

Preparing Rural Preservice Teachers for Diversity

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This 2-year evaluative self-study of a cohort teacher preparation program in rural eastern Oregon explored preservice teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach diverse students. Using qualitative methods, teacher educators examined preservice teachers' assumptions about student diversity in rural schools where they planned to teach. Characteristics of experiences that preservice teachers found helpful and unhelpful in their preparation to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students are described. Data suggested that the cohort model used for teacher preparation program delivery was important in supporting inquiry that sensitized rural preservice teachers to diverse learners' funds of knowledge.

Hi, Kerri!

How goes things? I'm crazy as usual. I have two students who are very limited in English proficiency in my placement. One speaks little to no English and her writing skills are merely copying off the board. The second has some verbal skills, but no academic vocabulary and no writing. They are suffering from lack of help. I've been asked to make several modifications for these kids in order to facilitate their learning. There is no ESL support, no books in our library which seem relevant or helpful. AAHHH!! I'm not sure what I should do. I don't even know if this makes any sense. Any suggestions? If not, just tell me to go take a nap.

Thanks, Kerri. Rachel

(Email received from a student teacher in rural Idaho, October 2003)

Rachel's words express her frustrations and her desire to help all her students in her middle school English language arts classes. Rachel is a committed, thoughtful, and creative preservice teacher, whose love of literature and writing is woven into all her lessons. She has taken many courses in language arts methods, children's literature, and young adult literature. She has designed sample units that encourage her students to study language use in and out of school. She has worked with a reading buddy whose first language is not English. Rachel is in her late 20s, the mother of two, and a resourceful learner. But the reality of her student teaching situation, in the very town where she grew up, is hitting her hard.

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Rachel is not alone. Research indicates that schools across the U.S. serve increasingly diverse student populations, while our teaching force is becoming less diverse (Mercado, 2001; Nieto, 2004). In rural U.S. schools, student demographics are changing as well, with rural schools in the 21st century serving student bodies with 18% minority students (Beeson & Strange, 2003). In southeastern Oregon and western Idaho, where this study takes place, linguistic and cultural minority students in some schools make up half the student body.

Rachel is representative of the preservice teachers admitted to the "Riverside"¹ teacher preparation branch campus of a university in eastern Oregon. Our work as teacher educators at Riverside suggests that future teachers in rural schools need support in developing a sense of their own creativity and ability to teach in increasingly diverse schools. It is surprising to some preservice teachers that

¹Names of schools, preservice teachers, and cooperating teachers who participated in this study have been changed.

minority families have substantive contributions to make to rural schools. They must learn about, and from, diverse students in their communities. The task that Rachel describes in her email is complex: first, to learn about her language minority students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll & González, 2004) so that she can build on that knowledge to teach well, and second, to convince educational stakeholders across her community to do the same.

A Self-Evaluation of Riverside Teacher Education Cohort Program

Research about teacher preparation for diversity has increased substantially in the last 25 years (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). However, little research has been published on preparing nontraditional teacher candidates for diversity in rural settings. Current research on programs aimed at preparing teachers for work in rural schools suggests little emphasis on preparing teachers for cultural and linguistic diversity in their students (Campbell, 1986; Storey, 2000; Yellin, Bull, & Warner, 1988). There is some evidence, however, that newly-certified rural teachers who enter the field and remain in rural schools are concerned about meeting culturally and linguistically diverse students' needs, and that they wish they had more preparation in this area.

The teacher education program at Riverside opened in 1998 as a rural branch campus of a small university in eastern Oregon. Riverside serves preservice teachers who are returning students of nontraditional college age. They live at home, have strong ties to local schools, and attend Riverside classes in a cohort model in peer groups of 15-20 each year.

This article describes an intensive 2-year evaluative self-study of the Riverside program. We explored preservice teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students. When they entered the Riverside program, preservice teachers usually felt they knew their small communities and the students in them very well. However, as they spent more time in local schools, they soon became uneasy about "having to deal with" diverse students. Their rural school placements had few resources. School libraries had few multicultural books; there were few cultural mediators in school and parent groups; schools had few full-time teachers or counselors with personal ties to minority groups. Within this context, our primary motivation for the self-study was to improve our practice as teacher educators (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), particularly our preparation of future teachers for diversity. Several questions evolved over the course of the study:

- (a) What were preservice teachers' assumptions about student diversity in rural schools where they planned to teach?

- (b) What learning experiences in the Riverside teacher preparation program did preservice teachers perceive as especially helpful in preparing them to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students?
- (c) What did the preservice teachers perceive as unhelpful in preparing them to teach diverse students?

Thirty-one preservice teachers and we, their two Riverside education professors, participated in the study from August 2001-December 2003. Study Cohort I completed their Riverside program in December 2002 and consisted of 13 preservice teachers. Study Cohort II completed their Riverside program in December 2003 and consisted of 18 preservice teachers. Table 1 illustrates the study timeline.

