociocultural categories. “Multicultural education has to focus on more than your classroom. It was more related to the different cultures in the classroom or the world.” Based on the literal meaning of multicultural education, Melissa did not think this was a right approach for her classroom. “I can’t do multicultural education just based on the kids in my classroom. It is not multi because in my classroom this year, I have black kids and white kids—that is not multi, because only two.” “So I think multicultural education has to reach to the students, but then also to the larger world.” She thought the definition of diversity was broader than multicultural education. “Diversity can focus more than just culture. Diversity can focus on your age, your sex, your religion, how many parents you have, how many siblings you have….“ Thus she thought that all diversity issues were not necessarily multicultural issues. There were others issues as well (first interview, September 3, 2003).
Melissa related the issues of equity and diversity to how teachers dealt with personal issues for the students. “I think issues of equity and diversity have to focus more in the classroom” (first interview). For Melissa, equity was a concern for teachers to think about their teaching practice. “I think those are things that teachers worry more about, issues of equity, not the students.” She thought teachers should make the students realize that, “You may not get the same thing, but we will make sure it is fair.” She used different examples for her students to get the idea that not everybody needed the same thing. For instance, Melissa talked with the students about how they might eat less than their parents. She told them that they should not feel it was not fair because they did not really need as much food as the adults. She also provided additional options for the students who had special needs. She mentioned that Ramon, for example, was a student who had a feeling of powerlessness because of his experiences at home. He attempted to gain power by resisting her instructions. She said she then showed him the appropriate ways to gain power. He could enjoy some privileges if he fulfilled his responsibilities. Privilege, responsibility, equity, and diversity were closely related to each other in Melissa’s classroom (first interview).

Melissa’s attitudes toward issues of equity and diversity were magnified by her concerns about labeling. She hesitated to tell me which students were getting special services because of their learning difficulties. She said she did not want to reveal the labels attached to the students and also tried to free the students from the negative impact of the markers. She explained that she gave students positive feedback, especially those who were academically behind. Melissa advised the students not to allow their classmates
to see their test scores. Individual students’ dignity was carefully protected regardless of their academic achievement.

In addition to students’ dignity, Melissa claimed to show her respect to individual cultures and their heritages. She liked to study anthropology. She appreciated cultural diversity and emphasized authenticity of instructional materials which included cultural information. Melissa did not agree with the idea of changing some cultural facets in order to make the instructional material look appealing.

She thought, if used appropriately, cultures should be viewed as great resources to facilitate students’ learning. “Students are more interested when they know about different cultures, because I think it is fun to know about things you don’t know.” “And I think [knowledge of cultures] automatically helps them understand themselves and other people better so that they are able to get along better and able to learn better.” She thought that bias and wrong assumptions could be avoided if students were trained to be open-minded at early ages through learning about different cultures. “I think sometimes when the kids get older they become more afraid of things because they have been hurt.” Because of unhappy cultural experiences, they might reject or become indifferent to learning about others’ cultures. Melissa thought it was important to start multicultural education in the younger grades “so that we can open them up to the positives.” Melissa hoped through education about different cultures, students would keep their minds open and enjoy cross-cultural experiences.

Though Melissa considered cultures as resources for students’ learning, she acknowledged that students’ cultural backgrounds could present challenges for teachers, too.
I think students’ backgrounds can greatly impact their learning. They feel differently about material being presented and they often learn in different ways. I think especially students with limited English have been a challenge for me. These students are often bright, but they are not able to understand you, and you are not able to understand them. Many times, these students are eventually moved to ESL classrooms where their needs are met more aptly (first interview, September 3, 2003).

Besides the language issues, misunderstanding resulting from cultural issues caused problems sometimes. Melissa shared a story from 2002. One day she let a couple of students who felt nauseous go to the nurse; these students happened to be white. Then two black children asked if they could go to the nurse. Melissa did not let them go until later. Because they didn’t eat breakfast, Melissa thought it likely that their stomachs hurt because they were hungry. A parent who witnessed the situation, but did not have all the facts, jumped to conclusions, and accused Melissa of being racist. After the incident, Melissa found that, no matter what she did for that African American student, it was never enough. Fortunately, her efforts eventually changed the situation. In 2005, she wrote a comment about this event. “This issue has since been resolved and the student and parents and I are on good terms.” Frequent contact and negotiation with both the students and parents was an important strategy Melissa used to resolve these problems.

For Melissa, multicultural education provided cultural knowledge to facilitate students’ learning and to prepare them for positive cross-cultural experiences in the future. The issues of equity and diversity were related to meeting the needs of individual students with different sociocultural factors in their backgrounds. In spite of the challenges, Melissa continued to make efforts. “I think it is our job to present multicultural issues and equity issues” (first interview).
**Experience in the M.Ed. program.** Melissa’s strong sense of her religious identity may have had an influence on her sensitivity to aspects of the dominant culture—such as Christianity. According to one of her professors, Melissa was a vigorous, unconventional, and out-spoken critic (personal communication). She often challenged the hidden ideology of the mainstream culture permeated by society. However, her deeply rooted religious identity sparked her interest in other cultures. She especially appreciated what she saw as the open learning environment for questioning in the M.Ed. classes.

We did projects on different cultures, thinking about what questions to ask. I think sometimes having the questions is much more important than having the answers. If I know what the right question is, I can get what the answer is. But learning the questions to ask is really a hard part (first interview, September 3, 2003).

The discussions in the courses of the M.Ed. program, according to Melissa, did not only grant freedom of speech for students to express their ideas but also helped them reflect on their existing thinking.

I am guessing that the major goal [of the program] was reflection. I think that being a reflective teacher is very important because it means you are always working at getting better. It also means, though, that you take things more personally, because you have belief that with enough thought, you can come up with a solution (first interview, September 3, 2003).

Through the guidance given in the M.Ed. courses, Melissa felt the critical views that she brought with her into the program were further cultivated. She reported learning to ask questions about different aspects of education including her own teaching.

So asking these questions is also important, that is what we did a lot in the M.Ed. program. Asking questions in the classroom and thinking about reflecting on our teaching and reflecting what went well and what did not, through thinking of these questions. And learning to be a little bit patient with ourselves with each other (first interview, September 3, 2003).

For Melissa, the process of group work, either sharing or listening to different voices, required some practice of patience. Once she was able to adjust to the working
pace of a group, she started to learn how to approach things from different positions.

Referring to the benefit of working with a diverse group, Melissa said, “…So I think having a diverse group in M.Ed. and being able to do those projects and working with different people would help because you start to learn what questions you need to ask.”

To Melissa, her cohort was diverse in several ways. “We had different groups, sometimes based on grade levels, sometimes based on interests…” And she made more friends of color than she had before. Melissa recalled her relationship with the African American students in schools.

I grew up in a school system where it was primarily white students and the few African American students who mostly hung out together so that there are few African American friends growing up. But when I got in the PDS, most of my good friends there were African American because we shared more interests in common. So that was something very great for me, being able to meet people from different backgrounds. So I had the opportunity to grow up. (electronic communication, April 10, 2004).

Melissa chose “strongly agree” on one survey question about the program strength related to collaborative learning. She seemed to like the way the program provided nurturing opportunities for collaboration. However, the time factor played an important role in the process of her learning to work with different people. She did not hang around with particular friends as much as other minority students did. She appeared to be alone in the eyes of one of her professors (personal communication). Melissa acknowledged that it took her a longer time than other people to make friends. She was aware of the obstacle in developing close relationship especially with white people (who were not Jewish).

It is much more rare for me to develop a close friendship with people who are white and Christian -- I don't think they always understand what people who are not part of the dominant culture go through. (electronic communication, April 10, 2004)
Compared to her experiences in the M.Ed. program, Melissa reported more interactions
with her white colleagues at Winston Elementary. She had stayed there long enough to
get familiar with people. She noted that she had established a close relationship
particularly with a colleague who was an African American. They often got together to
do lesson plans and exchanged students to teach. She chose “strong connection” to
describe her relationship with school colleagues. The training in the program seemed to
prepare Melissa to have good interpersonal connections and collaboration at her
workplace.

Melissa thought the program also helped her develop a better understanding about
her role as a teacher. “For some students I need to be a coach or a mentor, for other
students they need more direction, instruction” (first interview). The differences between
the role as a mentor and as an instructor may depend on the degree to which scaffolding
was applied. There were some students who demanded less time from Melissa. They
usually followed her commands and helped her out in the classroom. Other students
demanded more time and strategies in order to communicate. They were often from
families with cultures that were different from the white and black majority cultures in
the school.

Melissa usually applied different tools or techniques, literature, or metaphors to
help the students get her point. “Today or yesterday our discussion was about how you
can get more friends if you are ‘sweet vinegar salad.’ Can you describe this further? So
we had a whole discussion and role play about that kind of thing.” Melissa gave a
positive response (strongly agree or agree) to survey questions about the program
strengths in classroom management, meeting special needs of students, and fostering
democratic classrooms. The knowledge that she learned from the program seemed to help her identify herself as a teacher who was able to adjust her teaching practice based on the individual needs of students.

In addition to her relationship with students, Melissa felt that the program had an impact on her interactions with the parents. She had close relationships with the parents because she was able to provide resources and advice for them. “The program helped me by figuring out where the resources are to really get to the parents….” She perceived her role with parents was more like friends who have a partnership relationship. She said they called her by first name and were involved in different school activities. The parents brought food to the class when there were fieldtrips or parties. She said they were comfortable walking into the classroom and either watching their children learning or helping a bit to arrange instructional materials, like art work.

Communication with parents also helped prevent misunderstandings. For example, some parents wondered why they often got notes from the school. Melissa explained to them that the frequent notifications did not mean that the students had bad behaviors. While the students in other classrooms lost their recess time before a teacher would send notes home, Melissa liked the parents to get notes earlier, before things went too far to control. With this understanding, the parents felt relaxed and knew how to follow up with the school notes.

Maintaining partnership relations with parents helped Melissa gain support for effective classroom teaching. She said she appreciated the M.Ed. program because it showed her how to make connections with parents.
Consistent with the interview data, Melissa’s responses to the survey questions showed that she was satisfied with the overall quality of the M.Ed. courses and related activities. She marked “strongly agree” that the M.Ed. program did well in preparing her for developing curriculum, integrated learning, establishing equity in classroom, sensitivity to cultural differences, and working with culturally different children. She gave one point (in a four-point Lykert scale, where one point referred to the most positive attitude) to 17 out of the 29 questions. She gave two points to the other nine items.

The only three fields that she did not perceive sufficient training from the programs were: connecting theory and practice, knowledge about the politics of schools, and preparing students for high stakes tests. Melissa felt that she had learned more about the politics of education through her working experiences than in the M.Ed program. She also perceived an increase in her competence preparing students for high-stake tests. However, because of the political environment, such as requirements of the state or school district, she could not really do what she thought was good for the students. She felt she was a robot, not a teacher, and only followed what the district required her to do.

Compared with her experiences in the program, Melissa felt less competent as a change agent in schools. Melissa thought the school could have done more to help her connect theory and teaching practice in the real world. In reality, there seemed to be many obstacles on her way to practice what she had learned in the program. Fortunately, Melissa considered her current ability in meeting the needs of all students as “very strong.” She seemed to be confident in her multicultural competence, in spite of the pressure from the socio-political contexts.
School. Winston Elementary was located in a residential area with a convenient distance to grocery stores, hardware houses, and shopping centers. A marker claiming no drug use on the campus area stood at the entrance of school. The school had a small parking lot. If necessary, parents could park temporarily on the playground and move their cars by 11:00 am before the morning recess (playing) time. In the morning, school buses were busy running through the small streets. Inside or outside the campus, the space was a little crowded, but everything was kept in order. The parents or teachers on duty directed traffic in front of the building and some students were responsible for guiding cars to stop for passengers. Inside the building, the library was located at the center. There was a stage at a corner of the library where the students watched TV programs during their library time or took pictures with Santa for the celebration of Christmas. (The school invited a person dressed like Santa Claus for the event.) A set of computers were installed at another corner. Tables were arranged behind the computers and were used for parties or books exhibits. The room at one side of the library space was for the work of the librarians. At the other end of the library were rooms for the school psychologists or consultants. Students who needed special education or tutoring were used to talking with the tutors or consultants at the tables outside of the rooms. Things looked to be arranged efficiently at this school.

Students. 61.2% of the students at Winston Elementary received free or reduced lunch. 75.3% of the students were African American. 18.8% were white. 8.5% of the students had learning disabilities. In year 2003-2004, the test scores of the fourth graders at Winston Elementary met the criteria of Adequate Yearly Progress. The fourth-grade writing scores, particularly, had exceeded the state standard for three years. The
performance Index score was 83.1. (The cap was 120.) Three out of the seven state indicators were met (2003-2004 report card). Both the teachers and administrators reported feeling generally satisfied with the student achievement in the 2004 school year.

Case 3: Morgan

Differently from the previous two cases, Morgan’s story has been enriched by a wider range of data, which include her writing for the Capstone Project during her M.Ed. program, an Integrated Unit, interviews, and classroom visiting. The data were reorganized and presented as five learning stages of Morgan: before the M.Ed. program, within the program (2000-2001), first year teaching (2001-2002), and her practices at the current school (2002-2004).

Before the program. Morgan described herself as a Caucasian who grew up in a “white, middle-class, Catholic” family. Before college, she attended schools comprised of students with backgrounds similar to hers. She said she had thought about teaching as her career choice since she was second grade. She stayed with this initial choice for 15 years, although her family had different expectations for her. They thought she could have a better career options with her good grades at school as a doctor or a lawyer. As an independent thinker, Morgan knew what she really wanted to do and did not change her mind.

Because of the structure of the student population at her Catholic elementary school, Morgan said she did not have many chances to make friends with African American students. She met her first African American friend in the second grade, and soon they became close friends. Unlike Morgan, her family held a strong attitude toward African American people. Both her great grandmother and her grandfather called black
people “niggers,” which Morgan later realized was a disrespectful word. Morgan’s mother showed a softer attitude toward race differences. One time when Morgan expressed her positive impression of the name of an African American girl (she thought that was a beautiful name), Ebony, her mother did not try to change her attitude. But she explained to Morgan that that name was only for a black child. White people would not use that type of name because “Ebony” means “black”. Though she said she was not quite sure about the reasons, Morgan felt she had experienced conflict among races since her early childhood.

Under the influence of family culture, Morgan gradually picked up the same stance as her family members. “I thought that ‘different’ was equated with ‘bad,’ and that people who were black must then in some way be corrupt.” The idea of corruption resulted in a feeling of fear toward African American people. She reported that she found herself walking closely to her parents when they were passing by areas where there were African American households. When unexamined assumptions permeate most parts of one’s life experiences, even critical thinkers such as Morgan could not resist adopting the conventional position. “While I didn’t know why I should fear African Americans, I knew that there must be something wrong with them, since the adults in my life seemed to think so, so I didn’t question my thoughts and actions.”

Morgan’s impression about African American people as “unintelligent, different, and scary” inevitably hindered her previous curiosity or interest in knowing more about their culture. In high school, Morgan tried to avoid contact with students whose ethnicities were different from hers. Her conservative attitudes remained throughout the high school years and extended to her early college life. She studied in a Catholic
university in the inner city of Philadelphia. There was a “tall, black, steel fence”
surrounding the university that kept out people who were not university students. For
Morgan and her mother, the fence was a symbol of safety. They felt safe and protected
when staying on the campus. On the contrary, the experiences outside the fence seemed
to be scary and uncomfortable:

It seemed like there was an African American man sitting on almost every porch
that we passed. Some of them would whistle or make catcalls at us as we hurried
by in our skirts or dresses that we were required to wear. I remember feeling
ashamed, and wishing that they would just leave us alone (Capstone).

The unpleasant encounters took place on her way to visit a local elementary
school--a required assignment of one course. Coexisting with the campus guarded zone
were the issues of gender, class, and race, which were hard to separate from individuals’
lives outside the material fence.

In 1998, Morgan transferred to The Ohio State University to compete her
bachelor degree. The classes contained a more diverse student body where the “concrete
walls” among cultures appeared more subtle and physically invisible. She had been
married by then and had a four-month-old baby. She tried to spend more time with her
family, especially with her child who was later diagnosed with autism. Unlike the other
college students who she felt looked for fun in bars or at parties, Morgan considered
herself an untraditional student. She perceived herself as individually-oriented, not
enjoying group work. She was so busy transporting between school and home that she
had few memories about the nonacademic experiences in the classroom.

A variety of categories (e.g. intelligent versus unintelligent, traditional versus
untraditional student, individualism versus socialized personality, etc.) emerged from
Morgan’s life experiences before she entered the M.Ed. program. However, the issues of
equity and diversity had not yet played a conscious role in her thinking. Except for her relations with African American friends in elementary school, Morgan did not seem to have had many positive cross-cultural experiences during this stage. Her study in the M.Ed. program was another stage of learning that brought her different types of life experiences. The following are descriptions of Morgan’s teacher education experiences at the M.Ed. program.

Morgan said she entered the M.Ed. program with the identity as a white female honor student, wife, and mother of a child. The following are descriptions about her next stage of learning in the OSU M.Ed. program.

_Within the program._ Morgan applied to the OSU M.Ed. program after she finished her B.S. degree in psychology. She was glad to get accepted into the program. She knew not every student got accepted. Even someone who had a GPA as high as 3.8 failed to get admitted, so she felt privileged to be able to study in the program. Having few ideas about teacher education, Morgan was curious about many things in this new environment. She was interested in getting to know her peers. She took notes about the names and ethnic information of her fellow cohort members who were present at the introductory activity. She noticed that there were a few African American students among the participants. She assumed that they worked as hard as she did to get into the program.

Morgan said she wanted to know about the program and read the program description. One line drew Morgan’s attention: “At the forefront of the work in this PDS are issues of diversity and social justice… we hope to continually ask questions about the ways in which this program and education in general reflect the racism and
discrimination of the larger society.” Morgan commented: “Little did I know at that time how this statement would guide my own journey in becoming a teacher!” (Capstone).

The coursework was another interesting experience. “It [the activity] wasn’t in the syllabus and it’s like oh, this is what we’re going to be doing. We’re going to be reflecting the theory. Okay. I can do that” (interview, 2002). Presented in the courses and activities were something that Morgan had not thought about before. “I think I expected more as far as methods [ways to teach], but then I think I realized how much I already knew” (p. 31). Morgan had assumed teaching was about using textbooks for knowledge transmission. After Morgan finished the program, she said she realized that her original views about teaching were narrow. The M.Ed. program helped broaden her perspectives on many aspects of education. She felt she benefited especially from her courses in math and reading, from the emphasis on reflection, from discussions of high-stakes tests, and experiences of being mentored in her field placement. The following are descriptions about Morgan’s reflection on her experiences at the M.Ed. program.

Math and reading/language arts were the two methods courses that Morgan perceived most helpful to her learning about teaching strategies. She still remembered the books that were used in the reading method class.

I really enjoyed Paula’s courses as far as - I don’t remember the first time but I remember doing the middle school books. I remember reading all those books that we had to read for - the chapter books we had to read and I enjoyed it and I do think it was a good course overall (interview, April 17, 2002).

She also liked the concepts that she learned from the math courses:

Jim's math course was extremely helpful. I found myself going back time and time again to not only the text but just to things, concepts that he taught us. He did a really great job of connecting the algorithm with the actual process and making sure that we understood what we were doing which has been I think really, really good... (interview, April 17, 2002).
Besides those teaching strategies, Morgan valued what she had learned about the preparation of high-stake tests:

I had a good knowledge of high-stakes tests, like the Proficiency test, and this helped me, especially since I taught 4th grade this past year [2001-2002]. My students did pretty well on the test this year…. In my class, I had 3 students pass all 5 parts of the Proficiency test, and the other two 4th grade teachers didn’t have ANYONE do this. I think this is more reflective of how bright these students are, but I like to think that I helped out at least a bit! (Survey).

Morgan was also proud of her class because 17 out of the 27 students passed the writing tests. She thought high expectations helped her students’ achievement on the tests. “I believe that the high emphasis I placed on writing across the curriculum really helped with this! I expected superior work from all of my students in writing, and this set the standard for them.”

Reflection was another activity that Morgan felt helpful to her learning. Her Capstone writing was a reflection on her learning history and existing belief system about the African American culture. Through reflection, Morgan tried to uncover her unexamined assumptions and envision her role as a White teacher teaching diverse students.

I have learned a good deal about myself in writing this [Capstone] paper. I have had to confront my own personal prejudices when I would rather have kept them inside. It's easier that way, to not admit to others your own imperfections. But for me, it was very necessary that before I start teaching, I think in depth about what it will mean to be seen not just as a teacher, but also as a White teacher (Capstone).

Reflection provided Morgan opportunities to imagine the relations with her students and to project her teaching in the future. It was not until this stage of learning that she felt the issues of equity and diversity became an important theme in Morgan's learning. She expressed her valuing of cultural diversity in the Capstone paper:
With my fourth graders, I want to incorporate the idea of celebrating diversity (not only of appearance, but of thought as well) from the start. I was told about one way another teacher did this, and the more I think about it, the more I like the idea…. I have thought a great deal about how I am going to use what I have learned to impact my teaching during my first year. I want my students to realize what I have discovered through this paper: that we don't have to hide behind our skin color. It's okay to be different. In fact, it's more than okay. It's great! (Capstone).

Through activities like the Capstone project, Morgan felt that she had developed the ability to reflect on her teaching practices. She was still confident about this ability during her current teaching.