To unpack the perceptions of study participants about their feelings of preparedness to teach diverse students, we used ethnographic and qualitative data collection methods (Eisenhart, 2001; Frank, 1999; Johnson, 2002). The nature of the cohort model afforded us daily access to preservice teachers in both their university classes and in their elementary school settings. We collected all the preservice teachers' written assignments. These included journal entries, lesson plans, research papers, and in-class work. In addition, we kept fieldnotes of all university class discussions (whether related to "teaching diverse learners" or not), and met weekly to review those notes. Observation notes of all practicum and student teaching lessons conducted by study participants were collected, and a "culturally responsive practices" observation data collection instrument was developed to supplement fieldnotes of student teaching observations (see Appendix A). We interviewed preservice teachers informally and formally during their cohort year about their feelings regarding teaching diverse learners and about their experiences with minority students and families. In their student teaching terms and in Cohort I's 1st year as practicing teachers, we made extensive use of email contact around topics central to the study.

In the 2nd year of the study, we asked 12 representative preservice teachers from the two cohorts to participate in a series of three videotaped group interviews. These group interviews focused on their perceptions of program efficacy related to preparing them to teach diverse learners. The group interviews (adapted from methods described by Krueger & Casey, 2000) involved a number of activities and discussion topics designed to extend and clarify themes in previous individual interviews. For example, participants sorted and ranked cards marked with individual assignments that preservice teachers had identified in individual interviews as important in their preparation for diversity. Participants then discussed reasons for their rankings. All group activities were videotaped, and these sessions yielded a particularly

Table 1
Study Timeline

School Year	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
August		Cohort I enters student teaching placements; Jan observes and collects weekly email data	Cohort II enters student teaching placements; Jan observes and collects weekly email data
September	Cohort I initial interviews; Cohort I takes at least three ESOL classes with Kerri (Sept-Dec); class fieldnotes taken, assignments collected throughout term	Cohort II initial interviews; Cohort II takes three ESOL classes with Kerri (Sept-Dec); data collection continues	Cohort I hired as 1st-year teachers; email contact and observations during entire school year
October			
November	Cohort I engages in CCE	Cohort II engages in CCE	
December		Series of three focus group interviews, Cohorts I and II; Cohort I completes student teaching and many begin substitute teaching in local districts	Cohort II completes student teaching and many begin substitute teaching
January	Cohort I enters Riverside integrated methods classes with Jan and Kerri/rural classroom placements (CORE I term: Jan-March); class fieldnotes, interviews, assignments collected, observations of practicum teaching	Cohort II enters Riverside integrated methods classes with Jan and Kerri/rural classroom placements (CORE I term: Jan-March); class fieldnotes, interviews, assignments collected, observations of practicum teaching	
February		Email contact with Cohort I continues as member checking; Peer Debriefers check data and study report drafts	
March	Cohort I develops and engages in focused inquiry projects around their own questions about diversity in schools (their action research March-May)	Cohort II develops and engages in focused inquiry projects around their own questions about diversity in schools (their action research March-May)	
April	Cohort I enters Riverside second term of integrated methods classes with Jan and Kerri/rural classroom placements (CORE II term: April-June); data collection continues	Cohort II enters Riverside second term of integrated methods classes with Jan and Kerri/rural classroom placements (CORE II term: April-June); data collection continues	
May	Jan and Kerri refine study questions, develop student teaching with diverse learners data collection instrument; interviews with selected participants	Some preservice teachers in Cohorts I and II present their action research inquiry projects at Spring Student Research Symposium and as teacher inservice in local district	

rich data set as the activity discussions were transcribed and coded for various themes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Themes such as “negative feelings about assignments,” “good field experiences with minority students,” “relating community to school,” “initial fears/frustrations,” and “aha moments” emerged from preservice teacher dialogue about their teacher preparation program.

To provide member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for our emerging understandings, themes and representative quotes were shared with several study participants from Cohort I during their 1st year of teaching. In addition, a teacher educator from the main university campus was asked to serve as an outside “peer debriefer” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to read initial reports of study findings, raising questions of bias in our interpretation when necessary.

Theoretical Perspectives

As we collected data and refined our questions, the literature on funds of knowledge and the literature on rural teacher preparation informed our analysis.

Funds of knowledge. Recent studies in teacher inquiry with a “funds of knowledge” (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) perspective build on sociocultural theoretical perspectives in educational research. Such research has historically highlighted educational disparities among different cultural and socioeconomic groups. Data from these studies have suggested that linguistic and cultural minority students are poorly served when school materials and instructional practices do not build on what all students know and can do (Nieto, 2004).

A classroom, as Cazden (2001) notes, is a meeting place of cultures. Yet cultural practices are not fixed or static. Mainstream and minority students move through many cultural sites daily (Heath, 1996). Schools and communities change. A funds of knowledge perspective, therefore, invites teachers to think about students’ funds of knowledge less as a list of fixed characteristics, and more as all of the “various social and linguistic practices and the historically accumulated bodies of knowledge that are essential to students’ homes and communities” (Rosebery, McIntyre, & González, 2001, p. 2).

Preservice teachers must identify and explore funds of knowledge of students whose lives are not like their own (Cazden, 2001). At the same time, culturally responsive teacher educators cannot ignore or appear to discount the funds of knowledge possessed by rural preservice teachers who will teach in the same communities where they grew up. For example, the rural teacher in this study who bases her third-grade ecology curriculum around the game birds that are in season at different times of the hunting year is building on “the knowledge base that underlies the productive and exchange activities of households” (Moll & González, 2004, p. 700). This fund of knowledge is shared by a large

number of majority and minority families in her community. This suggests that preservice teachers must develop inquiry skills that help them meet changing needs of diverse learners against the background of their own funds of knowledge. It is a complex process. Preservice teachers need to reflect on their own funds of knowledge, how students’ funds of knowledge in a community might differ, and what factors in the community are influencing social and cultural resources which all students possess (Moll & González, 2004).

With these perspectives in mind, we analyzed our data to see which experiences at Riverside had encouraged preservice teachers to identify minority students’ funds of knowledge, and to see how those funds of knowledge intersected with their own as they planned instruction and assessment. In turn, we tried to examine how the experiences we designed for preservice teachers to prepare them for diversity built on their funds of knowledge.

Teacher preparation for rural settings. The literature on preparing teachers for rural settings is limited (Gibson, 1994; Sherwood, 2000). However, there is evidence that teachers would benefit from in-depth study of rural community issues as those communities change (Ernst-Slavit, 1997; Schram, 1993). Such study of “local communities and their impact on educational possibilities” can be viewed as a starting place for instructional improvement, although such a focus appears to be rare in most teacher preparation programs (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p. 70). This recommendation is aligned with recent research in multicultural teacher education which suggests that preservice teachers preparing for teaching diverse students in any context should learn inquiry strategies that enable them to be students of their own students and their communities (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Wink & Putney, 2002).

The Riverside Context: Preservice Teachers Learning in Rural Schools and Communities

Riverside area rural communities and students. The preservice and practicing teachers in Riverside area schools are representative of the nation’s teaching mostly White, female, teaching force. Yet the students they teach are considerably more diverse than school faculties. In a third of districts in this study, the student body is nearly 50% students who speak Spanish at home. In addition, many immigrants who had originally settled in the Boise, Idaho, area have begun to move to rural Riverside areas. As a result, there is a wider variety of religious, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups in schools than in the past 20 years. Riverside preservice teachers may not have attended rural schools with children of Bosnian or Chinese descent, but they are there now. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 has local administrators worried about meeting “Adequate Yearly Progress” goals with few teachers prepared in English for Speakers of Other

Languages (ESOL) and limited access to specialists in meeting exceptional learners' needs.

The Riverside Cohort Teacher Preparation Program. The Riverside branch campus operates in a cohort model which serves 15-20 students in each cohort. Preservice teachers take most of the required courses for their degree in community college classes or transfer credits from previous university work. They then apply for the Riverside program. In their "cohort" terms, they take integrated elementary teaching methods and assessment courses, and selected courses in their endorsement areas². At the same time, they are placed in rural schools for at least 12 hours a week. Kerri, an associate professor in ESOL/literacy, and Jan, an associate professor in elementary education and the Riverside Cohort Leader, teach nearly all cohort courses. One course each term is delivered via distance education from a professor from the main university campus (for example, a two-credit course in special education law). The third Riverside term is a 14-week fall student teaching placement in a rural Oregon or Idaho school, supervised by Jan, Kerri, or a selected Riverside area teacher.

Jan and Kerri are European American. They have a combined 29 years' experience in living and teaching in rural U.S. communities that have become increasingly diverse. Like their preservice teachers, they live with their families in rural towns near the Riverside branch campus. Their children attend local schools. They are the main advisors, instructors, and physical "faces" of the larger university campus for Riverside students in the university's teacher education program.

Future teachers enrolled at Riverside. The preservice teachers in the cohorts at this branch campus can be characterized as "nontraditional" university students in many ways (see Table 2). Most are over 30. Most are married and seeking to fulfill career goals after raising children or pursuing another career, and most come from rural backgrounds. Most would not seek a teaching degree if they had to uproot families to attend a residential university campus. Most Riverside graduates take teaching positions within a 50-mile radius of the Riverside program.

In other ways they are typical of most teachers in the U.S. The majority are European-American women who speak English as a native language. They come from middle-class to lower-middle-class backgrounds. Like many rural teachers described by Kannapel and DeYoung (1999), Riverside preservice teachers feel strong ties to their communities and have plans to teach in them long term. These rural communities in Oregon and Idaho are largely supported by

low-wage jobs in food processing, small businesses, farms, dairies, and county government services. Towns that have schools range in size from 130 to 9,000 residents.