Mentorship was viewed as another important support for her practices. Morgan thought that she had learned a lot from her mentor teacher, Lily. “I feel like I was always looking at her for everything” (2002 interview, p. 2). Morgan appreciated Lily's help in showing her how to make connections between theory and practice. She felt that Lily was her model for teaching:

Once I started doing an integrated unit I worked through lessons I wanted to teach it was like that was the first question. What am I doing here? Am I teaching the subject or am I like leading the children. How am I doing this? And it was helpful because Lily was really good about that. About like having the kids - like leading the kids. So I had a model. I think if I had never saw constructivism it would have been more confusing but connecting it, doing a lesson in the classroom became a lot easier because I saw it in practice a lot more. I think that helped. I think constructivism is a hard theory to understand unless you actually see it and you value it (Interview, April 17, 2002).

Morgan explained that she and Lily had different personalities. But they cooperated well and learned from the strengths of each other. While Morgan admired Lily's patience and experiences, she felt that Lily was impressed by her knowledge about technology and her enthusiasm in exploring novel strategies.

Morgan said she was satisfied with her experiences in her field placement. Here was what she wrote to describe the “weakness” of the field experiences: “TOO great of a
placement—gave me an overly positive view of Cleveland City School system” (open-ended survey question). The following were features of her placement school, John Glenn Elementary, and the factors that Morgan thought contributed positively to her teaching.

John Glenn Elementary was a math/science alternative school in a middle-class neighborhood. 50% of the students were from the neighborhood, and the other 50% were enrolled using a lottery system. Some of the students were from higher-income neighborhoods. It was a school “considered to be one of the better-quality schools in Cleveland.” The school had a large science laboratory. A science teacher was hired to work with the students and the other teachers in the laboratory. In that building, the students were exposed to various authentic instructional materials. “Textbooks are not used often, especially in the lower grades. Teachers try to find other, nontraditional ways to reach their students” (Capstone)

The students consisted of 33% African American and 67% Caucasian. Morgan taught a mixed-grade classroom where there were 7 first graders and 14 second graders. She had seven African American students in her classroom. She said the students seemed to have appropriate information about the school culture and behaving themselves. “…The hallways are quiet. I never did PEAK (in-school suspension). You said the word PEAK and every kid froze” (interview, 2002, April 17). 90% of the students had strong family support.

With all factors she considered supportive, Morgan and her mentor, Lily, experimented with multi-grade-level pedagogy. Lily had some earlier experiences in mixed-grade classrooms. Morgan said she searched for new knowledge and techniques and shared with Lily. They discussed and modified their teaching. Morgan especially
appreciated Lily’s way of guiding students. “She guided but not that she didn’t lead, she led sometimes too, which was good I think. She would leave the room and let me feel like I was the teacher.” Morgan felt that Lily knew her needs well so that she knew when she should take over and when not. The university supervisor, April, helped her practice in a more critical way:

April was more critical mainly because she was from outside the classroom but I also think that it was her personality. April is very different. She’s more like me as far as willing to speak her mind and not wanting to cushion things. I think like I said April definitely just because she was never afraid to mention things and she had a different perspective on things. She offered both Lily and I different ways to think about what we had seen and what we were doing. (interview, April 17, 2002)

In addition to April and Lily’s assistance, the experiences of other cohort members in Morgan’s field placement school were valued. She concluded in the open-ended survey by writing about the strength of the program: excellent mentor teacher, excellent school, cohort members in the same school, and great TA. She had a pleasant memory of her placement. “I feel like I was just so - just thinking that teaching was going to be a breeze after the field experience” (interview, April 17, 2002).

Besides the fields described above, Morgan felt the program prepared her well in meeting the needs of all students, being sensitive to cultural differences, and establishing equity in classrooms. On the other hand, she perceived insufficient training in the M.Ed. for school politics and preparing to be a change agent in schools. She felt the program talked more about how to teach than about school politics or change agent. Classroom management was another field in which she did not feel confident. She considered it a great challenge:

My greatest challenge [my first year] was classroom management. I don’t feel the M.Ed. program really prepared me very much at all in this area. Aside from a
book or two and a few articles on this subject, most of my preparation in this area was done outside of the classroom (by reading books on my own the summer before I started teaching). (post-observation meeting, March 6, 2004).

Beyond the learning experiences, satisfied or not satisfied, was a change of attitude. It was during the M.Ed. program that Morgan started learning to embrace cultural diversity—a concept that she had excluded from the core of her life for a long time. She said she used to be indifferent toward diversity around her in her undergraduate years. “I had more on my mind, and it may have been that I didn’t take too good of a look around me when I was an undergraduate at Ohio State—there was too much else I had to think about!” (Capstone). When entering the program, she thought maybe she was still a little passive, but Morgan started to explore the environment:

It wasn’t till I sat down at our May orientation for graduate school and met my fellow cohort members that I can remember actually taking notes of who was present and what race they were. I did it more out of curiosity, in getting to know my new peers, than for any other reason (Capstone).

At that moment, Morgan seemed to be already leaning toward a learning trajectory that would take her out of her personal world to find her position in new communities. Wenger (1998) relates the term “trajectory” to the process of identity formation. “As we go through a succession of forms of participation, our identities form trajectories, both within and across communities of practice” (p. 154). After Morgan graduated from the M.Ed. program, she began her first year teaching at Somerson Elementary, where she would renegotiate her identity and form a different trajectory. The following are descriptions about the next stage of her learning at Somerson Elementary.

*First year teaching.* Somerson Elementary was an inner city school where almost 100% of the students received free or reduced-price lunches; the students mostly came from families with low socioeconomic status. There were 95% African American
students and the rest were mostly Caucasian. The building was big but lacked resources. The content of textbooks was old and not updated. At Somerson Elementary, many features were different from Morgan’s field placement school, including less family support, more behavior issues in classroom, lower student achievement, and larger class size (Capstone).

Morgan had heard negative feedback about the school from her colleagues when doing job search. “Most of them were quick to tell me about the difficulties in teaching at an urban school—the turnover rates, the discipline issues, etc.” (Capstone). She said even her family did not agree with her plan to teach there. Morgan herself also hesitated to make the final decision until she spent a morning at the school and found more positive aspects in the environment:

Just as the teachers at John Glenn Elementary had warned me, it was predominantly African American. I can’t lie and say I didn’t see the colored faces, but I was taken in more by the warmth of the staff and the happy faces of children that I saw around me. Everyone seemed like they were enjoying themselves, and there was definitely a good deal of learning going on. When I walked into a room and the principal told me that if I took the position, this would be my classroom next year, I decided then and there to take the job. (Capstone)

The impression of the new environment supported Morgan’s optimistic goals at the beginning of her first year teaching. She found another positive thing in the school:

The principal is very much involved. Oga is always out on duty with us. She’s always, she’s very receptive about taking the kids. All I have to do is send a kid down with a note and she’ll keep them. (interview, April 17, 2002)

Morgan also had another teacher, Maya, with whom to work. She was very happy to find someone to work with: “We started teaming together and I love it. I love sitting down with her. And I love being able to do - and I wish we could do it more” (interview, April 17, 2002). Compared to other grade levels, according to Morgan, the fourth grade team
was the least connected in the school. Morgan thought the reasons that brought her and Maya together were their shared thinking and concerns.

However, as pleasant as Morgan’s team work experiences were at Somerson Elementary, it was not like the close interactions she had experienced earlier with teachers at John Glenn Elementary. At John Glenn Elementary, Morgan exchanged teaching ideas with colleagues and shared with them a variety of information, such as meetings, family, or children. But the collaboration between her and Maya was more conversational than dialogic (the latter contains more negotiations of meaning):

Really the only thing we’ve collaborated on is math and at first we started out with both of us looking through the guide and finding things we wanted to talk about. Now it’s like we’re both kind of rushed since Thursday. We both want to go home. All right. I decided to do this, this and then these two things…. Okay, I’m going to do those three things too and I’m going to do this teaching with my group (interview, April 17, 2002).

Morgan did not expect to work in such an isolated situation and missed her student teaching experiences. “I miss working with other people. I feel so lonely. I feel like my room is like my office and I never thought it was going to be like that” (interview, April 17, 2002). Unfortunately, the feeling of isolation was not the only thing unexpected to Morgan. The different behavioral issues with students was another challenge for which she said she did not feel prepared. Morgan’s students who originally looked “happy, energetic, and curious” turned to be a group of active students who had a very different value system from her students at Georgian Height. For example, they did not think of PEAK as punishment. “…They want to go to PEAK because they liked it…. It’s not something that works as a punishment any more…” (interview, April 17, 2002). The different behavior system of the students along with the isolated working environment consequently influenced Morgan perspectives on teaching and learning in several ways.
The following are discussions about these changes during her first year teaching. Selected parts of her Capstone writing will be reviewed and compared to her teaching practice at Somerson Elementary.

*Respect did not work.* In her writing for the Capstone project, Morgan discussed about the relations between white teachers and students of color. She read a study of Hale who claimed that students tended to have higher achievement if they were taught by teachers of same ethnicity. As a white teacher, Morgan worried that her minority students might have stereotypes toward white teachers. “I am even more concerned about my students having preconceived notions about white teachers based on previous ones that they have had, and stereotyping me as soon as they see me?” (Capstone). She thought of respect, empathy, and recognition of differences as strategies to deal with classroom diversity. Morgan commented on a study about how to recognize differences in classrooms. “I think that there are other ways of meeting Gussin Paley’s goal of recognizing the differences in one’s classroom. One way is to treat all students with the respect that they deserve, regardless of their color or ethnicity” (Capstone). She referred to Jonathon Kozol’s ideas about how to teach students to respect each other while retaining different opinions. She thought it might be also helpful to develop a common ground between herself and African American students by sharing her personal experiences with prejudice, for example, her experiences in being judged as not competent in child-raising because of her young appearance.

However, for some reason, her knowledge about respect and recognition of differences did not work in her classroom:

I try my best - my PAR [district mentor] says oh well treat them with respect and they’ll treat you with respect back. Well, it’s not happening. I can say please and
thank you and sir and madam all I want, but they don’t, they don’t do it and she asked me a question - why don’t your kids treat you with respect. You treat them with respect, what’s wrong? What’s not going on? I don’t know. I don’t know. (interview, April 17, 2002)

Morgan said she was struggling to deal with the behavior issues of not only with one, but 15 or 16 out of twenty-seven students in the classroom. She felt as if the students were forcing her to treat them disrespectfully:

I started the first day treating them exactly the way my teachers taught me in my Catholic school, with respect, and I feel like they’ve almost forced me to treat them in a different way and I don’t want to treat them that way (interview, April 17, 2002).

Her personal experiences of suburban, Catholic, private education did not seem to be helpful to her teaching practices in a urban, non-Catholic, public school. The PAR evaluator was not able to understand the classroom situation either. In her Capstone project, Morgan described the contrast of two cultures in classrooms as a challenge to teacher’s authority. In her classroom at Somerson Elementary, Morgan’s authority did get challenged although it was unknown whether Morgan perceived a separation between different classroom cultures.

Sharing/Connection. Morgan had not explicitly talked much about sharing or community building, but she reported that she started to try to practice this concept while at Somerson Elementary. However, she reported that the classroom was usually in chaos and that she did not know how to initiate the sharing and connection:

Hi kids. How was your night? What did you do last night? By that time we’re in the room. Aaron is chasing Bryan around the room. I’m yelling at Aaron. Steve just came up to me, I forgot my book at home again. I didn’t do my report last night and it starts - and it’s like I try. Every day is a new day I try to tell myself that (interview, April 17, 2002).
In her response to the M.Ed. survey in 2002, as mentioned earlier, Morgan talked about the insufficient training in classroom management in the program. Her response seemed to reflect a need from her experiences of the first year teaching (2001-2002).

Theory and practice. In Morgan’s integrated unit project, she employed social constructivist theory. She thought knowledge was constructed by students and not delivered by the teacher. However, at Somerson Elementary, she did not think student-centered curriculum was always feasible:

I still definitely think I tried, at least in theory and I tried my best to try to incorporate constructivist notions that were taught in the M.ED. program but it becomes harder and harder. It’s funny because - this is very funny - like a couple of weeks ago I don’t know what I was doing but I thought about something and I thought how I haven’t thought of the word constructivism in like - it would have been 5,6 months and I’m like wow. That’s all I thought about before was the kids constructing this and constructing that. And I do do it. My PAR has been really good about making sure, don’t tell, let them see it, let them internalize it. And I read a really good quote - something about never tell the students what they can tell you and I’ve been thinking about that a lot more lately. Making sure that they are the ones doing it more … (interview, April 17, 2002).

Morgan felt that prescribed curriculum, classroom management, and limited amount of time, influenced her ability to make connections between theory and practice. Covering the prescribed curriculum had taken much of her energy and time. The students’ behaviors needed management, too. There was not really enough time left for her to carry out what she thought was right to do. “… like I said it’s almost like with everything that I’m required to do I’m not able to let them do that. So I’m having to change my philosophy from when I exited the program. It’s kind of been difficult” (interview, April 17, 2002).

Reward and self-management. Morgan did not think drill and examination could help improve student achievement for those who were already behind:
What does concern me about my future students is simply the fact that they are behind where they ought to be. Beyond helping them pass the Proficiency Test, I am going to be expected to help some of them move from reading at barely a second grade level, all the way to a beginning fifth grade level, in a matter of about eight months, factoring in the various vacations and days off. A formidable task, no doubt. The usual response to a child who is behind already in school is to give him/her remedial education by way of drill and practice sheets. This appears contrary to the situation that the student is in. If a child were already behind in his/her classmates, the most logical next step would be to accelerate his/her education. I do not want to get caught up in the trap of second-guessing what my students can do. The only way for a child to truly advance in his/her learning is to challenge them. If we say to ourselves, “Oh, that science experiment will be too hard for little Billy to understand,” we are doing a disservice to little Billy unless we let him try the experiment. In addition, the student who is already behind needs more hands-on, integrated lessons, not repetitive dittos. (Capstone)

Nevertheless, after the first year teaching, Morgan said she had other thoughts about how to facilitate students’ inner motivation. She acknowledged that rewards worked directly and efficiently to have students get their work done. In regard to her change in attitude toward the necessity of reward, she explained:

I would see that argument. I definitely see that side of it and it’s true but - I love to see the people who write articles about that come into my classroom and try to teach without doing it. I know - that was actually going to be one of my things for my capstone was about rewards but - you can say all you want to say about internally motivating the kids and teaching them to be more responsible for themselves but for example with homework, most of my kids wouldn’t do their homework if they didn’t get a reward for it. So I give them this ticket which they fill their name and on Fridays we draw out the ticket and whoever’s name is drawn - I draw out three of them and they get a box of candy. And most of them have won at least once. So that’s a big motivating factor and even grades, grades themselves. (interview, April 17, 2002)

Morgan did not think rewards prevented students from being self-responsible. Rather, she thought rewarding students was a way to reinforce self-management and responsibility:

I think the self-manager program is supposed to do is to make better self-management of behavior but they need so much reminding and then we do reward them for it by giving them the assembly and they got like a cookie or something. …It’s supposed to remind them over and over again - I mean they are only 10. So they do need to be reminded. I think that these kids for some reason have taken longer to internalize the things that we - I don’t know why. I feel like in first
grade I learned to walk the hallway quietly and that kind of thing. My students never learned that in first grade. So now it’s like I’m constantly trying to get that into their heads. I really think it starts though from when they’re little children. My mom taught me to be quiet in the library. She taught me to stand in line and I don’t know…. (interview, April 17, 2002)

Morgan felt it was difficult to change students’ behaviors that they had developed for a long time at home. Nevertheless, some of these behaviors disrupted learning, such as talking loudly during instruction. (She said some families were used to talking to each other in high volume.) She would not correct students’ behaviors by telling them that what they had learned at home was wrong. She would rather use rewards as a way to reinforce behaviors for the sake of effective learning.

_Cultural or socioeconomic?_ Morgan thought there was a strong connection between the behavioral characteristics of students and their parents, especially fathers. She described the family culture of one high-performing African American student, :

Both her parents are very African-American, you know what I mean? It’s like why is she like [a high achieving student] that but then I had others who - I don’t know if it’s because she has a father influence – I’d say maybe 20% of my kids have a father in their lives right now if that, maybe because of that (interview, April 17, 2002).

While Morgan was aware of the socio-economic and family culture that Barbe brought into the classroom, she retained high expectations of Barbe:

I honestly wonder because Barbe is probably going to be a pediatrician some day. That’s her goal and she’s met every goal as far as I can tell this far in her life and she’s a very motivated child and I can see her doing that (interview, April 17, 2002).

Morgan valued individual students’ efforts. She thought the socio-economic status of the family might have more impact on the students than race:

A lot of times I do think that culture or race is blamed for, that’s what people talk about. But I honestly, I don’t see a difference between my two white students and my 25 black students as far as the work they do, the effort they give. Their
parents - the way their parents talk. I think it’s the environment of where they’re living and that pretty much, at least in my neighborhood, has to do with their socio-economic status (interview, April 17, 2002). Morgan had similar discussions about socio-economic status in her Capstone:

After reading Ordinary Resurrections, I began to think more about the impact that other variables aside from race have on the lives of children. One that comes up in many contexts is class. Rather than focusing on race, Kozol chooses to look at children who live in the inner city. Class is one dimension that I feel has at least as much to do with the prejudices against African American students as the color of their skin does. I am not saying that money solves problems. However, a person’s socioeconomic status often determines things such as where they live [the inner city or the suburbs], which in turn decides which school they will attend [the new and spacious suburban school, or the dilapidated and cramped urban school]. I have often heard people say that if you put the White children from the suburbs in a school like the children from the inner city attend, they will fail just as miserably. I am not sure if this is true, but nonetheless it is something that must at least be considered as a contributing factor to the academic troubles of some African American children (Capstone).

Recognizing the impact of class, Morgan saw more commonality than differences among students during her teaching at Somerson Elementary. She was not as focused on diversity as she was during the M.Ed. program. She appreciated and paid more attention to the similarity beyond cultural differences.

Diversity and power of culture. In her Capstone project, Morgan discussed the differences between tolerating diversity and celebration diversity. She liked Landsman’s ideas about the need for understanding rather than merely tolerating

In speaking about the rise in number of non-Caucasian students in American schools, she [Landsman] states, “I believe that we have much more to gain than to lose by these changes…I am confident that the diversity of cultures in our buildings, the mixture of clothing, dialects, and music in the hallways, can only increase our knowledge, our joy, and our excitement and can only add to the quality of our lives” (p. ix).

Morgan commented on another book, Other People’s Children by Lisa Delpit, regarding her ideas about the culture of power:
I would like to return to my discussion of Delpit and her idea that there is a “culture of power” in our schools. In her own words, “success in institutions—schools, the workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power” (p. 25). The culture of the school is based on the cultures of those who are in power—the middle- and upper classes. Although others who are not in these classes have their own cultures that are perfectly acceptable, they are not cultural groups that have the power in the schools. Within a given culture, there are certain rules and codes that are passed along between members in an implicit manner. The problem is that this information can seldom be passed on in the same implicit way to people of another culture—the message often doesn’t get across the same way. Being told explicitly the rules of the culture in power would no doubt help to solve this problem (Capstone).

Morgan reflected critically on the possible tension between the school cultures and the cultural of individual students. She agreed with Delpit’s idea about how to help students recognize and deal with the power in cultures. Morgan suggested that teachers need to make their students know that “although there is more than one way to say the same thing, no one way is ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than another” (Capstone).

Morgan did not describe whether or how she had tried to implement Delpit’s idea at Somerson Elementary. But she did show her respect toward the cultures that her students brought into the classroom:

I don’t think it’s [speaking in non-standard English] necessarily bad. I don’t know. . . . I do correct them sometimes. If they say “ain’t,” I correct it but I’m not going to correct them if they’re speaking in their own… (interview, April 17, 2002).

After getting alone with her African American students for one school year, Morgan found herself using their language sometimes:

This is a funny thing - I do use their way of talking. I talk with my head. And the funniest thing is when I start to say aunt (“ont”) instead of aunt (“ant”). Most of my African-American students pronounced the word “aunt” as “ont”. I had never said it this way before, until I became a teacher. Oh my lord! I started saying that at Joe’s Christmas and I said something about my aunt being a teacher too and every one of his relatives kind of stared at me. They said what did you say? I said aunt. And it was so funny because I didn’t realize it (interview, April 17, 2002).
Morgan tried to make her classroom a place where her students would feel safe and comfortable about their own cultures. Her language was even influenced by how her students talked sometimes. She reported that she was still aware of the tension between the family culture and school culture. However, different from her critical stance in her Capstone writing about cultural diversity, at Somerson Elementary, Morgan did not seem to be assertive in showing students the sources of stereotypes and power relations among cultures. Rather, she implicitly created a space of pluralism in the classroom by respecting the cultural differences.

Reflecting on her teaching practices at Somerson Elementary, Morgan felt she had learned a lot from these experiences:

I learned a lot. I don’t want to say I’m sorry because everything is a learning experience. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about the grade level but I learned even more about the students and that area of the city which I never knew about (interview, April 17, 2002).

Nevertheless, she perceived herself less capable in helping her students than what she had originally expected:

It’s like there are some kids I hope I’ve made some sort of impact on and made them realize what they can do but - the program made me feel like I could do that more. And it’s almost like I’ve been so disillusioned and that’s why I feel the program has kind of left me like sighing every day and saying oh, it’s hard (interview, April 17, 2002).

In contrast to the inspiration in her earlier Capstone writing, her words above reveal frustration and discouragement. At the end of the school year, Morgan was looking forward to her new job at Clinton Elementary. She had impressions about the differences of students at Clinton Elementary and Somerson Elementary:

Yes, they do what you tell them but I think they’re more excited about coming every day, about doing their work. Also the school I’m going to be at – there’s going to be more parental support I believe because it’s a lottery school so the
parents actually had to do some work in getting their child into that school (interview, April 17, 2002).