Results and Discussion

Preservice teachers' initial assumptions about student diversity. Data suggested that most preservice teachers readily accepted the notion that minority students bring a host of cultural knowledge and practices with them to schools. However, they had not considered the challenges in working with large numbers of students whose language, cultural practices, and associated funds of knowledge were unknown to them. They did not view "reaching minority kids" as their responsibility. "Oh, my practicum teacher told me that those are the kids the school just passes along," explained one preservice teacher early in her program.

In these Riverside cohorts, most preservice teachers did not readily question the dominant assumption that European-American, English-speaking school faculty automatically knew best how to teach all children, regardless of the children's language or cultural background. Nor did cohort members know how or where to begin to learn about students who shared their communities, but not their cultural experiences.

As they spent time in schools, however, they began to worry. Gabi expressed some fear that teaching linguistic and cultural minority students might not be as "easy" as "teaching students like my own kids." Claire, who grew up in small Oregon and Idaho towns, put it this way:

I feel like I've been kind of culturally sheltered. I have not been around second language learners—second language speakers. I haven't been around Hispanics or anybody except what we call the standard, White, English speaking person, and I'm here now in college learning everything about this new world that I'm introduced to. The case study we did of the bilingual person, that was my first big experience with a minority group member.

Claire's use of the word "standard" underscores a common assumption in many Riverside area schools and communities. Minority students are viewed as "nonstandard" and hence, problematic. Even though students have become increasingly diverse, diversity in language and culture is apt to be ignored by school faculty when possible. One middle school science teacher told a practicum student, "We don't have very many Hispanics at all," when in fact nearly 20% of the students in the school speak Spanish at home. When diversity is impossible to deny, it is commonly characterized as a burden: "Those [minority] kids - they are the reason why our reading scores are low!" Diversity is seldom viewed

²All preservice teachers at Riverside are encouraged to seek a state endorsement in ESOL. If they do not seek this endorsement, they still must take at least four upper-division courses in ESOL methods, reading methods with ESOL students, and multicultural education.

Table 2
Representative Preservice Teachers in the 2002 and 2003 Cohort Group

Preservice Teacher	Previous Teaching or Work Experience	Age	No. of Children	Ethnicity	Native Language	Religious Affiliation	Cohort Group
Gabi	Raising children; Sunday school	48	4	Euro-American	English	Catholic	2002
Carlie	Special education aide	25	0	Euro-American	English	None	2002
Erin	Special education aide	25	1	Euro-American	English	Catholic	2002
Rachel	Small business manager; coach	28	2	Euro-American	English	Mormon	2002
Jerri	Military; court transcriber; foster parent	32	6	Euro-American	English	Protestant	2002
Claire	Raising children	28	2	Euro-American	English	Assembly Of God	2002
Shauna	Grocery store manager; county clerk	40	2	Euro-American	English	Lutheran	2003
Ronda	Waitress; restaurant owner	38	3	Euro-American	English	Protestant	2003
Mary	Raising children; coach	35	6	Euro-American	English	Mormon	2003
Leslie	Raising children; farming	37	5	Euro-American	English	Mormon	2003
Jill	Education aide	32	2	Euro-American	English	Protestant	2003

as an asset to be built on in curriculum or extracurricular activities.

Data suggest that preservice teachers had internalized many of these assumptions. Only 1 of the 31 preservice teachers entered Riverside with a strong desire to meet linguistically diverse students' needs. Of those who sought ESOL endorsements, most explained their reasons in one of two ways: "It was available" (Erin) and "I've been told a lot of schools are looking for that" (Mary). Most did not indicate any desire to connect with and understand linguistic minority students early in their program.

While acknowledging that learning about minority students might be a good idea, it was not something most

preservice teachers were excited about. Shauna put it this way during her student teaching term:

I could have been the poster child for resisting this . . . I wanted a full science endorsement instead and actually started it, until I really began to do practicum work with kids in my schools. Like [the Mexican American kids] didn't all want to read the books I just loved. They cared—but about things I didn't know about. I had to learn it from the kids.