The support from parents and the learning motivation of the students seemed to encourage Morgan as she thought about her move to a new school because of staff reduce. The following are introduction about the school environment and the students of Riverview Elementary.

School. Riverview Elementary was an alternative school with a focus on the integration of arts (visual art, dance, drama, vocal music, and instrumental music) into the basic academic curriculum. There were certified teachers in visual art, music, dance, and drama. The school had a big room with wooden floor for dancing classes. There were other well-equipped rooms for music and art classes and a stage with a computer board theater lighting. The school collaborated with the City’s Cleveland Arts Council, Ballet Met, Cleveland Children’s Theatre, and Cleveland Symphony to organize different art-related activities. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTA) assisted student clubs and various school functions. The student clubs included: chess program, Girl Scouts, school newspaper, book clubs, tap dance and ballet, lunch time performance, computer graphics, 3rd and 4th grade after-school tutoring. There were quarterly performances for the students to demonstrate what they had learned through arts.

Students. 76.6% of the students at Riverview Elementary were economically disadvantaged as indicated by the free and reduced lunch enrollment. 88.1% of the students were African American. 10.5% were white students. 4.6% of the student were identified with learning disabilities. The school was in School Improvement Status in 2003, but they gained adequate yearly progress and got out of the improvement status in 2004. The Performance Index Score was 87.1 (the full score was 120). The average
writing score of the fourth grade proficiency test was above the state standard (2003-2004 school report card).

Morgan’s most recent teaching practice (2004-2005). During her fourth year of practice, during the year of this dissertation study, Morgan had several changes in her ideas about teaching, related to classroom management, cooperation, and learning community (interview, July 11, 2005). At Riverview Elementary, Morgan said she did not rely on rewards or a behavior system to enforce students’ behaviors. She would like to see students enjoy their work because of self-fulfillment rather than rewards or punishment. Morgan tried to develop a community of learning in order to enhance cohesiveness in classroom. She took more time in listening to students’ voices when they were troubled. She became more independent at work because there was limited time for collaboration with her colleagues. Details about her teaching practice will be introduced in later section.

The following is a summary of the personal backgrounds, learning experiences, beliefs in teaching and learning, and school environment of the three teachers.

Summary. The teachers had commonality as well as differences in their personal backgrounds. For example, Morgan and Melissa received bachelor degrees in psychology. Nicole had a bachelor’s degree in biology. Both of Melissa and Nicole had mothers who had been teachers. Melissa called her mother every day to share her teaching experiences. Nicole was influenced by her mother and was interested in Reading Recovery because her mother was a trained teacher. The three teachers had different religious beliefs. Morgan was Catholic, Nicole was a Protestant, and Melissa was Jewish.
Melissa was involved in a variety of activities in the Jewish community. Nicole regularly volunteered to do community service in her church.

Morgan was a swimming coach on weekends until she was expecting her second child at the beginning of 2005. The other two teachers also were married but did not have children. The three teachers were all 26 years old in 2003. They all liked to go to exercise when they left school.

The three teachers were different in ethnicity and also had different attitudes toward issues of equity and diversity. Morgan was Caucasian and started to learn about multicultural education during the M.Ed. program. Morgan said because she had a son who was undergoing therapy for autism, she had empathy for people with disabilities. She would remind her students to keep an open-minded about individual differences that resulted from physical, cognitive, or cultural factors. Melissa had both a cultural and a religious identity as Jewish. She had a strong sense of social justice and issues related to equity and diversity. She encouraged students to take actions and make changes for the society. Nicole had a biracial identity (African American and Italian). She demonstrated concerns related to the marginalization of African American people. She was patient in trying different strategies to meet the needs of her students. She tried to understand the struggles of the students who came from families of low socio-economic status. While all three teachers valued cultural diversity, they had critical views about different aspects of multicultural education. With respect to their experiences at the M.Ed. program, Nicole was the one most satisfied with her teacher preparation experiences. Both Nicole and Melissa had increased satisfaction levels over time, while Morgan’s satisfaction decreased. Their ratings about the program at three periods of time are presented in a
format of five-point Lykert scale (five points referred to the most positive attitude). The table below shows the different patterns of their ratings.

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<th></th>
<th>During the program</th>
<th>Upon graduation</th>
<th>Now</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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Table 4.1: Comparison of three teachers

They all agreed that the program prepared them well in assessment of learning, collaborative learning, math and reading, instructional pedagogies, fostering democratic classrooms, establishing equity in the classroom, reflecting on teaching practice, and meeting the needs of all students. All of the teachers explicitly expressed that they had great experiences in their field placements. Morgan and Nicole strongly agreed that their mentor teachers were competent. Nicole still had contact with her mentor teacher and volunteered to be a mentor for current OSU student teachers. She wished she could have the same opportunities as her mentor did to be involved in the professional development school (PDS).

The only aspect of program preparation that was perceived as insufficient by all of the three teachers was the knowledge of school politics. Melissa felt that her knowledge about politics expanded from what she had learned in the program. Like Melissa, Morgan also perceived progress in her learning about politics, but she did not feel interested in getting involved in the politics at school. Morgan thought politics could
be used as strategies for productive reforms or for personal benefit. She would try to stay away from the dark side of politics by just focusing on her teaching practice. Nicole had strong confidence in her knowledge about school politics after she left the program. She actively participated in the teacher union activities and searched for resources, such as funding for applications to the National Board certification or other professional development opportunities. She applied for funding to attend one National Board preparation class at OSU in 2003 and planned to prepare a portfolio and other application materials in the following years. To Nicole, politics was a tool to improve teachers’ welfare and protect their rights.

There were several other fields about which individual teachers had different perspectives. One of these fields was the preparation to be a change agent in schools. Both Morgan and Nicole perceived insufficient training related to becoming a change agent. While Nicole thought she had gained some improvement in this area now, Morgan did not feel so. Morgan acknowledged that her passive attitude toward school politics might influence her role as a change agent. She was not assertive toward taking actions for the reforms of the society or world. She was more concerned about how to teach for the changes in her classroom. On the other hand, Melissa was positive regarding her training to be a change agent. She perceived herself as one who was able to “see the big picture and design a plan to fix problem” (open-ended survey question). Nevertheless, she was not confident in her competence to be a change agent after she left the program. She felt constrained by the current test system and prescribed curriculum.

Preparing students for high-stakes tests was another field where the teachers had different attitudes. Both of Melissa and Nicole felt insufficient training related to
standardized tests. They felt more confident about their current competence, though they still believed that standardized tests should not be the only way to test students’ ability. Morgan was satisfied with the program training in the preparation for high-stake tests. She was proud of the fact that, at Somerson Elementary, a school which had stayed in the improvement status for three successive years, that she had three fifth of her students passed the writing test. She thought that it was the problem solving techniques, rather than drill and practice that helped students demonstrate high achievement.

In respect to connecting theory to practice, all the teachers except Melissa considered it as one of the program strengths. Melissa did not think some of the theories, like constructivism, were feasible in the real classroom contexts. With all the requirements that she needed to fulfill, Melissa thought it was hard to connect the theory to practice. Both of Morgan and Nicole agreed with the statement that the program helped them apply their knowledge in practice. On the other hand, the longer they moved away from graduating from the program, the more they leaned on their own experiences to adjust their teaching practices or to search for new theory or resources that met their teaching needs. As Nicole reflected at the third year of her teaching, “No book can help. Books can give you ideas but the only thing that has helped me is PRACTICE. Just practice and experience in the classroom has helped me” (Electronic communication, March 12, 2004).

As illustrated above, the individual teachers had different attitudes toward certain aspects of their teacher education experiences. Sometimes, their attitudes toward the same items changed through time, too. For example, in 2003 when she was teaching at Clinton Elementary, Nicole indicated that she had few connections with her colleagues.
But she worked closely with her team teachers after she moved to Washington Elementary in 2004. Morgan was satisfied with the program training in preparing to work with culturally different children. But she felt less competent after she graduated and taught at Somerson Elementary. After she moved to Riverview Elementary and taught there for three more years, she gained more confidence in teaching African American students. Morgan’s 2002 survey response indicated she perceived an insufficiency in program preparation related to classroom management. In a 2005 interview, however, she changed her mind and said she thought that there were no perfect skills of classroom management that could be taught.

In 2003, Melissa appeared very discouraged and overwhelmed by the test system. She looked more relaxed in 2005 and thought the M.Ed. program should be credited with her increasing flexibility. “What M.Ed. did really helped with is being very flexible (which I am still improving at) and rolling with the punches” (open-ended survey question). Although all of the teachers agreed that the overall quality of their teacher education experiences was very high, as mentioned earlier, their ratings about their experiences varied through the years. There were many factors that might have contributed to the teachers’ inconsistent perceptions about the program and their own competence, such as the changes in belief system, teaching experiences, support net, state/district policies, and so on. Further discussions about those potential factors will be provided in later parts of the paper.

The purpose of this section was not to do a summative report of program performance. Rather, it was a review about the M.Ed. program from the perspectives of the teachers, with an interest in the dynamics of many contextual factors that may have
influenced their views and positions. The following sections are about the teachers’ practices in classroom.

Section 2: Engagement in Classroom

In this section, details about the classroom activities were provided to present the characteristics of the teachers’ practice. I chose selected facets and events in order to represent important aspects of their classroom teaching related to my research questions. A summary of the teachers’ practices with references to their perceptions of their teacher education experiences are discussed at the end of this section.

Case 1: Nicole

At the third year of her practice at Clinton Elementary, Nicole had eighteen students, nine girls, nine boys. Sixteen of them were students of color. Fifteen of the students qualified for free lunch, two had reduced price lunch status, and one paid for lunch. In Nicole’s classroom, there was a water fountain, four computers, five tables for the students, and one teacher’s desk. At the right hand side of the teacher’s desk was a carpeted space, usually for group instruction. Nicole read stories or taught science/math lessons to the group in this space. The students were physically close to each other on this carpet area. At the back of the same space was a vocabulary wall. Nicole put some words on the wall and asked students to make sentences or related practices. Beside the word-wall, there was a blackboard. Nicole used the board for writing her instructions for when students went from the carpet area to their own seats. Above the blackboard, there was a television and VCR. The students would line up their chairs in front of the television when they had some programs to watch. At the left side of the teacher’s desk were four
computers. Those who were behaved well or finished their work could have the privilege of playing computer games.

The following are descriptions of the classroom activities related to Nicole’s competence in dealing with multicultural education themes and issues. The factors and resources that were necessary to support her teaching will also be discussed.

The two teaching assistants. There were two teaching assistants in the office responding to Nicole’s call during her teaching. Assistant Daisy helped by copying materials (each teacher got one day of the copying assistant per week). Assistant Tina helped tutor in reading (for various grades of students.) Nicole called them several times today to come to pick up students and take them to the office (for their inappropriate behaviors.) She considered the assistants to be a good resource to help with discipline so she could continue her teaching (post-observation meeting, January 29, 2004).

The principal. I met with the principal and asked her if I could videotape Nicole’s class. She said I should get permission from all of the parents in the class. Anytime there were new students moving in, I had to get permission from their parents, too. On listening to those requirements, I realized that I could not realistically do videotaping. The requirement of 100% returned rate was too tough to meet with the high mobility rate in her classroom.

Come to me whenever there is a need. It was 9:00 am. Volunteers came to the room to pick up students for reading. Lemar got into some trouble. Nicole brought Lemar close and talked to him at a low volume. He nodded his head and returned a shy smile that I seldom saw on him. Nicole turned to Ashanti and asked her to assist Cynthia with the assignment. Getting her problems resolved, Cynthia then quietly worked at the
teacher’s desk. She showed me her worksheet. “Look, I have done all my work!” Nicole checked the answers for the morning practice.

I was curious about what she told Lemar. Nicole said, she told him to come to her whenever he needed something.

_We are a team!_ In a reading lesson, Nicole gave the students worksheets with questions. They needed to work with their team members to answer the questions. She listened to individual students’ reading and gave them brief instructions. Two students came up to ask questions. Dupont generated some violent behaviors. Nicole did not respond to his behaviors. She checked the answers of each team and gave candy to the team was working well together.

Everyone in Dupont’ team got candy, even though Dupont was the only student that got most of the answers correct. He did not mind his team members copying his work. He was a friendly and easygoing child when he was not in his violent mode. Except for his occasional behavior issues, the team members seemed to have a good time playing and working with him.

_A nice moment in the day._ It was writing time. The students were writing in their journals and having small talk with their neighbors sometimes. Occasionally, Nicole gave instructions to keep the students on task. “Lemar, sit down.” “I do not know why I heard your voice. It is your writing time. I do not want to hear your voice.” “Christopher, I will see you at the recess.” “…you are added to my recess list.” “… I am going to tell … you do not do your work every day.” The dismissal signal sounded. Nicole asked the students to put aside their work and line up for restroom break.
Nicole later told me later that the writing section was the nicest moment in the day. She looked content as she told me this.

*The teams and the wanderer.* 11:00 am, “There are only three teams that got their points.” (Nicole wrote on board when students were talking). Nicole added credits for three teams and explained to the students why she did so. Nicole told a student, “You need 5 more points (in order to get a treat after the reading section).”

The class was divided into four teams during the group activities. The team names chosen by the students were: 50 Cents, Little Remedy, Big Soldiers, & Bow Wow. Nicole marked the names of the teams on the board and gave points to the team that had good performance (e.g. collaboration, or correct responses). Nicole would give treats (e.g., candy or cookies) to the group that got 20 points at the end of the class.

Marquee kept making trouble and interrupting the class. Nicole asked him to sit at another table and work by himself. He got a book to read but found a tear on one page. He tried to get some tape for the book. “Marquee, sit down.” Nicole stopped him. She guided the other students through paired reading. Nicole walked around listening to the students read and giving them grades. Marquee asked some of his classmates to be his reading partner, but no one responded to him.

“There is one team only that’s not too loud.” Nicole marked credits for that team on the blackboard. She gave a command, “Ago.” (Swahili word for “I respectfully ask for your attention.”) The kids responded together, “Ame” (Swahili word for “I respectfully give you my attention.”). Usually the students became a little quieter, at least temporarily, after giving back their response. One student came to ask Nicole a question. She gave the student a brief explanation and asked her to work with the team.
Marquee asked for an eraser, and Nicole brought him to sit at another table (It was the same table where I was working on my fieldnotes.) Now he had half of a desk all for himself, with a box of pencils and erasers. The students at one table were arguing about who got the right answer. Nicole stopped by the table, listening, and went back to her desk.

*Rewards.* Nicole was satisfied with the class this morning. She told them, “I think you have done a nice job and keep doing it. I am going to buy something this weekend for those who behave themselves well....” Nicole told individual students how many points they needed in order to participate in the Valentine party (fieldnotes, 2-2-04).

*The PEAK Room.* Nicole sent a student to the PEAK room today. She seemed to punish certain disturbing behaviors while ignoring others. For example, in a reading section, there were several students not paying attention to Nicole’s instruction. Janelle touched the other student sitting beside her. Jeffrey was holding a book and talking with his neighbors. But Nicole only sent Janelle to the PEAK Room. She explained, Janelle had been behaving worse than what she did half a month ago. Today she disturbed other kids in the morning, in the afternoon in the library, and in the science class.

Nicole told me that the students did not like to go to the PEAK room. They would rather stay in the classroom and know what the other students were doing. It made me wonder whether children in the lower grades have a stronger need to be with their peers? I thought of Morgan’s students in Somerson Elementary who did not mind being sending to the PEAK room. Or maybe it has more to do with who is managing the PEAK room than the students’ feelings about their peers (fieldnotes, 2-4-04).
Nick’s parents. Besides the PEAK room, another time that the students would cool down was when Nicole had the office call the parents. Today Nick did not follow the instructions in math class. Nicole asked Sheila to go to the office for a call to his parents. The whole room became silent. The students seemed to know that it was serious this time. Nick was asked to sit at the back of the room. Sheila came back with a note. Nicole read the note, “…Nick’s parents will come to the assembly…good…” (The assembly would take place in the afternoon.)

Telling me your dreams. It was a morning writing time. Nicole asked the students to write about their dreams. She gave them some probing. “Tell me what your dream is?” One student, Aya, responded, “Dream is what you want to be when you grow up.” The other student asked, “Why do people need to work?” Nicole answered, “You work so that you have money to live on.” After a couple of more questions, Nicole gave three questions to guide the students’ writing: ‘What are your dreams?’ “What do you want to be when you grow up?” “What will you have to do to achieve your goal?”

Nicole said that one day before this writing section, she had a teachers’ meeting at school. One theme of the meeting discussion was about how to have students write about their dreams and to help them connect their dreams with their learning at school. This activity was intended to help make learning more meaningful to the children.

What was in the bag? It was a group activity for the science lesson. Lemar brought Nicole a cup of name sticks. Yin liked to do favors for Nicole when he was in his “good mode.” Nicole randomly selected students to answer questions by drawing names from the name sticks. Nicole asked the students to feel a bag and guess the content. The students were eager to give answers. After a student gave the correct answer (it was a
Nicole brought the class to the science lesson topic. “What do we do with potatoes?” “Potato is which part of the plant?”

Nicole used a bag of potatoes as instructional materials for a science lesson. She had anticipated the interest from her students upon seeing the potato in class. The class had read books about different parts of plants. She wanted to show the students how the plants were related to people’s lives. From some plants, people had their fruit for food; from the other, like potatoes, it was the root that was used for food. Nicole liked to use authentic materials for instruction. She said that, in this way, it was easier for the students to make connections between what they learned and the real world.

*Let’s make a prediction.* Nicole showed a picture from a book to the students. “Let’s make some prediction about the picture.” The students were engaged and eager to respond. Ashanti and Sandra were talking and playing. Tina, the teaching assistant, came in and took out the two students. Dupont played and made sounds. Christopher stood up and was walking around. Nicole stopped reading, had a glimpse at the clock, and then looked at Dupont. Some students gave warnings to their classmates. Nicole re-started reading the book.

*The story teller and her audience.* Nicole was to read some non-fiction for the class today. “Come over here and sit down. Anybody know what a plantation is?” Nicole used a picture in a book to describe a plantation. While some students were curious about the content of the story, the others were not settled yet. Nicole gave the latter a warning. “…interrupt me one more time and I will call home.” She spent a couple of minutes on classroom management and then continued to introduce the environment of the plantation.
She highlighted some specific locations in the picture of the plantation and described where the slaves, in the old times, worked, did laundry, and slept. She also talked about the types of work done by the slaves. She encouraged the students to imagine the potential concerns that a slave might have in a particular work selection. For example, they might prefer indoor jobs more than outdoor jobs. Nicole explained how the outdoor work might generally be harder than the indoor work. She described in detail about how laundry or ironing was done when they did not use electronic appliances. She talked about how the slaves might feel after working for the whole day doing those tasks by hand. She read the word, “exhausted,” and explained its meaning to the students. Dupont sat on the book shelf and played with his clothes. Nicole pulled Dupont close to her, whispered to him, and told him to face toward the front (not to bother his classmates).

I was not sure how much Nicole had read about the history of plantations before. She did not just read the story aloud; she talked about it. She vividly portrayed the slaves’ lifestyles, their feelings, emotions, and how they strived to get freedom. Her story telling revealed her knowledge of different fields, such as anthropology, history, science, and popular culture. She seemed to be a knowledgeable story teller!

Two little women fight. The students were to line up for a restroom break. Both Sheila and Cynthia wanted to stand at the first position (but Sheila came first). They tried to push the other off the spot, and step on the other’s foot. Jonathon who stood after Sheila tried to help Cynthia get the spot. He squeezed Sheila’s face. Sheila turned to look at me sometimes and insisted on not moving from her place. There was no serious violence involved. Generally, they were just squeezing and pushing each other. Nicole
came and told Cynthia that she needed to take turns. Cynthia tried to argue but failed. Sheila was allowed to be the first in line today. Cynthia quietly stood aside and leaned on the wall. The last student checked out Cynthia. Cynthia said, “Leave me alone!” Now the whole class went to the rest room but Cynthia. She stayed beside at the spot that she had wished to be at. The special education teacher who taught cross the hall came in and tried to comfort her.

I wondered what it meant for the students to be the first of the line? From the classroom observation, Nicole seemed to pay different kinds of attention to the two students. She trusted Sheila and had her help with many things in the classroom. She had sympathy for Cynthia (regarding her history of family abuse) and tried to provide more time and space for her. Cynthia liked to have some special interactions with Nicole. One time I saw her play with Nicole at the playground. She was using Nicole’s camera to take pictures for her.

Sitting in the classroom, I had question about how Cynthia could be help in developing stronger feelings of security. Cynthia had tried different ways to gain attention—many of that were disturbing behaviors in the classroom. Did she fight with Sheila to be the first in the line in order to be more visible in the class?

_The three Ds in the classroom._ It was a writing lesson. Nicole gave the students some instruction for their writing and told them to keep working until the dismissal signal. Nick said he finished. Nicole asked, “What did I say?” (She told them to write until the class is dismissed).

Lemar went to talk with Nicole. She told him to sit down and stop talking. Lemar shouted, “Leave me alone!” (The other students were writing quietly). Dupont came in
the classroom from reading tutoring. He looked upset and threw a piece of paper down on
the floor emotionally. Nick came again and told Nicole that he had finished. Nicole asked
him to remain in his seat for another couple of minutes. (9:57 dismissal signal) Dupont
whispered to Nick. He smiled and turned to look at Nicole while talking to Nick.

Nicole said that Lemar, Nick, and Dupont all had their strengths. Nick was
identified as gifted. Dupont was a quick learner. Lemar was good at math. Nicole
jokingly called them “the three Ds” in the classroom. They could be nice one moment,
and then turn to be difficult to deal with the next moment. The unstable emotion status of
students seemed to be one source of Nicole’s pressure.

*Which students are ready to be third graders?* Nicole asked the students who they
thought was ready to be in the third grade. The students answered, Sheila. Nicole said,
“Only Sheila and Mindy are ready to be 3rd graders.” It was another classroom
management of Nicole. Her words did make the group of students quiet for a while.
Cynthia came back from the reading tutoring. She showed me the toy that she got from
her tutor and rested her head on my shoulder. Nicole gave instructions for journal writing.
Some students were writing in their journals. The other students who finished their
writing were playing computer games. Most of the students were doing what they were
supposed to do. Ready or not, being a third grader seemed to be a big thing to the
students. They seemed to work better after Nicole’s reminding.

At lunch, Nicole told me that today she did not have Latisha, Jonathon, Sandra.
The class was great.

*I want to be alone.* 9:10 am, Nicole was checking the answers for the vocabulary
practice. Cynthia sat behind the bookshelf by herself. She did not want to join the class.
The teaching assistant and another teacher came to help, reluctantly. Finally, the special education teacher came and talked with Cynthia. Cynthia gave her a hug and they went out of the classroom. After a while, Cynthia came back to the classroom, sat beside me, and watched me typing on my laptop. Nicole asked her to go back to her seat. She stepped out of the classroom again. Nicole informed the office that Cynthia was in the hallway and refused to come back in the classroom.

_Aprilann was included._ It was Nicole’s idea to include Aprilann, one of the students from the special education program in her class. She exchanged some of her home students with the special education teacher. It was a reading section. The students were doing a “word search” activity. Except Sheila, Nick, and Aprilann, the rest of the students worked in groups. Nicole helped individual groups. Finishing her practice, Sheila went to work with Janelle and Latisha. Nicole asked Kanasha to help Aprilann. She corrected the answers for those who finished their assignments.

Nicole told me that usually she helped the students with higher achievement first and then had them work with the other students. For other peer work, she would pair students by similar learning levels; usually one was a little bit higher than the other. Nick was the one who knew the most vocabulary in the class. Even Sheila did not know as much as he did. She would make sure to have some students at either median or high reading levels paired with Nick to do peer vocabulary tests. Aprilann was getting help, too. She asked Aprilann some questions from time to time to help her catch up with the class. She had difficulty with reading and writing, but she still could complete the tasks to some extent if she got help.
Math. Nicole was demonstrating how to do multiplication. She allowed the students to work either by themselves or with groups. Jonathon, Sheila, and George chose to work by themselves. Nicole did scaffolding for Jonathon, while asking Sheila and George to do double digit multiplication (e.g. 9 x 12). She then helped Cynthia, Lexus, Dayjene, and Kanasha. “Count them, Kanasha. Now you have 3 x 4, you need 3, 4 times....”

Nicole had the students use plastic blocks as manipulatives. For the question 3 x 4, she told them to put three blocks together, and then do that for four times. Then she asked them to count the total number of blocks and they got 12 for the answer. All the students were busy doing the hands-on tasks. The concept of multiplication seemed to be difficult for the students at the beginning. Nicole was patient to explain the concept for individual students. She looked calm and had a sense of self-efficacy in teaching math.

Fieldtrip to the Martin Luther King Jr. Center. Feb 26. Nicole invited me to join the fieldtrip to the Martin Luther Kings Jr. Center. She invited two other teachers, too. She seemed to have nice relationship with her colleagues. On the bus, Nicole met a girl that she had tutored before. The girl asked Nicole about her age and was friendly with her. Nicole looked relaxed chatting with the student and the other teacher. It was the first time that I saw her so relaxed and humorous as she interacted with a student. Christopher’s grandma came with him to the trip. Nicole chatted with her at dinner in the center. The fieldtrip provided the participants opportunities for learning and socialization. It also gave me a chance to see another aspect of Nicole who was motivated to build good connections with colleagues, students, and the family members of the students.
Computer time. The students liked computer time. Unlike the third and fourth graders in my other observation classrooms, the second grades used the computer mostly for playing games. They felt sad if they lost indoor recess time because that meant they would not be able to play computer games.

Special project. Sheila and Dupont were doing their special projects. Nicole gave them assignments extended from the lesson. Sheila finished hers and wrote answers on Dupont’ worksheet for him. They smiled to each other.

Dupont was a charming boy. His male peers called him to take a look at something interesting that they had just found. He generously responded and came to share their excitement. His female peers sometimes asked help from him, or in Sheila’s case, volunteered to do him a little favor. He did not make efforts to please his classmates, but his presence was generally welcomed. However, Dupont did make efforts to get Nicole’s attention, either by doing her a favor or by acting up. Nicole was the person who recognized his potential, was committed to helping him, and tolerated his behaviors with understanding. She gave Dupont special assignments as she did for George and Sheila, though he did not meet the requirements for gifted and talented education. Nicole tried hard to direct his excessive energy and to inspire his learning. Searching for effective ways to help Dupont balance his energy could be described as a special project for Nicole.

Two new students. Nicole thought that the relocation of families (at the middle of school year) added complexity to the testing system (post-observation meeting, February 9, 2004). The influence that the new students brought from their previous classes might contribute some noise in the test results; in the same way, old students moving made it
difficult to assess the teaching effects of a particular teacher. The arrival of two new students did not seem to be the biggest challenge to Nicole. However, when interacting with these contextual elements, student mobility and other similar issues could turn to be the “unbearable lightness” (or the “last straw”) for the classroom teacher. Cynthia, the new student coming at the end of year 2002, was one example of this kind of the challenge.

*Was it fair?* In a read aloud section, Nicole had the students discuss some questions about “rules.” She asked them what it might look like if a class had no rules. Dupont disturbed the instruction. He was asked to go out for 10 minutes. He did and slammed the door after him. The class had a discussion about the rules in the time of slavery. One student asked if there were “white jails”? Nicole answered, yes, at that time, the jails were separated. The interactions engaged the students to ask more questions and to listen to the story attentively. Again, Nicole stopped her reading and asked whether the rule that excluded blacks from going to swimming pools was fair or not. George said it was fair. Nicole asked him to give reasons. George said it was because he did not like swim. Nicole asked him how he would feel if he went to stores and couldn’t go in. He said that was fair, for he was white. George seemed to hesitate putting himself in the scenario as Nicole suggested. Nicole did not criticize George’s answer, but reminded the students about the need to give reasons when thinking about the fairness of rules.

*The Chinese New Year.* A librarian came to talk about Chinese New Year. She brought a bag of materials. The students seemed excited by her presence. The librarian first described some rules that she expected the students to follow. She then started to introduce the celebration of the New Year in different cultures. She asked some questions
and the students responded. Some students talked without her calling on them. She stopped several times and insisted complete silence from the students as she was talking. She warned that she would leave if they talked again without permission. The class was quiet for a while. But the students soon got excited and eager to respond to her talking. The librarian collected the materials and left the room. She never came back for the New Year activity even though she said that she would come back.

From the beginning of the class, Nicole had sat at the back of the classroom and watched the students. After the librarian left, Dupont tried to explain that he did not do anything wrong. Nicole told him that she had seen him be involved in the incident. She asked the students to try to think of her mood now. They replied, sad. She then told them about how she felt disappointed and embarrassed. She told them about the good manners of the classes that she had had before. She explained to them how many benefits they had lost because of their behavioral issues. For example, the other classes had done more projects and learned more. But this class had wasted so much time from not listening, etc. She asked the class to move on, but she also let them know that she was in a bad mood now. Sheila was sitting in Nicole’s chair. Nicole called on her and asked her to leave the seat (in a serious tone). Sheila left the room and went to talk to the teacher in the other classroom. I saw a tear rolling down on Sheila’s face when she stepped out.

Nicole later told me that she thought the students were good during the lesson. Even Dupont had done his best (though he could not meet the “complete quiet” standard). The librarian did not understand that the class had been in their “great” condition during her lesson.

I think that the librarian did not have the patience to deal with my students. She expected them to sit still and listen to her without moving or fidgeting. I believe
that it is OK for them to move as long as they are listening and most of them can tell you what they learned. I had more experience with my students than she did and I knew them better (Electronic communication, June 24, 2005).

Nicole said that she saw the tears in the eyes of some students when the librarian left. I did not see that. I always appreciated Nicole sharing information like this that was often unnoticed by the outsiders, like the librarian and me.

**Dupont’ hug.** Dupont picked up one thing and showed it to Nicole. She told him to put it on her desk. Dupont said, “But I found it.” Nicole said, “But that is still mine.” I turned away to answer Mindy’s question. The next thing I saw was that Dupont was giving Nicole a hug. Nicole told him that Ms. Wilson would come to be a substitute teacher next week. Dupont looked sad when he knew that Nicole would be absent for two days. Nicole told Dupont that she knew the class liked Ms. Wilson and she (Ms. Wilson) had nice descriptions about Lemar and him. Latisha and Sheila helped clean the classroom. Latisha asked for a sticker on the table and she got it. Nicole asked the two girls what kinds of candies they like. She gave one package of candies to each of them. Dupont was not the classroom helper for the day so he did not get the candies. He stood by and looked happy and content.

Nicole smiled when I talked about Dupont’s hug after all the students left. I thought, a warm hug from the students, especially those who were usually hard to deal with, might feel like giving candy to their teacher.

**The science class.** In order to teach about plants, Nicole involved the students in different activities. For example, she had the students grow some sprouts and do observations. She also integrated crafts with the science lesson. The students used paper and strings to create plants with related information written on the leaves. In addition, she
borrowed tapes from the public libraries and played them for the class. When the host in the TV program asked questions, the students raised their hands with eagerness to respond. The class seemed to have fun in learning.

Regardless how interesting the lessons might look, the students engaged themselves in the activities with a wide range of behaviors. For example, you might see Jeffrey get extremely mad at his neighbor (for copying his answer sheet). Markelle played with his chair and fell on the floor. You heard a loud “shut up,” from someone quarrelling. Or you might see a flying pencil in the air (thrown by the angry Dupont). One time, Sandra threw a chair to the floor which then bounced to fall on Nicole’s foot—close to the place where she had an operation earlier that year. The pain was so severe that she could hardly hold her tears. Unexpected violent behaviors, in different degrees, created tension in the classroom. It was also a major source of challenge to Nicole’s teaching (post-observation meeting, March 3, 2004).

*The class went on.* The students got excited because Nicole was going to read the story, *Holes*, to them. At the end of the class, the class was still interested in knowing more about the story. Some parents started to come pick up their children because of bad whether. Shania went to Cynthia and asked, “Why did you do that to Jeffrey?” Cynthia remained quiet. She got a suspension for stabbing Jeffrey.

*Let’s be the best in the hall way.* During math class, the students were quietly doing their work, except Dupont who was pushing his chair around. “Jocelyn does a good job!” “Christopher does a good job!” Nicole gave praise to the students who were concentrating on their tasks. “6 take away 4 equals?” “Dupont?” “Ashanti?” Ashanti gave a wrong answer. Cynthia gave a correct answer. “Thanks to Cynthia.” “Those who
answered 10… you read too fast.” “Let’s be the best class in the hall way.” Nicole seemed to have high spirits today. She looked content about the students’ performance. Her sense of encouragement seemed to be for both the class and herself.

*We are different.* The school provided a puppet show in the assembly today. The show demonstrated how different people could be different from each other. The puppet characters who were deaf, blind, or disabled shared their experiences with the audience. The students sat on the floor watching the show. The school did not have a plan for follow-ups after the puppet show. It was up to the teachers to decide whether or how they would like to continue the discussion about the diversity topic.

Another day, after a reading section, Nicole asked some questions to guide the students’ writing. “Do you think the boys will stay with the blind man? Why?” “What would it be like if you were blind?” Generating ideas through writing was one way Nicole used to approach the diversity issue. She used to have discussions about one or two of the students’ work after the writing section.

*You will have lunch with me.* Nicole told one team that they were good yesterday, but not today. A boy tried to explain. Nicole asked him to negotiate with his group. She announced, those who completed three home work assignments could have lunch with her on Friday. The students were excited about that.

*Teacher? Or Mother?* At 10:00 a.m., it was a reading lesson. When Nicole read she used dramatic changes in tone which seemed appealing to the group. Many students appeared to be listening with interest. Marquee played, so Nicole asked him to sit beside her. He could not stop moving. Sometimes he touched Nicole’s lap. Sometimes he laid one arm on her shoulder and tried to get a glimpse at the pictures on her hand. A
discussion was followed after the reading. 11:05 a.m., the students went back to their seats to do assignments. Marquee was still fooling around. He went to Nicole to ask her some questions and laid his arm on her shoulder again. Nicole took off his hand and commanded, “Stop touching me!”

I asked Nicole regarding Marquee’s behavior today. She told me that Marquee’s mother was so sick that she could not take care of Marquee. He might be seeking a mother from other females. I thought Nicole might try to confirm her role as a teacher when Marquee tested the boundary. As Morgan said in one interview, besides teaching, teachers played the other roles such as nurse or policeman. Teachers’ decision making about which role to play at particular moments in the classroom reveals their expectations to the students.

*After-school program.* The students paid $20 every 9 weeks if they chose to participate in the after-school-program. There were six tutors in the program to work and play with the students. Nicole told me that Dupont and Lemar had fewer behavior issues in the program than in the classroom. She wondered if it was because the students could have more space to run and play after school.

I stayed with the students after school for four times to see how they were doing there. The tutors helped individual students do their homework. Then they had different types of activities, such as playing sports, making food, watching video tapes, and so on. One time, the tutors brought a snake and its prey, a mouse, for the students to see the life of animals. I went to the program three times and found Dupont and Lemar did have a great time there. When playing ball with the group, Dupont ran around the gym full of energy. He was a sharp and quick athlete. Lemar showed obedience to the tutors and
welcomed. Nicole when he saw her. I saw Cynthia get into trouble twice and she was punished. She disturbed the group when watching a film and used spoon to threaten the tutor (as if she was going to use it to stab him). She did not look much different from when she was in the classroom. Nicole mentioned that she also found Sandra behaved better in a church program where Nicole went to provide a service one time. I wished I had time to visit the church.

*Black kids middle class teacher.* Nicole felt that she could relate more culturally than socio-economically with her students.

I think that I had an advantage coming into that situation because I was exposed and raised in two cultures both White and Black since I am of two cultures. No, I didn't know how these children had to live from a financial standpoint but I did have some understanding of the African American culture (Electronic communication, April 3, 2004).

Being conscious of her limitations, Nicole read books that related to issues relevant to her class. She introduced to me a book called, Black Kids Middle Class Teachers. “… It talks about the myths and ideas that middle class teachers bring to the classroom that they are not even aware of how their beliefs affect black students.” This book helped teachers realize that things that were valued in the middle class might not be of importance to folks in a lower class setting. Besides value systems described in the book, Nicole found other things related to class differences from her own teaching experiences. “… often times I had to catch myself and explain things or bring in examples of things I was trying to teach that I assumed my children knew about but they didn't” (Electronic communication, April 3, 2004).

*Practice is the most important thing!* I saw some books about social justice on Nicole’s shelf in classroom. I asked her why she got the books and whether they were
helpful. “Those were books from Marilyn's class and no they have not helped me. I don't have a multicultural classroom I have a unicultural classroom.” “No book can help. Books can give you ideas but the only thing that has helped me is PRACTICE. Just practice and experience in the classroom has helped me” (Electronic communication, May 5, 2004)

*Summer school.* Nicole taught summer school in a different school. She taught fourth grade. She was excited about the change in environment and asked if I would like to come for a visit. “I am teaching summer school so maybe you would like to come observe me teaching summer school to see if there is a difference in the environment. . . Be prepared because you will see a big difference in the behavior of the kids.” (Electronic communication, May 25, 2004).

I felt the joy in her words and went to visit her. Nicole told me that the neighborhood of this school was nice. Most of the population consisted of African American students. The summer school prescribed the curriculum for reading and math. She read to the students in the beginning of the morning. Then she gave instructions for activities in reading and math. She had opportunities to meet and talk with the parents when they came to school to pick up students for lunch.

The principal was a young man. Nicole felt his support for classroom teachers. She said that the principal at Clinton Elementary, he did not tolerate students’ disturbing behaviors. If a warning did not work, he would send the students who did not follow the rules home. This may have been because it was summer school and these behaviors did not have to be tolerated. The students had high motivation to learn. They did not talk
back when Nicole asked them to do things or correct their behaviors. There were few cases like Sandra, Cynthia, or Lemar in the summer school.

_Reading in the summer school._ Kensia’s aunt brought some refreshments before the class started. Nicole was reading a book, “Letters From a Slave Girl.” She asked the students some questions to check their understanding and explained the terms commonly used during the slavery period. The students seemed to enjoy her reading. She told them that the book was from their school library. The students were surprised.

While Nicole was helping the students do their assignment, David stood up to close the door. Nicole asked him, “Did her voice [the teacher in the room across the hall way] bother you?” The student did not reply.

After school, I asked Nicole about that incident. She told me a story about David and the teacher across the hall way, Laverne. When summer school started, the students were all in her class. Then the school decided to move ¼ of Laverne’s students to Nicole’s class. David was one of the students who got moved. Laverne told Nicole that he was difficult to manage so she would like to move him to her class. Laverne and David did not get well alone. He acted up in her classroom and talked back to her. However, Nicole said she did not have major problems with David. She looked comfortable negotiating with her students in this classroom (personal conversation, June 20).

_The second to last day of summer school._ One more day, the students would finish their summer classes. Austin complained that there were too many questions. He wanted to go home and sleep. His classmates had similar problems to focus on their tasks. Nicole told them that if they did not work, they could not have the snacks that she
prepared for them. Except Tycci, the students continued to do their work. Nicole gave him a warning. “Do I have to tell you to put down that chair one more time?” He stopped. A girl asked Nicole why she did not get a gift today. Nicole explained to her that it was because she failed to submit one of her homework assignments. She smiled to the girl who looked discouraged. The classroom here was not as big as the one in Clinton Elementary. Overall, there seemed to be a sense of relaxation for Nicole in the summer school.

*Perspectives about the two schools.* I went to have lunch with Nicole after the class. Nicole did not seem to mind their little mischief, like what Tycci did today. “He is very smart.” She was generally satisfied with the performance of this class. “They all knew how to work on the computer. That is nicer than Clinton Elementary.” Nicole thought her students in summer school had more motivation to learn. Most of them realized that they did not do well enough on the proficiency tests and that this was why they needed to come to the summer school, but yet she seemed happy and motivated.

She compared the summer class with her class in Clinton Elementary. “I think the atmosphere in Clinton Elementary was for the kids to be cool. They did not want to do the right thing because they get more attention when they act out.” She referred to Lemar and Marquee as examples. Lemar’s youngest brother was the 8th grade, so he did not have siblings with similar ages to play with at home. She speculated that he might be ignored at home and trying to get attention by disturbing the class. However, she did not think it was a good solution to give students attention when they requested it in wrong ways. “A lot of times I ignored him, … that worked better for him than to stop him and give him what he wanted [attention].” She was concerned about fairness when dealing with
students’ behavioral issues. “Marquee, he wanted attention [by not following instructions] and he did get it. You think that if kids do their work and never get into a lot of trouble, they do not get a lot of attention--which is unfortunate” (personal conversation, June 22, 2004).

According to Nicole, many factors contributed to the differences in student performance and behavior between Nicole’s summer school class and the previous one in Clinton Elementary. In addition to the school environment, student motivation, parent contacts, Nicole thought the small classroom size (only 15 students) and the length of instruction (only half day), made teaching easier in the summer school. She seemed to be able to show more teaching competence and was less stressed in this school context.

*Her current school.* Nicole moved to Washington Elementary Elementary School in 2004. She had 26 students. Two of the students were Muslim, two were biracial, African American and White, and the rest were African American. Two students paid fully for their own lunch, and the other had either free (23) or reduced (1) priced meals. There was one female student identified as ADD without medication, there was one male student identified as ADHD with medication. Most of the students were from the neighborhood between two suburban areas, Greenhall and Clintonville. The socio-economic status of the families at Washington Elementary was better than those who were at Clinton Elementary. Unlike Clinton Elementary which was surrounded mostly by houses, Washington Elementary was close to a shopping center where there were grocery stores, banks, gas station, restaurants, and so on. The students were exposed to a living environment which was more diverse. They were dressed appropriately at school—for
example, most of them had on socks and clean clothes, which was not always the case at Clinton Elementary.

Nicole said that at Washington Elementary, there were few of the disrespectful behaviors that were common at Clinton Elementary. The students did not talk back to teachers. They followed her commands. “If you tell them to be quiet and listen to the teacher, they will pretty much do it.” Nicole only sent one student to the PEAK room for the whole year in 2004, while she used to do this all the time in 2003, “and that was my ADHD student. He hadn’t had his medicine. He ran around and hit a bunch of kids.” She had different feelings about sending students to the PEAK room at her earlier and current classrooms:

There was something that I really had to get him out of the room, … not something that I could not handle. So to me, that was completely different. That was why I look relaxed to you, because I am not so stressed out by school (personal conversation, May 10, 2005).

Seventy percent of Nicole’s first graders at Washington Elementary passed the standardized tests in math. She usually got around 75% of homework packages back. Many of the students’ parents read with them at home. Half of the parents would come to the Parent-Teacher conferences. In contrast, at Clinton Elementary, only one or two parents came to the conference. Most of the students had not seen books until they came to school at kindergarten. Nicole felt that parent support influenced the differences in student achievement at these two schools. Though she still had some students whose parents did not really support their children, her current class did much better than her students at Clinton Elementary.

*The second grader substitute teacher.* One day, at Washington Elementary, Nicole heard someone crying in the hall way. It was the substitute teacher of one of the
second grade classes. She complained to Nicole that the students were mean to her.