Effective and ineffective experiences in preparation for rural student diversity. We had good intentions when

Table 3
Characteristics of Effective Experiences at Riverside in Preparing Rural Preservice Teachers for Diverse Students

Effective learning experiences were characterized by . . .	Examples of Assignments or Experiences
Sustained Individual Contact with Linguistic Minority Child or Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study of bilingual teen or adult (extended written research paper in “Language and Cognition” class) • ESOL Reading Buddy practicum (involves 10 weeks’ work with one or two students learning to read in English)
Emphasis on Reflecting on Preservice Teachers’ Own Histories (Autobiographical Reflection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Language, Literacy, Culture” autobiography (presentation assignment in “Children’s Literature” Classes) • Literature Circles (reading and talking about books by and about minority students in “Children’s Literature” and “Reading Methods” and “Curriculum Cycle” classes) • Cultural case study of a cohort peer (short written case study writeup in “Multicultural American Society” class)
Highly Structured Exposure to Minority Community and Resources (with ample time for “debriefing” with cohort peers and faculty)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom discourse speech data collection and analysis (transcribing classroom interaction assignments in “Sociolinguistics” class) • Community Cultural Exploration (written assignment and structured group data analysis discussion in “ESOL Methods” class) • Inquiry projects designed by preservice teachers themselves into schools’ language policies and curriculum materials (e.g., 150-hour action research project into “Attitudes about Hispanic Students” conducted by a team of three preservice teachers in three different districts)

designing assignments and practicum experiences for our students, but not all experiences aimed at helping preservice teachers learn about minority students were equal in the eyes of preservice teachers. Data in this study provided a great deal of information about what the 31 preservice teachers perceived to be most and least helpful in preparing them to work with diverse learners. Table 3 presents the characteristics of learning experiences perceived as helpful. One of the most helpful experiences noted above is described in detail in the next section of this paper.

Preservice teachers also discussed learning experiences that they considered ineffective. Any university classroom discussions or in-class activities that made them feel ashamed, excluded, or embarrassed about their own lack of knowledge about other cultures and languages were perceived as ineffective. Erin described a particular “Introduction to Education” (not offered as part of Riverside’s program) course early in her community college career that she had taken

Where we just had to read all these articles by multicultural firebrands . . . and then the instructor would just talk and talk about how important it all was and how we didn’t know anything because we were White . . . looking back, that might have been true, but I was embarrassed, and that was a big turn-

off, and made me not want to do anything special for Hispanic kids. When I got into Riverside and realized I had to take courses in ESOL, I was just really panicked they would all be like that. Most of it wasn’t, but a few times it was, and it’s hard to get excited about learning about minority students if you’re sitting in a classroom having a discussion and thinking that you’re doomed before you start because you aren’t the right color or you don’t speak another language.

As we analyzed the data about experiences at Riverside, we realized that probably more than “a few times” we were guilty of talking about diversity from our soapboxes during class discussions—and of not letting preservice teachers like Erin reflect on what they were learning about minority students in rural schools. It has taken us years of teaching to develop a multicultural orientation to curriculum and pedagogy. Our preservice teachers have not had those years.

Preservice teachers, on the whole, did not consider readings in theory of multicultural education or multicultural education research conducted in nonrural settings as especially helpful. “Well, if it’s not connected to exactly what I’m trying to do with my own lessons and my kids, it’s hard to get into,” explained Leslie. Although we liked to use such read-

ings to spark discussion in class, few cohort members ever made links from those articles to implications for their own practice. Some of the preservice teachers, however, reported being “comforted” by research like the work of Ballenger (1992) and Lipka (1998). Their work was characterized by preservice teachers as suggesting that no matter what a teacher’s own language and cultural practices might be, a sustained focus learning about students can help her interact and teach in culturally responsive ways.

In addition, preservice teachers rarely described being placed in schools with minority students as helpful in preparing them to teach minority students well. Jerri described her first practicum experience in an elementary school with over 60% Hispanic students this way:

I really wanted to see how my cooperating teachers drew in the ESOL kids. But I was in this school, no books or materials in the classroom in anything but English, a teacher who didn’t know anything about all her Hispanic kids. There was no ESOL teacher, nobody knew what the test scores meant that they did on the Spanish-speaking kids for their language assessment at the beginning of the year or what to do with those. I didn’t get any ideas at all.

In sum, the most effective experiences we designed to help our preservice teachers feel prepared to teach linguistic and culturally diverse students were those which scaffolded learning from their own experiences with minority students and families. These experiences and related assignments included sustained contact with minority children and families over time, an emphasis on examination of their own funds of knowledge, and highly structured explorations into minority students’ experiences with ample time to reflect on their new knowledge. Conversely, when they felt that our assignments did not take into account their own funds of knowledge, or that assignments were not related directly to rural children and local school reform, they felt poorly prepared for “dealing with” student diversity.

The Community Cultural Exploration (CCE). We present here a detailed description of the one experience that all 31 preservice teachers reported as being very helpful over the course of their Riverside program.

The CCE is a 2-week assignment which gives preservice teachers a chance to use “ethnographic eyes” (Frank, 1999) in their familiar-seeming communities. We have assigned the CCE as part of combined work in classes such as “ESOL Methods” and “Curriculum Cycle,” but it is an assignment that could also be adapted for courses in sociolinguistics, educational foundations, or multicultural education.