Nicole comforted the substitute teacher and suggested that she take a short break. She volunteered to look after the class while the teacher left the classroom to try and collect herself.

Nicole told me that the second graders had the same teacher for both first and second grade. The principal wondered whether the students acted up because they were sort of fed up with the class for two years. However, Nicole had other thoughts about the second grade classes:

But I do not know, they said the second graders are bad, but I don’t think they are bad. Because of what I saw in Clinton Elementary, I wouldn’t say that they are bad. I would say that they probably need a little more structure than what they have because their teachers are out a lot [absent]. They haven’t had anything consistent this year, so I do not think they are bad. But if you ask the second grade teachers, they will say they are bad… (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).

Nicole’s experiences at Clinton Elementary seemed to extend her tolerance for students’ behaviors. She also got a good sense about the contextual factors that were related to particular classroom issues.

Lemar. Nicole kept in contact with her colleagues at Clinton Elementary. One third grade teacher told her that Lemar was doing very well this year. The teacher thought Lemar was smart but that he just could not focus or use his brain when he needed to. He generally behaved himself in the classroom, but got into trouble in other places like gym or music class. Nicole gave the teacher some suggestions based on her earlier experiences with Lemar:

I just told her to be hard on him from the beginning, to not show him any kind of weakness or niceness until he earned it, because he sees that as a weakness if you are nice. I was too nice to him in the beginning…(personal conversation, December 10, 2004).
Nicole thought Lemar made progress because of the strategic challenges that came from his teacher. His teacher told Nicole later that Lemar did not work hard and kept playing around until one day he found something serious. His teacher kept him for recess and gave him a book to read. He could not read it. She let him know that the book was at the third grade level which the other students could read but he could not—he was behind. She told him that he could not read it because he had been playing around all this time. Nicole thought it was that kind of challenge that helped Lemar. “He realized how far he was behind. I don’t think any kids want to be not successful, can’t read. So I think that was important for her to show him that.”

In addition to outside stimuli, Nicole thought the inner factor of development might contribute to Lemar’s self-awareness.

And he is probably old enough now to see [the difference]…. Because for first or second grade levels, you do not see who’s below the grade level, and who’s above. But once you start getting older, you know who the smarter kids are and who the kids are that don’t get it (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).

When all the factors, inside and outside, take place at the right time, Nicole believed students like Lemar can be motivated to learn for their own sake. From her experience and interactions with her previous colleagues, Nicole identified numerous factors that she believed could help students’ learning.

*The reading programs.* Nicole thought the reading program at the new school helped the student achievement, too. She felt the students could learn more by reading in their home classroom:

My first graders know more than my second grade students at Clinton Elementary, and I always think that goes back to the reading programs. At my [current] school, it’s literacy collaborative, so I have my own kids for reading. I pull them in reading groups in the morning. And you know at Clinton Elementary,
we had Success for All. The kids went to different rooms for reading. So I think the reading programs have a lot to do [with students’ success]…(personal conversation, December 10, 2004).

Beside consistent instruction, Nicole emphasized the importance of research-based teaching strategies, such as Reading Recovery. Four months after she arrived at the new school, Nicole noticed the differences that an intervention program with trained teachers could make in student achievement. She compared the professional and non-professional tutoring programs at the two schools:

At Clinton Elementary, they had kids that received reading tutoring, but it wasn’t teachers, they were parents, assistants, they didn’t have a degree, they didn’t have any training on how to teach reading, so I think it’s better to have teachers, somebody that has training in reading. You need to use research-based strategies, you don’t know what the parents were doing with the kids, or what the assistant is doing. You can see a difference. We have Reading Recovery at my new school. I have four of my kids that are in Reading Recovery. So that helps (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).

Nicole learned about Reading Recovery from her mother who had been a Reading Recovery teacher for several years. She wanted to be trained as a Reading Recovery teacher, too. Unfortunately, the school would not support Reading Recovery training any more. They would adopt another new reading program the following year.

Prior knowledge. Nicole thought that the students’ prior knowledge also made them better learners. Her students at Washington Elementary had a variety of life experiences which provided a knowledge base for further learning:

Most of them they go out to eat, go to the movies. They’ve been to parks, and things like that. If I give them a writing assignment, write about a time you went to a trip, every one of my kids can write something this year. Last year, I had kids who had never been on a vacation, and they did not understand what a vacation was. I had kids who had never been to a movie. So when I talked about movie, they did not understand what I was saying (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).
Teaching at Washington Elementary seemed to be easier for Nicole because she had a group of students familiar with the norms of instruction and mainstream culture. Their prior knowledge made their learning more meaningful than those who did not have the same prior knowledge with which to connect new knowledge.

_Diversity in the environment._ Nicole thought that the diverse home cultures that the students brought into the classroom at Washington Elementary also helped generate interest for learning. Students enjoyed it more when they could talk and write about something related to their own culture.

For example, there was one time they were supposed to write letters asking them what they wanted for Christmas. So you know, Muslim kids told me that there was a Muslim Holiday they called Eid --that was when they get gifts, which will be at the end of Ramadan. So I told them, you can write a letter about what you want for Eid (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).

The students enjoyed learning about each other’s cultures. For example, they had some “experts” from the Muslim culture among them.

Last week I did a “Holiday Day.” I did Christmas, Hanakkah, Kwanzaa, and Ramadan. When we got to Ramadan, all the kids got really interested, like they wanted to know about fasting, and they wanted to know about a mosque when they go to pray. And they [the Muslim students] were able to tell the kids about their religion (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).

The students were exposed to diverse cultures in their classroom life. They learned to be respectful toward these differences.

They know…because they see it and they see Malia’s mom come to school. She wears a head scarf and robe at school every day. When I was reading the book, the kids saw a picture of a woman with her face covered. You know, we talked about that. They do not make fun of them because they are different (personal conversation, December 10, 2004).
Nicole said she strategically connected her instructions to what the students were familiar with in their lives and consequently increased their interest in learning. Cultural diversity thus became one resource for learning in her classroom.

Nicole thought that the intervention program, school environment, students’ family backgrounds, and other social contextual factors contributed to the changes in her teaching practices. She felt the school system was supportive, though it was not perfect. This year, one of her team members left because she could not bear the pressure of teaching at Washington Elementary. It was her second year of practice. She was still leaning about classroom management and other teaching skills. Unlike her colleague, Nicole was satisfied with her current school because there were more resources than Clinton Elementary. She felt, at Clinton Elementary, she got only 25% of the support that she needed for her teaching. Given the gain in her teaching competence, I asked Nicole whether she would be confident to go back to teach at Clinton Elementary now. She said that she was able to do that, but she would not feel happy to go back.

The year 2005-2006 will be Nicole’s second year teaching at Washington Elementary. In the same year, Melissa will start teaching at a school in Alabama. Unlike the other two teachers in this study (Nicole and Morgan), Melissa stayed at Winston Elementary for the first four years of her teaching practice. The following sections describe Melissa’s classroom practices in the third year of her practice and her perspectives about teaching and learning before she left for Alabama (2005-6).

Case 2: Melissa

The space management was efficient in Melissa’s classroom. There was a blackboard in front of the classroom. On the top of the blackboard was a strip of paper. A
clip was put on the paper to indicate how many of the students had earned or lost their recess time. They earned extra recess time if they behaved well, and vice versa. At the left side was a bookshelf. Books were classified by reading levels. On the wall behind the bookshelf were different signs. For example:

- You are responsible for you.
- If you expect respect, be the first to show it.
- Sit smart! At seats: back to backs, seats to seats, hands quiet, eyes on. speaker.
- On floor: feet crossed, seats to floor, hands quiet, eyes on speaker.
- Handwriting rubric: letters are formed, spaced, spelled correctly….

On the table at the left rear part of the room, there were three differently colored cans—green, yellow, red. Clips written with individual students’ names were put on the cans. If the students followed the rules, their clips stayed at the green can. Those whose clips stayed in the green could do several things without asking for permission, such as sharpening their pencils, going to the restroom, getting supplies, etc. The students lost these privileges if they failed to follow the classroom rules, and their clips got moved to the yellow can. If the students did not show improvement of their behaviors and kept disturbing the class, their clips were moved to the red can and Melissa would send a notice to the students’ parents.

The teacher’s desk was at the front right side of the room. Those who could not concentrate on tasks would be asked to work at Melissa’s desk. On the other hand, if the students felt their neighbors were noisy, they could do their assignments at the carpet area in front of the blackboard. The closets for storing clothes and instructional materials were put at the right side of the classroom. The posters about characteristics of good citizens were hung on the closet doors.
At the back of the classroom were computers. Students used computers to do search, type, or play games at recess times. Those who disturbed the instruction might be asked to sit at the computer sites to do their assignments. There were five tables at the center of the classroom. The students were divided into five groups. Each group worked at their own table and had a captain who was responsible for distributing and collecting assignments or books. The students took turns as captains.

The following are selected facets or events to describe life in Melissa’s classroom. These facets were chosen based on their representativeness of a traditional school day in her classroom.

The students. Five students had learning difficulties in Melissa’ classroom. She said she had different expectations for them. Michael had strong emotions and was diagnosed as bi-polar manic depressive, borderline personality disorder, ADHD, gifted. He loved to read and had talents at math. Since Melissa first met him in September, 2002, Michael had progressed in emotional control and social skills. He became softer and relatively polite. Melissa claimed she hoped he could enjoy writing more and be able to control behavioral problems so that his academic performance could be improved.

Jimi was another student who had difficulty in learning. Diagnosed as ADD, he also had problem in attention and anger management. When he concentrated, his performance was above average; if not, below average. Melissa thought of him as an intelligent student but needing support and high expectations. She hoped that he could develop higher self-esteem and believe in himself.

Yoli was easily distracted, too. Her performance was below average, but she tried hard to stick with what she was supposed to do. Melissa described her as talking in ways
that were “gregarious and garrulous.” Now she was speaking politely, with “please” at the ends of sentences. Melissa expected her to be more polite when talking to people and to limit her whining.

Melvin’s achievement was behind. He used to “follow the pack” and also had problem of concentration. Melissa hoped that he would make more efforts in learning.

Melissa described Ramon who strived to get power in the classroom. She said he liked to be a leader. His mom was in jail. His emotions were not stable especially when his baby sister died. Melissa said she needed to tell him repeatedly that she cared about him to comfort him. She hoped to see him to find appropriate ways to empower himself, rather than acting out.

Choose your neighbor. On the blackboard, Melissa wrote: “Sit by the people you can learn by. If I need to move you, there will be consequences.” Melissa suggested Norlan and Sheila sit at different tables. Norlan shook his head while moving himself to the other table. Originally he chose to sit beside Rosa, Sheila, and Oga. Now he chose to sit with Robert.

Melissa told students to make their decisions based on the criteria of whether they could learn from the persons that they chose to sit beside. If they just wanted to sit with friends that they could play with—that was not a good decision. Melissa would separate those who only played but did not learn well together.

The quiet sign. After Norlan moved to sit with Robert, he talked with him. Robert told Norlan no talking, and the students across the table showed a quiet sign. Shortly, Melissa asked Norlan to move to sit by himself.
The students were taught to raise their hands to show a quiet sign, a letter V, when they felt the classroom was noisy. Usually, the more students reacted to the signal, by raising their hands, the quieter the classroom would become. Phobie, Jimmy, Anitain, Mackenzie, Jasmine J., and Jasmine S. were usually the students who started the signal when necessary. Melissa felt these students were helpful for classroom management.

*The taboo words.* Sheila was asked to remove her clip for talking in class. She thought it was not her fault because what she said was simply in response to the talking of Rose and Oga. “I hate….” Sheila was very upset. Melissa corrected her language. Sheila then went to move her clip from the green can to the yellow can. If her clip got to be moved to the red can, Melissa would send a warning home—that was a big issue to Sheila. She was afraid to get a warning. When she went back to the table, both Rose and Oga had moved to the carpet to write. Now Sheila was working by herself.

Melissa did not allow the students to say “shut up” or “I hate.” These two phrases were not allowed. She would ask the students to use other nicer ways to talk whenever she heard inappropriate language use.

*Computer presentation.* One day, the class was doing a science project. The students could use the computer to create their own presentations. Melissa gave instructions for the students to complete their projects by doing important things, like type the words, and later adding the details such as colors. Ramon insisted on his own way of doing the project. He wanted to do color first. Melissa told him if he did not follow the instructions, she would delete his computer file and save the space for somebody else. Ramon said to keep his file. They compromised with each other. If she
did not delete his file, he would redo the project the way she wanted him to do it. Melissa promised him that she would not delete it.

This third grade class had gotten used to doing several tasks by computer. They learned to do searches through the internet and design their presentations using PowerPoint. Melissa encouraged the use of the computer so that the students could prepare themselves for future learning in this technology era.

Privilege in the classroom. Michael was eager to try to use PowerPoint. Melissa told him that all of the computers were being used by the other classmates. He needed to wait. Michael appeared angry and walked back to his table putting his head on the desk. I saw one student finish his task and told Michael that one computer was available. He then went to the computer to start his work.

Ernest, who sat beside Michael, was talking to him. Melissa gave him a warning. He stopped for a few seconds and started to talk again. Melissa asked him to move his clip to the yellow can. He went back and continued his conversation with Michael. Finally, he was asked to move his clip to the red can. Melissa asked Michael to come to her for a private talk. She told him that being able to use computer was a privilege. Therefore, he should not talk with others while using the computer or he needed to move himself from the computer.

Thanks for your question! Jimi went to table 5 and sang a song to Alex. Alex laughed with Jimi. Jimi then went to table one, stopped by shortly and turned to Melissa to ask a question. Melissa thanked him for asking his question and provided explanations. Jimi went back to his seat with a complacent smile. Later he went to talk with Alex again.
Melissa told Alex that Jimi was trying to get his attention and his work would not get done. Melissa suggested Alex move to another seat.

Decision making was an important topic in Melissa’s class. She told the students how to make the right decision. For example, whenever their work got interrupted by their neighbors, they should move themselves to another place. The carpet was the place that the students often chose to move to. For the students who had difficulty in concentration, like Phiphi, Shefu, or Melvin, Melissa tried to encourage them especially when they showed interest in learning. Nolan seemed to particularly like her praise today.

Jimi’s table. Because of his continuous disturbing behaviors, Jimi was asked to sit alone. He had a desk and chair at the right side of the classroom. Melissa came for a couple of times and gave him positive comments. Jimi did not have any particular facial expression. After Melissa left, he went to get some tissue and carefully cleaned his noise. Then he took out his snack to eat, quietly and slowly. When break time started, Jimi stood up happily as if he had been waiting for this moment for centuries. He went to chat with Alex and played with Michael. He laughed and enjoyed playing with his classmates. I found that, if Jimi had reached his energy level at 95% during the recess time, he seemed to be using only 5% of his energy during the study time.

Melissa allowed Jimi to go back to work with the other students if he could focus on his work. But when he was with his classmates, he usually wanted to play with them regardless whether it was recess time or not. Before Jimi learned to direct his energy in different sections of work, Melissa had to arrange the boundaries in the classroom so that he would not interrupt the learning of other classmates.
Are you happy? It was 1:00 pm. The students were doing some handicrafts making snowflakes. Michael got upset because he felt people around were bothering him. Alex told Michael where to get the snowflake papers and asked him, “Are you happy?” Michael told Alex that he wanted to play chess. Alex told him that he would like to do snowflakes and a poem first. After he finished this work he would play chess with him. Melissa noticed Michael’s emotional behaviors. She asked him what was on his mind. Michael said no.

Michael easily got upset and showed strong emotions. Sometimes his emotion resulted in violent behaviors. Melissa tried to help him calm down through having dialogues with him. He was not always willing be openminded. However, when he was in good mood, he would volunteer to do her a favor in the classroom. In spite of his emotional issues, Melissa knew Michael was a quick learner. She allowed him to read his favorite books when he finished his work. It was not uncommon to see Michael bury himself in reading while the other students were still working on their tasks. He looked content and happy when in his own reading world.

Melissa described her perspectives toward Michael and Poland, the two students who had discipline issues in the classroom. “Michael was a really good reader.” “I love Michael. I really do. He’s just a neat kid. I really like working with him.” Sometimes he might get really mad at her, screaming at her, especially when Melissa wanted him to write things. When he got over it, probably within two minutes, he would go back to normal.
Poland did not get as angry at Melissa as Michael did, but when he got mad, he would just sit and sustain it for a day, and not ever work through it. Therefore, Melissa felt that Poland was angrier and more difficult to deal with than Michael.

Both of Michael and Pland had very involved parents. Melissa had contact with Poland’s mother regularly, about once a week, either through notes or phone calls. They had several meetings during the year trying to help him. Melissa also had good relations with Michael’s parents.

*High achieving kids.* Melissa liked to give the students various options to complete assignments. For example, they could choose what they wanted to do from a list of tasks to meet the requirements of a social study project. Melissa used to be a gifted student in school. She said she had felt bored in many classrooms because the tasks were too easy to her. Therefore, Melissa claimed she had empathy, especially for students who were not encouraged to use their full potential. Through flexible instruction, she responded that she tried to give individual students opportunities to cultivate their abilities.

*The support system at school.* It was a writing lesson. The students needed to write poems about themselves. I sat beside Jimi and found him finishing the poem before the other assignments. Melissa read his poem where he described himself as "evil (bad in school)", and a "very very bad" boy. Melissa talked with Jimi at the end of the class. She ensured him that he was not bad or evil. She told him that she had described him as good student when she talked with his family. Melissa cried when she tried to explain her perspective about him. Jimi cried, too. They gave each other a hug at the end of conversation.
After this talk, Melissa still felt sad and went to see the school counselor. She suggested Melissa not telling Jimi’s mother about his writing right now. The counselor knew Jimi’s mother treated him harshly--she was a serious parent. She recommended Melissa talk with Jimi about his poem again later on. When interacting with him, she could help him reflect what was going on in his mind when writing the poem. She could also ask him how he felt now. The counselor added that Melissa needed to make Jaylon understand that she did not have negative feelings toward him in spite of his behavioral problems in the classroom. The counselor seemed to know well Jaylon’s family background well. Melissa looked better after talking with the counselor. She thought the counselor was a great person with whom to talk.

The school counselor was one of the resources from whom Melissa could get help for her teaching. She was trained to do therapy and counseling groups with the students. Unfortunately, she also needed to organize their testing. “So she has less and less time to do the things that she was trained to do.” Besides the school counselor, a school psychologist came in once a week. Another person who majored in special education came to help the counselor and psychologist to organize testing and contact parents for signatures on school notes. In total, there were three staff persons for mental health. Sometimes, Melissa also talked with the PEAK person. The Peak teacher knew the students well and was able to share helpful information with Melissa.

Melissa also talked with the four teachers in her team. The team members planned lessons together and also exchanged ideas about their teaching. Among the team members, Melissa spent more personal time with Rachel, who was the next door teacher. She worked with Rachel closely. Either when Melissa felt that she could not deal with
some students any more, or it was the students who needed a break from her, Melissa would “trade” students with Rachel. They helped each other out when they had a difficult time coping with discipline issues. Melissa seemed to have several resources to support her teaching practice.

*Line up if your first name has one syllable.* Melissa liked to make learning interesting in different contexts, including the restroom break time. She created signed languages for students to respond to her instruction. For example, in a measurement lesson, she told the students to give her different hand signs to indicate whether one object was bigger or smaller in quantity than the other. She created instructional materials to guide students imagining how water drops changed their form in different conditions. The students learned through physical engagement in the activities and had a lot of fun. Today, Melissa asked students to line up for break by the syllables of their first names. “If your first name has one syllable, you may line up.” “If your first name has two syllables, please line up…” Students giggled when they found themselves lining up in the wrong places. Melissa helped students find the syllables of their names by clapping her hands. The students followed her instructions and found the correct numbers of syllables for their names.

Getting the students ready for the restroom break was not always as smooth as this time. Sometimes, Melissa canceled the break because the students were too noisy. She said she expected them to remain quiet when lining up. She had thought of different strategies to keep them following the rules. Sometimes the strategies worked and sometimes not. But today she had a good idea to have them line up in order and with a good learning experience.
The math class. Melissa noticed that the students did not get some of the concepts from the last math class. She brought to class several bottles. She put water into a small bottle from a bigger bottle. She explained the measurement units for each size of bottle. The students appeared interested in watching her demonstration.

Jaylon was also engaged in the activities. He seemed to like this math class. I asked him some questions. With my help, Jaylon almost finished the math practice. However, he was eager to draw some pictures to show his peers. He showed Michael and Melvin a machine man. They both laughed at the pictures. Encouraged by their responses, Jimi added more details to the machine man and showed it to Alex. Several weeks ago, Alex had gotten his clip moved to the yellow because he played with Jaylon during practice time. Since then, he had tried to ignore Jimi’s call. But when he saw Jaylon’s machine man, Alex could not hold it and burst into a big laugh. Jaylon was able to learn, but he seemed to want to play more playing than learn.

Recess time. The students had learned that if they could not earn extra recess time, they should at least try to retain what they had by behaving themselves. This morning, the classroom was noisy. Melissa gave a warning for losing recess time. Peter worried about that. He frequently raised the silent sign when his neighbors were talking.

There were several steps before individual students lost their recess time completely. After their clips were moved to the red can, they lost part of their recess time. If they continuously had discipline issues, they lost the recess time completely. Finally, they would go to the PEAK. They might jump ahead of these steps if they did some serious, “like kicking somebody else.”
The students would gain extra time for recess when they were quiet during transitions, if they worked very well when doing a group project, or if the specialists told Melissa that the class did well during music or PE class.