In the first part of the CCE, preservice teachers observed and took field notes in places frequented by linguistic minority students and their families. They were encouraged to visit places in their rural communities where they would

not routinely go. In-class brainstorming was necessary for some preservice teachers to think about places in their small communities where non-English speaking residents might be found. Preservice teachers were given a brief set of focus questions and instructions (see Appendix B). Working from their observations and fieldnotes, they then wrote short formal reports about their experiences.

Preservice teachers went to a wide variety of places new to them: small businesses owned by Mexican-American residents; health and social service offices; laundromats; Catholic church services, conducted in Spanish; Buddhist church services, conducted in Japanese; quinceñera celebrations; Hispanic soccer league tournaments; Judo clubs; Ore-Ida vegetable processing plants; onion sheds and other agricultural produce locations. Even familiar places such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and hospital emergency rooms became good places to hone their observational skills as they watched different cultural groups interact in bureaucratic settings.

The second part of the CCE required the cohort to practice analyzing data in their reports. First, we read the reports and identified tentative themes across them (for example, “choices about language used” or “parent/child talk patterns”). Then we typed examples for each tentative theme on slips of paper, omitting the writers’ names.

In the next class period, we opened by sharing the list of places that preservice teachers went. “I had no idea there were so many places you could go and not hear any English!” said Claire. We wrote tentative themes on a poster, and explained that the cohort would examine and analyze data from the reports to refine our understanding of unfamiliar places. We distributed the slips of paper around the group. We then invited preservice teachers to sit in a circle and read the data on their slips of paper aloud. The corresponding number of a possible theme was included on each slip, but readers were encouraged to change the number (or suggest a new theme) as the discussion continued and more descriptions were read aloud.

As we facilitated the circle discussion, the group decided where each example on a slip of paper should be pasted on the “themes” poster (see Figure 1).

As examples were pasted and repositioned on the poster, much discussion ensued. Often, the writers of the field notes would speak up to give more details about what they had seen and experienced at a given place. Sometimes the group decided a new theme was needed, or that two themes might be collapsed into one. Often writers were encouraged by the group questions and discussion to reevaluate language they had used to describe an event, or to identify their own biases and cultural lenses.

For example, one preservice teacher read aloud a passage about a visit to a Laundromat patronized by Spanish speaking customers:

Sample Theme	Representative Example Identified in Writeups
1. Being in the “minority”	At Gonzalez market: “I would have to say that I felt uncomfortable there. I was in an environment that was not my own. The people were friendly but I was a minority. Not being able to speak the language did not help.”
2. “New” (to us) sights, artifacts, and processes	At La Casita grocery: “I asked a lady that was buying nopales (cactus meat) to explain to me how to cook it. She was very friendly. She said it was good for the muscles and gives people strength if they have anemia . . . she also showed me chayotes, like a sweet potato, which had little prickly things on them and said they were good to eat all by themselves.”
3. Discomfort (self or others)	Observer discomfort at corner taco stand: “We ordered tacos from the stand outside. The tables were not the cleanest and they had to go into the store to get us napkins. We received them when we were almost done eating. I went to use the restroom. It was out of toilet paper and looked like a little boy missed the potty—not a public restroom by any means.” Patron discomfort at W.I.C.: “I guess this observation of an unfriendly place where the Hispanic women had little access to the one bilingual health worker made me think. I felt sorry for them seeming to have difficulties communicating with the front receptionist. It seemed a true experience for them and probably a pretty uncomfortable one.”

Figure 1. Section of “Themes and Examples” CCE poster

I have heard that in this culture, the man takes charge of the money. I thought it was interesting to watch him take charge of getting the quarters and putting them all in the washers and dryers. It was almost as if the woman wasn't allowed to touch the money. As an educator, I think it is important to take note of cultural differences such as this (the money factor).

Immediately thereafter, the group discussed the use of a single observed behavior as evidence for or against a stereotypical belief (instructor comments are italicized):

Kelsey: What about that, the money part – like it's a cultural thing for Hispanic males or something?

Jayla: That's not Hispanic, that's too broad a term

Jerri: Yeah, my [Mexican-American] mother-in-law isn't like that—she controls the purse strings! (laughter in the circle)

Kerri: I wonder what people would see if they saw me and my husband and kids at the Laundromat? He might put in the money while I took care of other things -

Kelsey: And we know you are not some timid little thing!

Marsha (who read the excerpt): That's not one for “parents and children” [theme], that's really one for “stereotypes” [theme]

Val: Right right. It's like this is not scientifically done, it's just one time

Kerri: Can one observation, a couple of hours, be used as evidence of a general cultural trend, or, or a trait really? Then what are we learning here?

Other written descriptions and interpretations of events were challenged during this group's discussion. The characterization of a Spanish-speaking child's behavior in a Laundromat as “unruly” was questioned by some group members, and a description of the activities of Hispanic patrons in a bar and grill as being “just like normal people” was also questioned. At this point in the debriefing, Jerri remarked,

Isn't it interesting how it's such a big thing, how we use more descriptive language, more adjectives, for those who are not like us in our writings here? It's like it's “Mexican music” or “Hispanic, Span-

ish-speaking family”, but if there’s no descriptive words, that’s “normal” – or really, means just White and English speaking? Why don’t we write that?