During recess, Melissa released the students who volunteered to help their peers do assignments. Sometimes she asked students to volunteer in some situations. Like in her first year teaching, as Melissa reported, there was a girl who had low self-esteem. She asked the girl to help her classmates and that made her feel good about herself. But most of the time she asked for volunteers rather than request them to do so. “I don’t like to force kids to help. Because a lot of time the brighter kids are kind of being forced to help when they have their own stuff that they can be doing…. To be honest, it is my job. If you want to help, that is great.” She did not want to not ask them if they did not have interest in helping.

*Sharing time.* After writing lessons, Melissa would ask some students if they wanted to share their writing with the class. Today it was Javonta that volunteered. Michael was not interesting in listening. He kept reading his own book. Melissa asked Michael to apologize for his behavior. The sharing time provided opportunities for the class to exchange thoughts about their readings, writings, and their perspectives about the characteristics of good citizens. Therefore, Melissa would like the students to pay attention to the sharing and to learning from it.

Respectfulness was one of the major focuses in Melissa’s classroom. She asked students to be polite to their peers and said “sorry” or “please” when necessary. She also gave lessons about responsibility, fairness, kindness, compassion, and other good characteristics. She also demonstrated for them how to arrange their folders in boxes and
to be organized. Melissa tried to teach the students about good behaviors when she had time.

_The rewards._ Melissa walked around the classroom to give students stickers. Michael asked for one, too. Melissa asked if he knew why he did not get a sticker. She only gave stickers to the students who were concentrated on their task. She told him that he needed to work in order to get stickers. Michael told her that he would work.

Melissa knew Michael was a smart student and she liked him, too. But she would not grant him privileges merely because of his academic achievement. He had to fulfill particular requirements to get rewards. Rewards were associated with fairness in this classroom.

_I am on yellow._ Sheila’s clip was moved to the yellow can again because of her talking during the class. She was sad. However, when lining up to the lunch, she started to sing a song that she made for herself, “I am on yellow, hm, hm….” Sheila was a happy figure although her achievement was below the average. Her mother was a tall African American. She kept frequent contact with Melissa. Sometimes she came to help Melissa’s class with art or craftwork. Sheila was irritatedly talkative at school so that she was not welcome by her peers sometimes. However, her mother’s support seemed to be one source of her self-contentment and persistency in learning. Melissa explained why Sheila was happy that she was on yellow. “Normally by noon she was on red.” No wonder Sheila would sing a song for having her clip stay on the yellow can.

_The teacher at the next door._ Melissa reminded the class that if they did not finish their work, they could not attend the holiday party. Michael was asked to move his clip because he had done nothing for five minutes since she called upon him last time.
Michael showed a sad expression and went to move his clip. He came back to his seat but still did not start his work. He checked if Melissa was watching him. She was busy helping the other students. Jaylon went to talk with Michael and Alex listened, too. Melissa turned to them and asked Michael and Jaylon to move their clips. Michael waived to Melissa and said, “bye!” He had to move out of the room after his got several warnings. “He knew the consequences. He made the choice,” Melissa said.

Melissa negotiated with the students about the consequences of their behaviors. They were responsible for their own choices. The students would be sent to Rachel’s room or the PEAK room if they did not follow the instruction. In this case, Michael seemed to know where he should move to when Melissa told him to move his clip. Rachel had been a kindergarten teacher, “so sometimes it was effective to send kids to her” because she would tell them that their behaviors were like her kindergarten students. And she would remind them that they were 3rd graders and should not have the same problems. Rachel, the teacher at next door was a big support for Melissa.

*The holiday party.* Melissa told the class about a Jewish holiday, Hanukkah. The students were asked about their knowledge of the holidays. They played a game using Hebrew characters. A student asked Melissa if there was a Santa. Melissa replied that she was Jewish and had no idea about that. “That’s always a sensitive thing for me. You know for some kids in the 3rd grade they still believe that there is Santa.” She did not feel comfortable responding to this type of question, “because it was not something that was part of my culture. So that’s usually what I told the kids that, Santa never came to my house because I am a Jewish--sort of a way to get out of that question.”
Melissa was excited to teach the students about a Jewish holiday. She taught them to play a dreidel game, which was part of the Hanukkah activities. Dreidel meant “a great miracle happened there.” She explained, in times when Jewish people could not talk about their history or culture with their children, the parents used this game to teach their heritage to avoid being killed. Therefore, if somebody approached them and asked what they were doing, the Jewish parents would tell them that they were just playing a game.

*Cultural lessons.* Melissa did a whole unit about underground railroad, about the stories of slavery, in the spring. She and the students talked about how people escaped from slavery, who helped their escape, and how the white and black people worked against slavery.

The kids really enjoyed doing the unit. We read a lot about kids who were in slavery, we acted things out so they could really get a sense of what it had been like to be scared, to be separated from parents…. I try to tell them the stories about people from different cultures (first interview).

Melissa tried to expose the students to a variety of cultures, especially the ones that were related with the students’ ethnic backgrounds. Like this year, she had a Vietnamese girl, and two Chinese girls. Most of their classmates did not know that they were ethnically different. Melissa helped the class to learn about the differences. She thought that meaningful dialogue and learning about cultures in the class helped the Vietnamese student develop her identity, “because she did not want to be [identified as] Chinese, because she wasn’t Chinese [she was a Vietnamese].” Melissa would like the class to know about that, too.

*Tell the book not to spin.* Melissa saw Jaylon spin his book and told him stop doing so. Jaylon said he did not spin the book. Later Melissa saw him do the same thing
again and told him to “tell the book not to spin.” The other students talked to the book for Jimi, too. All of the students laughed and Jaylon stopped. He also laughed.

I found that sometimes with Jimi that he did not want to take blame for things. So by stopping having him be the one being doing it, and put it in on the object, then it became kind of a humorous thing. He sometimes liked to have control. He would not stop if being requested to do so (personal conversation, June 15, 2005).

It was at the end of the school year. Melissa seemed to have gotten to know Jaylon well enough to have smoother interactions with him. However, Jaylon’s mother decided to have Jaylon move to a charter school in the following year. In a personal conversation, Jaylon told me that he had learned what was taught at school. His mother also taught him a lot at home. Therefore, he was not interested in the instruction in the class.

*Book club.* Melissa was the only teacher who did book club. She said that she was only allowed to do so because she had kids who were above level in reading:

I had children from all three rooms, but I was the only teacher who did book clubs. The only reason I had the flexibility was because it was the last three weeks of school and I had the kids who were above level (electronic communication, July 20, 2005).

All the groups of the book club had to do within-group presentation each time they met. They did two whole class presentations.

*A spiritual moment.* Melissa asked the students to put their heads on their desks, to stop thinking about things going on, and to concentrate on their breathing for a minute. “It was sort of a way to take a break…think about what we have been doing.” She also told the students if they did not behave well, she would not talk nicely.

It was a day that the students could not concentrate. Therefore, Melissa led them to do something different. “Sometimes I just like to try something, it is like, ok, nothing
is working, well, I will try this, see if it works. I tend to do that a lot.” Melissa had many ideas to try for her classroom management.

1, 2, 3, all eyes on me. This was one classroom management technique that Melissa used to get students’ attention. The students needed to pretend to freeze after they counted to five. Melissa learned the technique from one of her students’ experience in another classroom. She had been improving her teaching techniques since she graduated from M.Ed. program. She used those techniques to directed students’ attention or to help them calm down. The students liked to play these routines with her.

Guessing the teacher’s age. Hamza made a card and asked his peers to sign it. They gave the card to Melissa as a birthday gift. Melissa was happy to get the card. She put it on the wall of classroom. A student asked how old she was. Melissa created a math question for them to guess her age. She was good at transforming a play time into a moment for learning. The students thought hard to resolve the math question in order to know her age. Some students got the correct answer. Their teacher was 26 years old.

The following school year. Melissa had another group of 3rd graders in 2004. Melissa still met some students of her 2003 class in the school. Melvin would come to her classroom, telling her that he was doing good in his classroom, and asked if he could get a pencil or candy. Melissa said Melvin did very well this year. He does more of his work than he had done in her room. He had started to make the progress in her room at the end of the school year. His progress continued this year. “Sheila is still Sheila this year.” Melissa smiled when she thought of the girl and her whining ways. “Ramon is doing very well this year.….” When he saw Melissa on the hallway, he always waived to her and gave her hug. Melissa had worked hard to engage those students who were
academically behind in learning. She was glad to see their improvement the following year.

*Her classroom in 2004.* Her third graders in 2004 were different from the 2003 group. This year she had more students who had behavioral problems. She could not play with the students during break and have fun together. Playing game or having some activities for relaxation often meant that the students were hitting or fighting with each other quickly.

It sounds silly but it was what was happening…. It was like, you know, you were talking and two minutes later, it started with somebody yelling something and within one minutes or perhaps two minute they had been hitting if you did stop them immediately (interview, June 15, 2005).

Besides playing games, Melissa could not let this group of students make their own decision about choosing their neighbors, either. There were six of the students who did not get well along with their classmates. Melissa had to assign them to sit at single desks. In regard to the recess recorder, the paper strip over the blackboard, she still used it sometimes to encourage learning. However, few students were really concerned about it. The recess recorder did not work very for this class. The students were not as responsive as the previous group. She used to have several kids who signaled the quiet signs when the classroom was noisy. This year she only had one or two students still doing that. “I just have a whole different group of kids.”

Melissa thought respectfulness was an important focus in her classroom. Nevertheless, one thing in year 2004 that bothered her was that, no matter how hard she tried to teach respectfulness, “a lot of them were just not respectful.” She thought a lot of their behaviors were developed in their home life. They used the words like “shut up” to their classmates. “It got better though out of the year but some of them they still resorted
to it when they got really mad.” Melissa thought there were several reasons for her to
teach respectfulness more efficiently in the previous class. She had more time to do the
good citizen characters in 2003 so that the students made progress in their behaviors. The
2004 class needed to spend more time on test preparation. As mentioned earlier, their
family backgrounds were also different from the previous groups. “The kids started from
different places.” Therefore, it was hard for some of them to learn to be respectful and get
well along with people.

Changes in demographic neighborhood. The demographic neighborhood at
Winston Elementary changed in the past year. Many white families moved out. Criminal
incidents increased. In 2004, there were 7 students, including a kindergarten child who
was just five years old, who got expelled from the school. The principal got tired of
dealing with them, and decided to expel them during the last fix to ten days of school.
These students were being increasingly violent with the other students. Three of the
students who got expended were from Melissa’s classroom. The changes in neighborhood
included the high mobility rate, which made teaching more difficult. Melissa had only
seven students who stayed with her through the whole year. With this high mobility,
Melissa felt that it was hard to train the students to think of the consequences of their
behaviors and other disciplines issues.

Longer consoling time. Melissa had three students who stole things frequently.
One of them stole a laptop at school. There were other 8 girls who had issues about
relationships and problems in getting along with each other. The consular came in the
class to help the students being nice to each other. She used to come to the classroom
three times a year. This year, she did a couple of more time with the students. She met
with students who had particular issues. The eight girls who had trouble in relationship
met with the counselor every other Monday recess. There were only four students in
Melissa’s class who did not need help from the counselor. “It was a difficult year this
year” (Meeting in 2005). Beside the changes in the neighborhood and the students’
discipline issues, the test system and school policies contributed to the challenges that
Melissa felt.

**Testing.** The students’ achievement in last year (2003-2004) was good. The
school tried many things to maintain that record, though it sounded nearly impossible for
Melissa, given all the changes in the environment. The school required the students to do
testing practice in the afternoons for three months. The students lost their time to have
social studies or science lessons because of the test preparation. Melissa did not think
what the school did was fair to the students. The 3rd graders this year (2004-05) came to
the school with lower test scores than the 3rd graders the last year. However, the tests
scores of the former were to be compared with those of the latter in order to determine
the Yearly Improvement Status (YIS) of the school. The 3rd graders were expected to
make gains on the last year’s group regardless in the differences of their starting point.
Because of the testing pressure, the teachers could not teach individual students based on
what they needed. Rather, they had to teach them how to do the tests. In spite of the
efforts and changes in school policies in 2004, Winston Elementary failed to gain the
required annual progress, as Melissa had predicted.

**The reading program.** The change in the reading lessons was one of the examples
that showed how the school seriously looked for solutions to increase their test scores. On
a Wednesday in November, 2004, the school was informed about the reading test results.
The school decided to divide all of the students into groups based on their reading achievement. Starting from the following Monday, the teachers did not teach their home class for reading and writing any more. They were responsible for teaching the students with particular reading levels. The school hoped the students could be more focused when they got instructions that matched well their reading competence. However, in groups that combined children from several classrooms, the teachers had few ideas about what the students from the other classroom had learned during the rest of day. “It gave you less time to tie things together.” The teachers could only follow the curriculum. “You do not know whether the other teachers help tie things together.” The teachers did not cooperate but taught their particular group of students who were moved around the classrooms. Melissa thought that the lack of cooperation was one of the biggest problems in education.

The reading program in the next year, 2005-2006, might make things worse, because of the scripted curriculum. The reading program in the morning would last for two hours. The teachers would not have additional time for team planning. The lesson could not be interrupted. That was, no break time for the students.

They give you a timer, they tell you that you have 20 minutes to do vocabulary. And whatever it is, when the timer goes off, you are done. If you finish it early, you wait until the timer goes off (interview, June 15, 2005).

The districts created this curriculum, which was neither based on research nor students’ learning condition. The district told the schools that, in 2005-2006, they could either choose what the district told them to do, or if the school wanted to choose their own reading program, they needed to justify for the decision. In 2006-2007, the school would
have to do what the district prescribed anyway. Winston Elementary decided to start with the district’s program in the district in the fall of 2005.

*Challenges of the new curriculum.* In 2003, Melissa only had some writing genres that were mandated, such as a story, letter writing, and poem. This year, they assigned topics, one piece of writing every week. The district told the teachers what to teach without alignment with a systematic framework. For example, in November, the students were required to write how to plant a seed—something that they were could not experience except in the fall season. Melissa called the writing department to tell them about her complaint. The department told Melissa just to do what she was told to do. “You have your assignment, teach.” Not only did Melissa felt discouraged, but the students did not feel interested in their writing. Their writing was not good. She did not ask them to share their writing as much as she did in the 2003 class.

At the end of the school year in 2003, Melissa wrote down how she felt about the impact of the M.Ed. program on her teaching:

I think in part because of [the] M.Ed. [program], I detest what we are doing to our children. I believe that kids sometimes need more time than we can give them and that kids are more likely to drop out/fall through cracks than ever before. I can’t really speak to the difference in performance due to my training because I have virtually become a robot, reading scripted lessons and following curriculum designed around one test…. (open-ended survey question)

Melissa knew that her students needed extra help from other people. Some of them were not able to give it. Melissa was upset about that fact. When feeling stressed, she would talk to Rachel, her mother, grandmother, and her husband. Melissa’s mother used to be a teacher in multi-grade classes. She had students from first to third grades and most of them were academically behind. She talked with her mother sometimes three or four times a day, sharing or getting her suggestions. Melissa also tried to remind herself that
she was only one person, that she could not do everything. That thought helped keep her from being too stressful. In 2005, she would relocate to Alabama. She was looking forward to teaching in a suburban school where teachers could have more freedom to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

When Melissa starts her new job at Alabama in 2005-2006, Morgan will be returning to Riverview Elementary to teach. She had taken off since April in 2005 for the delivery of her new baby. Because of her outstanding teaching performance, the principal suggested to her that she get a certification to be a principal, too. Morgan does not want to be a principal. She wants to be close to her students in the classroom. She would rather go back to school to get certification to become a school psychologist if she got a chance. The following are description about Morgan and her teaching practices at Riverview Elementary.

Case 3: Morgan

It was a mixed-grades class with 11 fourth graders and 11 fifth graders. 15 of the students were non-white. 10 students had free lunch, two reduced lunch, and 10 paid fully for their lunch. The teacher’s desk was at a rear corner of the classroom. There was a daily schedule for lessons on the wall beside the teacher’s desk, for example:

9:00 Word study
9:15 Dance class
10:15 Reading
11:15 Science
12:00 lunch & recess
1:10 4th SSR; 5th math
1:45 4th math; 5th SSR
2:30 writing
3:15 dismissal
Morgan arranged the schedule for the next day before she left the school. The schedules were flexible and adjusted based on the learning needs of the students. They were never the same on any given day. In front of the classroom, there was a small whiteboard.

Every morning, the students would see the agenda of the day on the board:

Good morning! Today is Friday, April 02, 2004. Today’s helper is Alex. If you have a book order form & money, please give it to me. The word of the Day is goblet. Read silently when you’re finished.

At the other end of classroom were four computers and several electronic typing machines, called AlphaSmarts. Behind the computers were book shelves. Books were arranged neatly in piles. Students’ desks were arranged in a U shape. The fourth graders sat at the right side and the fifth graders sat at the side close to the teacher’s desk.

Surrounded by the desks was a space for group activities. If it was a lesson for the fifth grade, the fifth graders would come down to the center listening to the instruction, while the fourth graders remained at their seats doing independent or partner activities, and vice versa. The center space was also used for some whole class instruction, morning meeting, or stories reading. There were cushions for students to rest and listen to Morgan reading stories or to watch video tapes after lunch. On the wall outside of the classroom was an exhibition of students’ writing and projects. Morgan changed the content of bulletin boards as students had new work to display.

The following are sections introducing Morgan’s students, their family backgrounds, and how Morgan was involved with students in classroom activities. The topics or events are selected for discussion on the basis of their representativeness of the natures of Morgan’s classroom.
The students. This was a special class for its selection of students. Many of the students in this classroom were high achievement students and/or gifted students. One student’s IQ even reached 200. Many of the students had parents actively involved in the school. For example, Bailey’s mother, Carol, was the principal (president) of the parents’ organization. She did substitute teaching sometimes in Duxbury and also other Cleveland Public schools. Kenny’s mother came to help in the classroom often. Almost 99% of the parents returned permission for my research, including Elizabeth’s mother, who did not come to the school as often as the other parents. Four students with behavior issues or learning difficulties were put into the classroom, too. The school hoped these students could learn from their high achieving peers and this would improve their performance.

The students in this classroom knew they were in a special class. They knew they were different. On the other hand, their teacher, Morgan, felt honored and also pressured to be assigned to teach this class. This group of students demanded more time and efforts than the normal class because of their diverse needs.

The teacher. Morgan was the second youngest teacher at Riverview Elementary. Compared to the other older teachers, Morgan seemed to display more explicitly a kind of indomitable and unremitting energy. Her teaching style was creative and at a fast pace. She made quick decisions in the selection of teaching strategies tailored to students’ learning needs. She was active in searching for teaching resources. For example, she requested additional electronic typewriters for her class so that the students could store their writing in electronic files. She also liked to try different lessons plan or activities that she found on the internet. Morgan’s teaching practice revealed enormous exertions and characteristic enthusiasm related to her ideals for education.
**Colleagues.** Morgan liked to share her thoughts about teaching with the other teachers. They often stopped by her classroom to chat or exchange ideas. She worked closely with one of the teachers in particular.

I do quite a bit of collaboration with Denna [made name], who is the other 4th grade teacher at Riverview Elementary. Last year, our school went from having no scheduled planning time for the classroom teachers, to having one hour once a week. Denna [made name] and I meet during this hour to discuss what we're doing (interview, April 17, 2002).

In spite of her regular interactions with colleagues, Morgan perceptions about collaboration had changed from her earlier perspective. As mentioned earlier, in her first year teaching at Somerson Elementary, she had felt alone and missed the collaboration experiences in the M.Ed. program. With the growth of her teaching experience, Morgan became more independent and self-sufficient. When asked about her thoughts regarding collaboration with the other teachers at Riverview Elementary, she said, “It does help a bit.” However, she did not feel the same level of eagerness or reliance on collaboration as she had before. “I'm getting more used to ‘doing my own thing’, though. I have established my routines and how I do things, and while I think some collaboration is good, I've adjusted to working on my own more” (Electronic communication, May 5, 2005).

Morgan tended to lean on herself probably because of the unique nature of her class. It might be difficult for the other teachers in the normal classrooms to give suggestions helpful to deal with the two grades of students in Morgan’s classroom.

**The principal.** The principal’s presence was almost everywhere at the school. She greeted me sometimes when she saw me visit the school in the mornings. She might show up in the playground watching the students playing or picking up the trash on the ground. From time to time, she walked along the hallways and checked to see if things were
going well in the classrooms. There was one time she stopped by the door of Morgan’s classroom to see what I was doing with the video camera.

The principal had worked with Morgan at Somerson Elementary for one year before Morgan moved with her to Riverview Elementary. She highly valued Morgan’s teaching competence, especially her experiences in teaching a mixed-grade class. After she moved to Duxbury, she hired Morgan and let her teach the first graders for the first year. Then she had Morgan teach this mixed-grades class in the following school year, 2003-2004. The school performance showed significant gains after the principal started her job at Riverview Elementary. Morgan could feel the principal’s efforts in trying to improving student achievement. “This is the 3rd year that I’ve been at Riverview Elementary, and the same for my principal. I do think that she does a great job in making sure that academics are top priority at Riverview Elementary” (Electronic communication, March 10, 2005).

Morning meeting. Morning meeting was held once or twice a week. It lasted for 30 minutes. The students sat on the carpet and formed a circle and gave their peers greetings. They had different ways of greeting. For example, each of the students used one language other than English to greet one of their classmates of the opposite gender. Then they shared news events or stories with their class. The audience could respond with questions. After the sharing, Morgan led the class to do some group activities. For example, she described some attributes of an object and allowed students to ask up to 10 related questions. The students had to guess what the object was after finishing the questioning. Finally, Morgan would announce some tasks or news for the students to complete for the day.
Morgan gave me a book from which she got the ideas for the morning meeting. It was written by Denton and Kriete (2000). The authors suggest that teachers use morning meeting for the training of communication skills and for facilitating mutual learning in class. The group activities at the end of students’ sharing can help class cohesion. They also recommended that teachers write daily messages on a chart. Through reading the messages, students can develop language skills and know about events in the days ahead. Because of time limitation, Morgan could not hold morning meeting every day. But she wrote announcements of events on the whiteboard every day.