Jerri’s comment was an astute one, and it encouraged some discussion about the nature of ethnographic data collection. There is the danger that such an activity, without sensitive and careful debriefing, can serve only to reaffirm preservice teachers’ own biases. That is, as they compare their funds of knowledge about community norms with others’ funds of knowledge, they may decide to view their own accustomed practices to be the “right way” of doing things in any community (Cazden, 2001). We have found we must take care to encourage “looking beneath the surface” to question our own commonsense assumptions, even as we explore minority students’ and families’ funds of knowledge.

At their best, assignments like the CCE help us to examine our communities and the ways we interpret everyday events. This assignment gives preservice concrete ways to gain new information about minority families beyond what they learn in schools. In the process, they can reflect on their own previously unexamined funds of knowledge, and seek out new funds of knowledge held by minority students. But data from this study suggest that such inquiry must take place in a supportive classroom atmosphere. It can be difficult for preservice teachers to dissect their own beliefs and practices publicly. We had to model and reward talk that questioned others’ beliefs without ridiculing them, and talk that challenged others’ thinking without patronizing others’ ideas. For this reason, we did not include writers’ names on data slips that are read aloud by group members. It was the writer’s choice to “own” the description presented (or to avoid claiming it) in the moment of discussion. For example, the writer of one of the challenged descriptions didn’t speak up at the time to defend her use of the phrase “just like normal people.” However, she wrote in her class reflection that she “learned the value of a comfortable, trusting environment—yes, I participated and shared, and saw some of my own perceptions in the discussion.”

Extending knowledge gained during the CCE to planning instruction. Data in the study suggested that preservice teachers used information gained in activities like the CCE to help them plan instruction. For example, preservice teacher Miko was struggling to assist two ESOL readers in her third-grade placement. During her CCE, Miko attended services at the children’s church. There, to her surprise, she observed those same students reading in Spanish. They assisted uncles and aunts in finding titles in Spanish hymnals, and they played word games during the sermon on the church bulletin.

Miko noted, “I saw them reading. Their teacher doesn’t think they want to read. For me, learning to read a little bit and playing with Japanese is fun outside school, because some of my family knows Japanese, and that’s what these

students were seeing reading in their home language in church as—fun.” In this way, Miko made a connection between her home cultural practices in second language literacy and her minority students’ funds of knowledge, and she began to wonder about how to build on that to help improve her reading instruction in school. Eventually, Miko worked with the third-grade teacher to create a “reading outside school” bulletin board. Students, including her ESOL readers, brought in texts from home or community that they knew how to read.

Rural preservice teachers generating their own community research projects. Such “wondering” can lead to preservice teacher-generated inquiry into teaching diverse students well in rural schools. Because of the flexibility in our cohort model, we can make space for such inquiry for credit across several courses. We also support in-depth inquiry projects with weekly “data meetings” as students plan how they will collect data related to their questions, how they will make sense of them, and how they will report them to others. During their first 20 weeks in the Riverside program, preservice teachers design and complete a series of action research projects related to “burning questions” (Hubbard & Power, 1993) they have about teaching. The burning questions do not have to relate to issues of diversity, but preservice teachers often choose diversity-related topics as they spend more time in local schools. Figure 2 provides a list of questions that led to valuable long-term inquiries into student diversity by preservice teachers in the study.

Some of the preservice teachers’ inquiries become quite intensive. All cohort members present results of their inquiries to their peers in during Riverside’s “focused inquiry project” presentation day. However, 12 preservice teachers’ action research projects (including several case studies of bilingual learners, a study of attitudes toward minority students in three different rural districts, and a comparison of materials used in reading instruction for mainstream and minority readers) were also selected for presentation at a prestigious university-wide student research symposium, 150 miles north of Riverside. Four preservice teachers were then asked to present their research to a local educational service district.

Some Conclusions and Implications

Findings in this self-study support Garrett’s (2002) assertion that

Teachers cannot take their students where they themselves cannot go . . . The exposure of individuals to diverse individuals and groups is insufficient to assure their ability to teach all of America’s children and youth. Only through carefully directed activities, with ample opportunity for reflection, can [preservice teachers] grow to become the kind

- Why isn't a local elementary school that serves over 60% non-English speakers using more culturally relevant materials? Why is there no Spanish on the walls when most parents speak it? Why don't students demand it? Why don't their parents?
- How do classroom teachers feel about the bilingual aides? How are they "used" in the school?
- Whose job is it to make school policies about language use and who teaches which students?
- What kinds of books do minority and mainstream kids like to read from the school library and the classroom library, and why?
- Why aren't the Hispanic kids reading the multicultural books in the library? (This led to the question, "Why aren't the multicultural books in the library assigned Accelerated Reader points like the other books?")
- What do local teachers like about working with linguistically diverse students?
- Why does the dual-language charter school need to be here?
- Why are ESOL kids' language skills tested by aides or volunteers who've never been trained to give the tests?
- How on earth do busy classroom teachers decide who gets "help" when help is available (in form of aides or volunteers)?
- How do parents feel about the "Success for All" and "Alice Nine" reading programs? Are there different responses to these recently-adopted schoolwide programs?
- How can I advocate for minority students, get time for home visits, and ask for translating services for conferences and notes home without alienating long-term faculty in small schools?