Please help me. It was close to the end of March. The math lessons were getting difficult. Morgan was trying to teach the class transformation between different measurement units (1 Gram = ? Kilometer). The students had to know how to move decimals of a number during the transformation. Morgan found that several students had difficulty following her instruction. She provided assistance for individual students. She then went back to the carpet area and asked those who finished their work to bring their answer sheets for her to check. All the fourth graders went to check their answers except Paula and the other two students. Paula looked upset at her seat. She seemed to still have difficulty solving the problems. Most of the fifth graders also had finished their worksheets and went to get their answers checked. Stephen stayed at his desk. He asked Jorgi to help him. Two other girls came to join the “math help team.” Totally Stephen had three tutors trying to give him assistance. Morgan called the students to check their answers. Now Stephen had to work alone again.

Morgan noticed the students who were having difficulty and remained at their seats. She went back to this section a couple more times later. She looked up some
references and taught the students additional strategies to resolve the problems. Some students who got confused earlier gradually got the ideas by using the suggested strategies. There were still a few students struggling. However, Sam, who had missed the math sections quickly picked up the rules of the game after Morgan gave him a short tutoring. Sam’s invention had been evaluated as an outstanding project. He was called out by the office and so missed the math lesson. Morgan had a group of students with a wide range of achievement levels. It was nice to see the interactions among Stephen and his three math tutors. Maybe the morning meeting did work for community building and mutual learning in this classroom.

Historical fiction. March 22. Morgan explained to the students about historical genre. They needed to read some historical fictions and complete information posters. She gave them three deadlines for the project. By April 2 they had to finish reading the novels; by April 5, a particular part of the poster needed to be done; by April 19, they needed to turn in the whole information posters. Morgan presented a box of books with a wide range of content and writing styles. The students seemed interested in her descriptions of the books. They picked up books to read for their projects.

A student who thought differently. 1:05 pm. Morgan was reading a story about a girl named. Martine. In the book, the students at school all dressed in uniform. Though Martine wore a uniform, she thought about many things differently than her peers. Morgan’s reading sounded so appealing that she had most of the students’ attention.

In Morgan’s classroom, there was a girl, Elizabeth, who was older than most of her classmates. She was different from her peers not only in age but also behavior. She liked to dress herself in a way to enhance the shape of her body. When sitting on a chair,
she did not mind whether her skirt covered over her lap or not. The teachers who had noticed the Elizabeth’s unusual behaviors exchanged their ideas in the lounge room and had concerns for her. Morgan had her perspective about Elizabeth:

I didn’t really speak directly to the students about Elizabeth’s behavior. I didn’t want to single her out. I don’t think I did anything specifically to cope with her impact on the class, other than continue to work on fostering a positive classroom environment with respect for all (electronic communication, June 10, 2005).

In spite of her behaviors which drew the attention of the teachers, Elizabeth was popular among her African American peers. They liked to follow her and play with her at school. Her influence on classmates usually increased the difficulty of classroom management. She had been moved to different classrooms twice. The principal finally decided to put her in Morgan’s class to see if she could get some good influence from the other students in the room. Soon after she was in Morgan’s class, Elizabeth made friends with two of the students, Stephen and Helen. Stephen was a low achieving student who was moved from the other class, while Helen was a student with good grades. Like Elizabeth, both of Stephen and Helen were African American students who were older than the other classmates. They were close friends and frequently talked in classes. The tension between these three students and Morgan increased. For some reason, Helen and Stephen started to show negative attitudes toward Morgan after they got to be friends with Elizabeth. While the teachers hoped that Elizabeth would get some positive influence from her classmates, Elizabeth seemed to have made a considerable impact on others students instead. Elizabeth’s mother was somewhat aggressive in interactions with teachers and Elizabeth’s behavior may have been influenced by her mother.

*The math contest.* It was a math class at 2:30 pm. Morgan asked the students to count back from 30 to 1. Then she started to teach math with several warm up questions.
“What is the basic unit of weight measurement?” “Beside weight, what are the other types of measurement?” She helped the students to learn about the measurable attributes of objects and the processes of measurement. The students were divided into two groups by genders and had a contest to see which group gave the most correct answers.

Morgan liked to think of something interesting for the class to try. She was glad to see the students having fun while learning. Such games involved students in developing skills of leadership, team work, and knowledge about the subject matters. The competition among groups made the process exciting and interesting.

_Collaboration._ One incident happened after a math contest. A fourth grader, Paula, cried because Chris, a fifth grader, blamed her for losing the game of their team. Morgan asked Chris to apologize to Paula. Morgan had been aware of the collaboration issues between her fourth and fifth graders. They were two groups of students with different characteristics. To Morgan, the fifth grade students were smart but lazy. She needed to urge them to submit homework on time. On the contrary, the fourth graders worked more diligently. There was one thing interesting to note. When Morgan gathered her fifth graders and taught them math, some of the fourth graders, though staying at their own seats, were curiously listening to her instruction. The fourth graders were a group of students full of curiosity and ambition for high academic achievement.

Getting along with these active fourth graders, the fifth grade students hesitated to associate much with them at the beginning. They sat back and watched them play and learn. Sometimes, they went forward and claimed their authority as Chris did to Paula. Morgan found her fifth graders were gradually impressed by the performance of the fourth graders and began to accept them and be willing to interact more with them. The
fifth graders were also inspired by the hard work of the fourth graders. The interactions between the two graders became more smooth and productive as the year progressed.

*What did you learn?* Morgan used bottles to show the students how to measure volume. Stephen was playing and not listening. He was asked to answer a question. Morgan gave him additional time to respond. He tried but failed to provide the correct answer. At the end of the lesson, Morgan asked the students to report on what they had learned in the lesson. Many students were eager to be picked to give a report. When it was the time to dismiss the class, the students who had not gotten a chance to share their learning, still wanted to stay to talk about what they had learned.

After the class, Morgan told me that she was satisfied with today’s math lesson. She received this lesson plan at a workshop and followed instructions. She thought the connection of each step worked so well that most of the students were engaged. She was glad to see that most of her students had something to report at the end of the lesson.

*The writing section.* It was 9:20 am. The fifth graders went to their art class. There were nine fourth graders who stayed in the classroom to do their writing assignments. One student was using a computer to edit her work. Four students were working in pairs for peer review of writing. The other two students were publishing (typing) their writings. Morgan went around the classroom, checking the students’ work. She told a boy how to use an apostrophe: “When one owns something, there will be an apostrophe here.” She pointed to the screen of an electronic typewriter and told the other student that he had mistyped one of letters.” Kenny’s mother came into the classroom and gave copies of some papers to Morgan. She assisted Morgan by making photocopies of the papers that she needed for the week. She chatted with Morgan for a while and then gave a suggestion
to a girl who was doing her typing. “You may choose a bigger font.” At 10:15 am, all of the fourth graders left for their dance/drama class. The fifth graders were having their second section of art class. Morgan used this time to read the students’ computer files and arranged to put the students’ work on the wall. It was the only hour of planning time that she would get each week.

*Thank-you letters to the Exchange City Volunteers.* The students were writing thank you letters to the Exchange City Volunteers who had provided assistance for the school activities. Morgan gave instructions for individual students’ writing. “I see a lot of you writing titles on the top of the letters, please make sure to write the date….” “I would just call her Wendy if you do not know her last name. If you know her name, I will spell for you.” Occasionally, Morgan needed to remind the class to be quiet while writing the letters. “Only those who are called on can talk.” The students worked quietly. “When you close your letter. You can say something like…thank you…please come back….” Sunnyariah was idling. Morgan smiled and talked to him at a small voice. Sunnyariah began his writing. Morgan checked the writing of another girl. “Just erase the D. Excellent.”

Morgan tried to make the classroom activities practical and useful in daily life. In addition to the thank you letters, the students had been writing to their pen pals at another school for several months. They enjoyed writing back and forth to their friends and sharing learning experiences. Morgan tried to draw their attention to the format and use of words in the letter writing process.

*Invention convention.* The school held an Invention Convention to encourage the students to think creatively. Only fifth graders participated in the convention.
graders’ works were not being judged at that particular time. They stayed in the classroom to watch a video tape about animal life.

Many of the inventions were designed to improve the convenience or effectiveness of commonly used products. For example, one student demonstrated the effectiveness of using a bunch of tooth brushes for dental cleaning. Another student made a stove using a some simple heating method. Another student created a bottle which allowed body lotion to come out easily, but not messy. Each project needed to be assessed by three evaluators. In order to impress the evaluators, the students tried their best to present how their invention would contribute to human life.

11:15 am. The students came back from the convention. They needed to fill out a reflection form. Morgan gave them some words to guide their reflection: “I was proud of”, “I was surprised that”, “I wish”, “The best part was”, “The hardest part was”, “I learned”, “If I did it over again, I would.” Morgan also suggested the students give some compliments to other projects.

During lunch time, the conversations about the convention continued in the teachers’ lounge room. Some parents brought chocolates for the teachers and administrators. They did not join the lunch but were eager to talk about their children’s work. Kenny’s mother said that her son was upset because his project was damaged by the lower graders who came to see the convention. She exchanged ideas with Morgan about the emotional development of children, about how their negative feelings originated from denial and sadness about accepting the fact of the matter. The principal came to join the conversation. She knew about the incident because she was in the
convention, too. In spite of small incidents like this, the teachers, parents, principal, and the students seemed to have fun in this activity.

The girls’ relationship. Dorothy found a note written by her good friend Sunny. She felt upset after reading it. “Me and Robert was saying “dirty, dirty” to Dorothy, cause she wore that GAP sweater a lot of times.” Morgan tried to comfort her. Issues related to friendships among the girls are not uncommon at these ages. Marcie said the moments when good friends argued or fought with each other were usually heartbreaking. In Dorothy’s case, she probably had feelings of being betrayal. Dorothy was placed in Morgan’s room because she did not have a lot of friends in the fourth grade and was picked on a lot. She did not really have good friends except Sunny in Morgan’s room, either. Since then Sunny had made other new good friends, so he was unfriendly to Dorothy sometimes. Morgan tried to be sensitive to the girls’ issues and to support those who felt bad about aspects of their friendships.

The suggestions of a school psychologist. “Who needs to type up their drafts?” Morgan was giving computer passes to those who needed to use the computers. With the passes, the students could go to the other classrooms and type their writings there when there were not enough computers to use in the home class. She checked the progress of each group. The students were either typing, editing their papers, or just reading their assignments. Elizabeth came into the classroom. She looked angry about something. Morgan went to talk with Elizabeth and then asked her to go back to her seat.

Morgan seemed to make more efforts to negotiate with Elizabeth than with the other younger students. Elizabeth had strong ideas about what she would like to do and showed resistance to Morgan’s commands sometimes. Therefore, Morgan was not always
successful in correcting Elizabeth’s behaviors. For example, there was one time that
Elizabeth lost her recess and had to stay in class. She greeted her friends playing outside
and talked with them loudly through the window of the classroom. Morgan gave her a
serious warning about her behavior. Elizabeth was unhappy about Morgan’s words and
did not think it was a big issue.

In teachers’ lounge room, Morgan met the school psychologist. He gave her some
suggestions regarding students’ behavioral issues. He told Morgan to help students
understand the relationship between particular behaviors and consequences. The
psychologist emphasized the importance of making sure the students did not take the
teacher’s commands personally. The teacher should focus on behaviors rather than the
child personally.

Elizabeth got moved again. Five or six students failed to turn in their homework.
Morgan dictated a note for them to write down and ask their parents to sign it. The
content of the note was like the following:

Dear Mom and Dad:
I am writing this to tell you that I did not complete my reading homework. I need
you to sign my reading log every night. Because I did not do it, I want to let you
know that I had to miss recess today. Please sign this note and return it
tomorrow…..
I love you;
Your daughter and son

Morgan got several responses from the parents. Most of them expressed their support for
her decision. One parent even provided a suggestion about the punishment. “This is all
XX’s fault. He did not tell me about this. You need to keep him in from recess.” But
Elizabeth’s mother replied in a very different way. “Ms. Hitchson, you are too immature
to teach the 5th grade, you belong in kindergarten, that suits you better.” Morgan was not
comfortable with this message. She thought it was “obviously very rude and upsetting.” Elizabeth’s mother told the school that she did not want Elizabeth to be in Morgan’s room. So the principal assigned Elizabeth to the other room where she had been before. Morgan felt upset about the situation but she felt relieved that Elizabeth was moved out of her classroom.

The angry Helen went to sharpen her pencil. Morgan asked her to sit down. Helen went back to her seat and said, “Good!” Apparently, she was not happy with Morgan’s command. Morgan asked her to repeat what she just said. Helen responded by saying something else. Morgan told her that her behaviors were not appropriate.

In addition to her negative attitude, Helen had become quieter recently. Morgan was aware of her change. “Ever since Elizabeth left, Raven was like this. It was like over a week. Raven has been sad. She hasn’t talked. She hasn’t volunteered for a week.”

Stephen refused to cooperate with Morgan during her instruction, too. I saw them talk with Elizabeth outside of the class. They warmly greeted with each other. On their faces were smiles and a feeling of comfortableness that Helen and Stephen seldom showed in the classroom.

For Morgan, Helen, Elizabeth, and Stephen, seemed to be a group of students very different from their classmates. She felt it was hard to negotiate with them:

I do not know how to handle that sometimes. It is their attitude, maybe they are just jaded. They are more mature, emotionally, than the other children. They are more mature, as far as how they act. I see Stephen and Helen have that kind of attitude (post-observation meeting, May 12, 2004).

She believed they possessed an attitude of resistance to prevent following the classroom rules. Morgan thought their attitudes resulted from some home factors. These students had home experiences different than those of their classmates. For example, Helen’s
father did not live with them. Her mother was pregnant. Helen needed to prepare her siblings for school every morning. She herself was late for school sometimes. Morgan understood her situation and did not blame her for not coming to class on time.

*The factors contributing to high achievement.* Though Morgan had difficulty dealing with the behavioral issues of some students, she enjoyed her teaching in this class. She thought the characteristics of the students at the fourth grades contributed to their high achievement.

We did have a great school report card for 2003/04. However, we also just had a super group of students last year. They were smart in 1st grade, 2nd grade, and 3rd grade, so it was no surprise that they did so well on the 4th grade tests. That group of kids has great parental support and that makes all the difference as you know (Electronic communication, June 11, 2005).

*Her current class.* Morgan had her fourth graders stay with her in the school year 2004-2005. They were 5th graders now. Another new group of fourth graders joined this class. Morgan was satisfied with the group. “The class is doing fine. The 5th graders are getting ‘full of themselves’ (they think they are the ones who are in charge in the classroom!). But that comes with getting older. They're just asserting their independence.” She taught mixed-grade classes for two years at Riverview Elementary. Morgan was satisfied with her teaching experiences there.

The above are descriptions about the teaching practices of the three teachers. The following is a summary of their teaching practice.

*Summary.* In their survey responses, the three teachers indicated different levels of competence in the areas of: integrated learning, equity in classroom, sensitivity to cultural differences, reflection of teaching, meeting the needs of all students, knowledge of school politics, preparation of high stakes tests, being a change agent, and working
with culturally diverse children. The teachers demonstrated their competence in these areas in various ways. This section summarizes the classroom practices of the teachers and their comments about the practices.

_Fostering holistic/integrated learning._ Both Nicole and Melissa were satisfied with the training and were confident in their competence in the field of integrated learning. Skills of reading and writing were integrated in their classroom activities. Morgan had a positive attitude toward her teacher education experience but considered her current competence as weak in this area. Because the curriculum had prescribed the activities of particular lessons that teachers needed to do, she felt it was difficult to integrate different subject matter into those classroom activities. The data from observations in the three classrooms revealed different degrees of integration of reading, writing, social studies, and technology by the teachers. Compared with literacy and social studies, math and science were relatively less frequently integrated with the other subject matters. Integration of all subject matters, like what the student teachers had done for the integrated unit in the program, was seldom seen in the classroom practice.

_Establishing equity in the classroom._ All of the teachers had positive attitudes toward their training and practice in respect of equity in the classrooms. Nicole perceived herself to have higher competence than what the program had prepared her to be. She tried to make the students understand that she would give support to those who studied hard, rather than those who acted out. Melissa taught students the connection between privilege and responsibility. The students could enjoy certain privileges in the classroom if they fulfilled their responsibility. Morgan considered the classroom as a learning community. She expected every student to follow the rules in the classroom for effective
learning. The three teachers provided students equitable opportunities to access help and resources.

*Sensitivity to cultural differences.* Both Melissa and Morgan were satisfied with their training and teaching practice. Nicole perceived insufficiency in her experiences of teacher education. She felt more confident in her current competence in this area. Both Melissa and Nicole showed their sensitivity to cultural differences by including in the instruction cultural information that was related with the students’ ethnic backgrounds. Melissa was especially assertive in presenting the cultural differences to the students. Like the other two teachers, Morgan was aware of the cultural differences in her classroom, but she tended to focus more on the commonality than differences.

*Reflection.* The three teachers all had positive attitudes toward their training and practice in reflection. Based on her experiences at Clinton Elementary, Nicole felt she had better understandings of the behavioral issues of students. Melissa used authentic instructional materials to enhance learning when she found the students could not get her points. Morgan tried to find alternative ways to help students understand difficult concepts. Through reflecting on their practice, the teachers adjusted their teaching practice when necessary.

*Meeting the needs of all students.* The teachers all agreed that the program had prepared them well in meeting students’ needs. They were confident in their current competence in this field. In spite of her confidence, Melissa did not feel that her teaching practice met the needs of students. She thought her competence was confined by the prescribed curriculum. In classroom practice, the teachers were aware of the various
learning styles and personalities of their students. They tried to give individual students
the support they needed. Melissa attended to the stages of students’ learning
development. She tailored the instruction to their cognitive levels. Morgan adjusted her
lesson plans daily according to the learning progress of students. Nicole was patient with
students who had learning difficulties. She spent time to give them individual
instructions. The three teachers were differently challenged as they coped with the
struggling students in their classrooms. From the experiences of those challenges, they
knew better ways to serve the needs of students.

*Preparing students for high stakes tests.* Morgan had positive attitudes toward the
training and her own competence in respect of the preparation for high stakes tests.
Nicole and Melissa perceived insufficient training but were confident in their current
competence for test preparation. Melissa’s students received high scores on the reading
tests. Therefore, the school allowed her to do what she would like to do with the
students—a book club. Morgan had more students passing the tests than the other teacher
did. The principal was impressed by Morgan’s performance. Nicole’s students at her
current had better performance than the students at Clinton Elementary. She felt more
support from the school environment for the test preparation.

*Preparing to work with culturally different children.* In regard to working with
culturally diverse students, Melissa was satisfied with her training and current
competence. She looked comfortable with students of color. She was concerned with the
identity formation of those students within the context of school environment. Morgan
had positive toward her teacher education experiences but was not confident in her
present competence. She said she had gotten used to the African American culture and
knew how to get along with the students of this particular cultural group. She said she was not sure whether she could do good if she had students from cultural groups other than African American. Nicole considered the training at the M.Ed. program as insufficient. She had higher confidence in working with culturally different students.

Knowledge of the politics of schools. All of the three teachers perceived insufficient training in school politics. Melissa and Nicole thought that they had better understanding about school politics after graduation. Though they were still not confident in playing the role of change agents, both of them made efforts in taking actions for the improvement of education. They expressed critical views about how to improve the school system. On the other hand, Morgan perceived herself insufficient in her current competence related to school politics and being change agent. She hesitated to be involved in activities of political actions. She had few interested in political issues and would like to focus on classroom teaching.

The teachers in the present study had similarities and differences in their teaching experiences at the Cleveland public schools. All of them reflected on their practice and explored techniques to engage the students in learning. They demonstrated multicultural competence but presented this competence in various ways. Nicole was aware of the political influence on her teaching practice and students’ learning. Melissa was assertive about the authenticity of cultural information in instructional materials. Both Melissa and Nicole recognized and utilized the cultural differences among their students in their classroom instructions. On the other hand, Morgan valued the commonality shared by different cultures and had high expectations for all of her students. The following chapter
includes discussions about interpretations and suggestions based on the findings of the current research.
The discussions above focused on the third year of teaching of the three case study participants. This section will first review some elements of their teaching practices, and second provide some suggestions for the improvement of teacher education.

The selected teaching practices that will be discussed here will use three of Wenger’s conceptual categories: engagement, imagination, and alignment. These elements are defined by Wenger (1998) as three modes of belonging which are related with the identity formation of participation and non-participation in a community (p. 173). As mentioned earlier, engagement refers to the mutual processes of meaning negotiation. Imagination involves the creation of images about the world based on our own experience. Alignment is the coordination of individuals’ energy and activities to fit within or function in a broader structure (p. 174). How the teaching practices in the current study contributed to the belonging of students in classrooms will be discussed in terms of these three modes.

Engagement. According to Wenger, the process of engagement includes the ongoing negotiation of meaning and formation of trajectories. Engagement helps develop a sense of belonging and definition of competence. In Morgan’s class, she facilitated
engagement by asking the students to collaborate in answering questions, completing
tasks, or editing papers. The fourth graders and the fifth graders were two groups with
different natures. The four graders were curious and eager to know new things. They
were used to working hard and demonstrated a high motivation for learning. The fifth
graders were confident in their ability but more passive in learning. Morgan created
spaces for the two groups to communicate and learn from their group differences. She
purposely had the two groups work separately or together in different activities.

In Melissa’s classroom, mutual engagement was enhanced in activities such as
book clubs, peer work, or group sharing after reading or writing. Visual demonstrations
and hands-on tasks were used to increase students’ interest. Sign languages or other
customs for interactions were created for the students to have more fun in the activities.
Melissa’s instruction demonstrated flexibility. She provided additional options for
assignments for students who fulfilled the basic requirements early. The alternative
options gave the high achieving students more chances to explore their abilities, while
making the other students comfortable with their own working pace. Melissa attended to
the psychological aspects of learning. She believed that certain types of exercise between
lessons could help coordinate the functions of the right and left brains and generate
positive behaviors in their engagement. Through engagement, she led the students to
explore the differences between each other and to learn to respect their differences.

Nicole was concerned about individuals’ cognitive styles, personalities, and
interests when she engaged the students in activities. She thought that both of the
commonalities and differences in individual learning styles could generate various
patterns of participation to contribute to the inquiry process. Nicole had taken
professional development courses about how to identify and cultivate students’ talents. She engaged the high achieving students in more challenging tasks and invited them to help their peers. During the activities of engagement, Nicole was patient with the students from different home cultures. She developed good interpersonal relationships with most of her students.

In spite of their different teaching techniques, the three teachers demonstrated shared characteristics of classroom engagement collaboration and flexibility. All of them tried to provide individual opportunities to develop their unique competences and encouraged collective work to generate multiple perspectives. The individual differences were viewed as resources for learning, but they could be a challenge for learning, too.

Wenger (1998) uses boundaries and peripheries to refer to the “edges” of communities of practice:

Boundaries – no matter how negotiable or unspoken – refer to discontinuities, to lines of distinction between inside and outside, membership and nonmembership, inclusion and exclusion. Peripheries – no matter how narrow – refer to continuities, to areas of overlap and connections, to windows and meeting places, and to organized and casual possibilities for participation offered to outsiders or newcomers (p. 120). In classrooms, the experiences of boundaries or peripheries are revealed at the encounters of different cultures, discourses, personalities, life styles, or interest of learning. As Wenger claims, how the boundaries are defined and how peripheries are organized will influence activities of engagement. In general, how the teacher sees cultural differences, whether they are resources for learning or conflicts in the classrooms, will determine the patterns of engagement.
Examples of discontinuities in cultural encounters are not uncommon in classrooms. For instance, in Nicole’s class, several students had difficulty fully engaging in classroom activities. The students stayed at the margins of the classroom and resisted learning when they experienced the boundaries of the classroom. Most of these students were from families and of single parent or low socio-economic status. Nicole acknowledged that, because of her biracial background, she had good understanding about the African American culture. But she was less knowledgeable about the family life at low socio-economics levels. It was a feeling of class boundaries that she perceived in the classroom at Clinton Elementary. (Maybe her students had similar feelings as well.) How to guide teachers to reflect on their cultural identities and to prepare them for cross-cultural experiences, including class, gender, ability, and other culture related issues, is an important challenge for teacher education.

*Imagination.* Wenger uses the term, imagination, to refer to the production of new images and new relations through time and space that become constitutive of the self (p. 177). Teachers lead students to imagine the purpose of leaning, the function of knowledge, and their places in the world. In Morgan’s class, she initiated the students’ imagination through such activities as reading, math, reflection, and poem writing. In reading classes, Morgan encouraged the students to recognize their own experiences in what they had read and to reinterpreted their experiences in new ways. In writing classes, she taught students different styles of poems to write down their images about the self or the world. In the math classes, she encouraged students to think of different solutions to the assigned math questions. At the end of instructions, when the time permitted, Morgan would ask the students to reify the patterns of what they had learned or observed.
Through these types of practices, Morgan helped the students dislocate their participation in order to reinvent their identities and perspectives.

Melissa involved students in imaginative activities to expand the scope of their learning through such activities as reading, writing, or scaffolding. She engaged the students in reading fables and guided them to reflect on their thinking or behaviors based on the reading. She had the students exchange what they learned from the stories. Whenever necessary, she invited them to imagine appropriate manners and created scenarios for them to practice good manners.

Nicole read stories for the students about how things looked and what people were doing in historical life. She engaged the students in critical thinking based on what they knew about the stories. Because the students in her class seldom had chances to explore the environment outside of their community, Nicole’s sharing of her life experiences became a window for the students to see the outside world.

Imagination in classroom activities can be viewed as an instructional strategy to help generate connections in time and space. It can also create assumptions of differences and commonalities that create new boundaries that lead to disconnection in a community (Wenger, 1998). For example, while the majority of the students in Morgan’s class saw their own abilities through group interaction and they constructed their identities based on their perceived competence, Stephen and Elizabeth did not form their identity in the same way. They established a small community where they perceived their competence through unique ways of engagement, development of repertoires, and meaning negotiation among the group. Helen joined this community though she had good academic performance. As suggested by Morgan, these three students might have
assumed that Morgan and the other students did not have the same life experiences as they did and thus disassociated themselves from the class. Emphasizing the overlap and connections among different cultures in the classroom, Morgan tried to arrange the classroom as an open periphery to invite the participation of students. Nevertheless, encounters of differences could not be avoided and discontinuities were still experienced. Wenger asserted, “Boundaries and peripheries are woven together” (p. 120). In Morgan’s classroom, the discontinuities co-existed with the openness of the peripheries which were based on a focus of commonality.

**Alignment.** Alignment is a process of coordinating energies, actions, and practices into a broader enterprise. It can be present in a form of allegiance to a social movement, or concentration on the assigned tasks in classrooms. Morgan was used to aligning the classroom activities with the techniques that students would need in the future. For example, she had her students practice communication skills in the morning sharing time. She corrected individual students’ assumptions about their audience and helped them propose good ways for communicating in group activities. Morgan also engaged students in other tasks that were related to real life, such as writing letters to pen pals. To enforce alignments in the classroom, Morgan rewarded the students by reducing their homework if they concentrated on the tasks at school. She tried to promote the inner drive of the students to engage in the classroom activities.

Melissa aligned the students with their school using a combination of strategies. For instance, she engaged individual students in imagining the characteristics of good citizens. She then encouraged the students to expand their understanding of good citizen in different contexts and to share each other’s ideas. The students’ writing samples about
the characteristics were put on the closet door as the repertoires of the classroom. Melissa incorporated individual and collective imagination, and sometimes her personal humor, in the process of alignment.

Nicole aligned the students’ practices with subject matter content by using authentic instructional materials. She borrowed tapes or books from the libraries to supplements for her teaching practice. When teaching math, for example, she created scenarios for the students to apply their concepts of money and measurement. Hands-on activities were used to connect what they learned in class to real life experiences.

As illustrated above, the teachers tried different strategies of alignment to direct the students’ energy in the learning process. One common issue related to alignment was students’ resistance to learning at school. Many of the students who showed no interest in the instructions and seemed to have other things on their minds were diagnosed as ADD or ADHD. Jaylon at Melissa’s class was a student identified as ADD. He revealed his resistance to instruction either by literal compliance or violent interruptive behaviors. Melissa tried to prevent the students like Jaylon from interrupting the instruction by asking them to sit alone until they behaved themselves well. Melissa set boundaries for disciplines in classroom, but the boundaries defined in the classroom did not seem to help Jaylon with his learning. The types of discontinuities among different learning styles are matters related to alignment in the classroom. Communication with the students and support from parents and school were important for the teachers to cope with alignment issues.

The teachers’ practices were interpreted in chapter four using the three modes of belonging. Many of the activities involved different combination of these three modes.
For example, the students’ writings about their comments (in Morgan’s room) after the invention convention could be viewed as a combination of engagement and imagination. The students imagined ways for improvement after their engagement in the activity. Correcting students’ behaviors and connecting them to the moral lessons in fable stories (in Melissa’s class) was an example of the combination of alignment and imagination. The students were told to follow rules in the classroom and they knew why they needed the rules from the moral lessons in fables. In the discussion after a reading section, Nicole used questions to guide students to share their comments on the lives of slaves in the U.S. She coordinated the conversations in the class into a better understanding about issues of equity.

Through these classroom activities, the teachers led the students to explore the discourse, life styles, knowledge and skills, and issues in the society. The students who were from different cultural or family backgrounds, learned to ask questions about what they had not experiences and to be engaged in developing new criteria of competence.

As presented in the individual cases, the teachers had different challenges in involving students to participate in the classroom activities. Discontinuities were experienced at a variety of boundary encounters in the activities of engagement, imagination, and alignment. Nicole recognized the cultural differences in classroom, but she perceived class boundaries with her students. Morgan focused on the commonalities beyond individual differences; however, cultural boundaries still existed. The ways that Melissa defined some boundaries in her classroom might have facilitated effective learning for certain group of students but left others to struggle alone.
The above sections are descriptions about the teachers’ classroom practice and their challenges in teaching. The discussion highlights the interplay between the teaching practices and the individual differences of students which constituted the complexity of classroom ecology. The following are descriptions about some features of the teacher preparation program and how these experiences prepared, or did not prepare, these teachers for the complexities in their classrooms which were related to issues of equity and diversity. The areas of teacher education experiences that will be discussed are: curriculum to connect knowledge and practice, transcendent knowledge, lifelong learning, pedagogy, and the formation of teaching competence.

Curriculum. From the data on the teacher education experiences of the three teachers, there were several major focuses of the curriculum in the M.Ed. program. According to the teachers, these focuses included learner-centered instruction, multiple perspectives, affirmation of differences, and encouragement to be change agents. Nicole commented on the program: “The OSU M.Ed. program is very current. I have yet to meet someone who covered as much as we did in our program” (Open-ended survey question, 2002).

The findings in this study indicated that these teachers with three years of practice experiences were still struggling to connect what they had learned in the program to their teaching practice. Both Morgan and Melissa considered constructivism an approach not feasible in real classroom practices. Artile’s study (2000), shared similar findings about the changes in teachers’ beliefs and practices. He suggests that teacher education programs (TEP) should provide sufficient resources and training for teachers to master and appropriate the knowledge they learned. Mentorship can play an important role to
align teachers’ knowledge to their practices. According to Morgan’s Capstone writing, Julie, her mentor teacher, did demonstrate how to practice constructionist theory in the classroom. Morgan described her concept about constructivism that she learned from the program, “Making sure that they [the students] are the ones doing it…” (interview, 2002). Morgan thought that the demonstration she experienced in her field placement was helpful, but she still did not use this approach because of time limitations.

According to Wenger (1998), lack of time is not necessarily always the factor that influences practices. Sometimes, the reason for disconnection between theory and practice is the change of focus or emphasis in the new community of practice to which one just moved.

To enhance the connection between theory and practice, mentor teachers can lead teachers during the training to imagine and prepare for the contextual factors that may later influence their practice, such as educational policies, testing system, or school cultures. School administrators can be invited to participate in professional development so that joint enterprises are built across different educational settings. Continuous negotiations among these educational institutions are important when teachers are developing new memberships in other communities of practice after graduation from the program.

Knowledge. Researchers have argued about that multicultural education is difficult for preservice teachers who have had few intercultural experiences (Aaronsohn, 1995; Artiles et al., 2000; Winfield, 1986). The findings of this study imply that teachers with few cross-cultural experiences, like Morgan, can still learn as well as other preservice teachers. On the other hand, if student teachers of color experience boundaries
inside or outside the program, they may either fail to undergo necessary knowledge transcendence or have difficulty applying what they have learned in their teacher education programs.

The finding of this study indicated that knowledge transformation depends on how teachers were engaged in the program and what resources they gained during their student teaching practices. As Baptiste (1980) claims, cultural experiences were helpful for knowledge reconstruction. However, teachers of color, like Nicole, who had cultural experiences may experience marginalization in the program and have difficulty in knowledge transformation. On the other hand, white teachers, like Morgan, who do not have many cross-cultural experiences can undergo knowledge transformation during the program. But their beliefs and motivation may change if they do not get consistent support after they leave the program. In Melissa’s case, she experienced knowledge transformation to a considerable extent as a result of her participation in the M.Ed. However, she was challenged by the practices in the socio-political contexts where testing was a major focus of the school and school district.

Teacher education programs that want to respond to the different needs of teachers should provide support for the students who are at the different stages of knowledge transformation. For example, the mentor teachers can provide different levels of involvement for student teachers to participate in school activities. The student teachers can discuss with the teacher educators and cooperating teachers the rationales behind the arrangement of learning objectives along with the consequences of participation from extreme peripherality toward the formation of core membership in school settings.
Learning. As Cochran-Smith (2000) asserted, learning to teach should be viewed as life long inquiry. Wenger (1998) argues that the interactions in communities of learning need to be maximized so that membership, in addition to the institutional roles of the participants, will be resources for long term learning. Morgan’s experiences of collaboration with her peers at George Heights was an example of the formation of membership in a learning community:

We’re there - you sit down for 45 minutes. The first 15 minutes are always talking about Laurie’s kids; Pam’s daughter and how the track meet went and then after that it’s another 20 minutes about this - you know what I mean? Oh my god, we haven’t planned anything. Let’s hear a plan. Which is - it just was fun. I miss doing that (Interview, 2002).

Morgan had different experiences of collaboration at Somerson Elementary and Riverview Elementary. She met with another team teacher once a week for discussions about lesson plans. But the engagement stimulated less power of imagination and alignment than the collaborative activities she had in the M.Ed. program.

Nicole had close relationships with her mentor. She was able to bring her strengths into her learning experiences because her mentor gave her considerable space for trial and errors. Nicole had observed how her mentor got connected with other teachers at the PDS program. She tried to build relations with colleagues at work. However, it was not until she went to Washington Elementary [her second school position] that she met a group of young teachers who were willing to construct a community for mutual learning. Melissa developed membership in a new community after graduation. She worked closely with Rachel, another teacher at her school, and did not feel collaboration was a burden or time consuming. They enjoyed the time to work together.
The findings from the teachers’ experiences in this study suggest that the memberships developed in the OSU M.Ed. program was a resource for learning. The student teachers benefited not only from the knowledge gained in the university classrooms but also the relationships that they had with the teacher educators and their mentors. The meetings and frequent interactions per se were resources of support for their teaching practice. Furthermore, the findings of this study also suggest that the program did not just support student teachers’ learning about teaching techniques, but developed their competence to function in different communities of practice. Wenger (1998) views multiple memberships as a key for long term learning. Depending on the contextual factors, the OSU M.Ed. graduates might or might not find opportunities to develop memberships in the new communities, like what Nicole experienced at Clinton Elementary and Washington Elementary. Professional development is thus important to sustain the competence of lifelong learning.

**Pedagogy.** Different types of pedagogy may facilitate learning (Bennett & Thompson, 2003; Core et al., 2003; Gay, 1992; Grasha, 1994; Ryan, 2003; Schulte, 2000). One finding of this study showed that pedagogy with concerns about alignment can prevent teachers from being overwhelmed by reality. Lack of such alignment, teachers may have challenges as Melissa experienced at Winston Elementary:

Testing! Because of testing pressures on the district/principal, we have been less able (unable) to adequately meet the needs of our individual children. I am no longer to pre-test kids for competency. We do not teach science/social studies until after testing (since mid-January). We focus on testing constantly and are no longer preparing kids for life. All writing is scripted. There is little choice for us or kids. The program did little to help prepare me for good reason—this is not good teaching (open-ended survey question, 2005).
Educational policies are sometimes in conflict with each other. Novice teachers often find it difficult to find their own positions at schools given the dynamics of the socio-political factors. To help teachers with similar struggles, university instructors can invite outsiders or teaching practitioners to share their experiences at schools so that the student teachers can learn to find a reasonable place for their practice.

*Achievement.* Researchers have defined multicultural competence as teachers’ abilities in a variety of areas: knowledge construction, critical thinking, social justice, history inquiry, curriculum design, school and classroom climate, ethnic identity development, and prejudice reduction (Bennett, 2001; Bank, 1993; Cai, 1998; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). The findings of this study suggest that there were connections between teachers’ competence and some internal and external factors. The internal factors included teachers’ beliefs, personal experiences, perceived roles as teachers, and the teachers’ objectives related to teaching practices. The external factors were related to mutuality, accountability, and negotiability, in the teacher preparation program, school environment, and socio-political contexts.

For instance, because the external environment factors, Nicole showed more competence in engaging children with different cultural backgrounds in classroom activities at Washington Elementary [her second teaching position] than she did at Clinton Elementary [her first position]. In Morgan’s case, it was because of the accountability system (external factor) and her personal beliefs (internal factor) that Morgan tended to focus more on academic knowledge than the cultural consciousness of her students. Melissa had high confidence in her competence to meet the different needs of students but she felt that her ability was confined to the prescribed curriculum and
demands of testing. Both personal and environment factors influenced the teachers’
teaching practices.

Teacher education programs need to consider the multiple factors that contribute
to the development of teaching competence and provide training and support for ongoing
professional development in order to prepare students for multiple and varied teaching
contexts.

How to make multicultural competence central to teachers’ practice had been a
major goal of the OSU M.Ed. program. From the perspectives of the three teachers in this
study, the program prepared them for engaging students with different cultural
backgrounds. The method courses, field experiences, practice of reflection and
collaboration were considered most helpful for their practice. The final section of the
study discussed five issues related with the improvement of the teacher education
programs in the future: 1) continuous negotiation among educational institutions for
consensus about teaching accountability, 2) multiple levels of involvements in field
experiences, 3) multiple memberships for long term learning, 4) practice of teaching in
socio-political contexts, and 5) conditionality of competence development. These
suggestions are not considered as implications generalized from the findings of the case
studies. Rather, they can be seen as suggestions for teacher educators to examine their
programs from the different positions of these case study teachers.


APPENDIX

OSU M.Ed. Graduate Survey

(Note: No information from this survey will be identifiable to you as an individual)

Name ______________________________ year graduated ________  
email: ____________________________

address

________________________________________

phone _________________ birth date ____________ ethnic dentity________________

mentor teacher(s)/grade/school _____________________________________________

___yes, I’m currently teaching
(school/district)__________________________________________

_______

___ not currently teaching because

______________________________

______________________________

1. Please list previous teaching positions--school/district/yrs/reasons for leaving.  
(If you need more space use the back of this sheet)

______________________________

2. List any professions (on back) that you had experience with prior to the M.Ed.  
program.

B.A. degree (subject/institution)

__________________________________________
National Board Certification – when received? __________ plan on applying? ________________

If teaching, how much cultural diversity is represented in your classroom? ___________________; ____________% on free and reduced lunch

What courses/professional development have you completed? _________________________________________________________________

3. List leadership positions you have assumed since graduation. How does this compare to peers with similar years of experience? (use reverse side of sheet to answer)

4. If you are employed, would you be willing to give your principal a survey (that we will send to you with a return envelope) asking him/her to evaluate you as a graduate of the M.Ed. program. If yes, please complete the following information.

Principal’s name: _________________________________________________________________

School and Address

___________________________________________________________________________

City___________________________ State ________ Zip _______________

Telephone _________________________ Email: ________________________________

Please rate how you felt about the preparation you received in the M.Ed. program at different times in your career:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>satisfied/positive</th>
<th>frustrated/negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upon graduation</td>
<td>4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now</td>
<td>4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate the level of connections or collaborative relations you have: strong connection no

<table>
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<th>connections</th>
<th>with former cohort mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>levels</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

223
with mentor teacher 1 2 3
4
with OSU instructors 1 2 3
4
with school colleagues 1 2 3
4
with university supervisor 1 2 3
4

**Strengths of the program**

The M.Ed. program prepared me well in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| theories of human development 1 2 3
4 | assessment of learning 1 2 3
4 | integrated technology 1 2 3
4 | cooperative learning/collaborative learning 1 2 3
4 | connecting theory and practice 1 2 3
4 | fostering social development of students 1 2 3
4 | students with special needs 1 2 3
4 | developing curriculum in mathematics 1 2 3
4 | in science 1 2 3
4 | in social studies 1 2 3
4 | in reading/language arts 1 2 3
4 |
planning  
4  

classroom management  
4  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths of the program (cont.)</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>instructional pedagogies/teaching strategies</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fostering democratic classrooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am better prepared compared to other professionals with similar years of teaching experience  
4  

the overall quality of your M.Ed. courses was consistently high  
4  

the M.Ed. courses were consistently challenging  
4  

my cooperating teacher was a competent mentor  
4  

the OVERALL quality of my OSU teacher educ. experience was very high  
4  

Indicate the degree that the program prepared you (line one), and what you feel is your current level of competence in each area (line two).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>weak fostering holistic/integrated learning</th>
<th>very strong</th>
<th>very weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(program)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>establishing equity in the classroom</th>
<th>(program)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
sensitivity to cultural differences (competence) 1 2 3
reflecting on your teaching practice (program) 1 2 3
meeting the needs of all students (program) 1 2 3
knowledge of the politics of schools (program) 1 2 3
preparing students for high stakes tests (program) 1 2 3
preparing to be a change agent in schools (program) 1 2 3
preparing to work with culturally different children (program) 1 2 3

If you prefer you can answer these questions on the computer, send them by email to Marilyn (Johnston.8@osu.edu). Tear these pages off and take them with you, then we’ll know to expect an email response from you.

How well were you prepared to work with diverse students?

Compared to your colleagues who graduated from other certification programs, how do you see your preparation in the M.Ed. program as different/better/less good?
What are your greatest challenges as a teacher? To what extent did the program prepare you to successfully deal with these challenges?

How did the M.Ed. program influence your perspective and your students’ performance on high stakes tests? Do you have any data or information you would like to share about your students’ success on high stakes tests?