Figure 2. Sample questions generated by preservice teachers as part of learning from students and communities for inquiry projects

of educators who are capable of working with a diverse population. (p. 68)

This study focused largely on how preservice teachers felt about being prepared for diversity. Should we have spent so much time investigating preservice teacher perceptions as we attempted to evaluate our practice in diversity preparation? Data suggest that our practitioner inquiry helped us model processes we want preservice teachers to engage in as they work with diverse learners. Data suggest that most preservice teachers in these cohorts did reflect on their own cultural assumptions in substantive ways. When Riverside assignments were carefully structured to include direct contact with minority students over time, when preservice teachers felt assignments acknowledged their own funds of knowledge about rural communities, and when preservice teachers had ample time to reflect on their exposure to new information about minority students, they felt prepared for diversity.

Findings indicate that the Riverside program helped preservice teachers become sensitive to issues in teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students in rural schools. They learned some strategies for inquiring into students' funds of knowledge. Moreover, they appeared to believe such inquiry was important, even in their 1st year of teaching. Data also suggested that a concomitant focus on their own autobiographies was important as they inquired into diverse learners' experiences in their rural communities.

For Riverside preservice teachers, it appeared that a sustained focus on inquiry and teacher research across the entire preparation program was essential. An underlying focus on teacher inquiry in all courses contributed to their feelings of preparedness for diverse learners. These findings support the work of researchers in inquiry-based teacher preparation, who posit that "inquiry-based conceptions of teacher learning, which focus on question posing and continuous learning over the professional lifespan, are in keeping with current research about how people learn more generally" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992).

One unanticipated finding suggested by the data was that the cohort model itself may have been essential in preparing nontraditional preservice teachers teaching diverse learners. The cohort model offers flexibility in scheduling, combined with an emphasis on strong relationships between cohort peers and their instructors. The flexibility makes time for sustained inquiry possible. This time together can support an atmosphere of trust between instructors and preservice teachers, who might otherwise be afraid to plunge into controversial issues surrounding multicultural education.

Questions remain for us at Riverside, however. We may have sensitized our preservice teachers to some issues in teaching all learners well. Yet we have more questions about how (and whether) our newly-certified teachers are translating this sensitivity into their practice. There is evidence that former cohort members are working to change school curricula and libraries to be more inclusive of minority students. However, there is also evidence that when

former cohort members do not have like-minded teaching peers in their rural schools, they find it easier to “leave the minority kids out” of their instructional planning. We continue to observe former cohort members in local schools. How can we support multicultural practice during and after the Riverside program? How can we interest diverse young students in our schools in teaching?

It can be exhausting for new rural teachers to design curriculum with students whose lives are different from their own. They are often surprised that their schools consider them resources for “dealing with” diversity—even though they are novice teachers. (Remember Rachel, whose emailed cry for help indicated a need for a nap!) Ronda recognized the opportunities and the challenges facing her when she wrote us in her 1st year of teaching:

I’ve learned that diverse students have been challenged by the education system for many years . . . progress toward addressing all students’ needs has been virtually ignored by dominant members of the education community. This issue has challenged me to be more than just a good teacher. I can choose to walk the tightrope, or I can take the easy road and comply with the current approaches in our schools.

Ronda, Rachel, and other teachers from these cohorts confront the challenges of meeting diverse learners’ needs in rural schools, frequently calling on their teacher friend networks for more materials, suggestions, and support. More research is needed to tell the stories of how teachers meet diverse students’ needs while attempting to make “the connection between pedagogy/curriculum and the value of ‘place’” (Sherwood, 2000, p. 65) in rural communities. Perhaps one of the best things teacher educators can do along the way is to support what Shauna calls “an enthusiastic desire to learn more” about their students and themselves.

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Appendix A
Culturally Responsive Practices Exhibited by Student Teachers: Observation Sheet

Note: This is not an evaluation instrument. It was designed as a data collection aid during one phase of a qualitative self-study in rural teacher preparation program efficacy. CRP categories are based on the work of Gay (2000) and Wenger et al. (2004).

Student Teacher: _____ Grade Level: _____ School: _____
Term: _____ Cooperating Teacher: _____ Supervisor: _____

I. Uses Students' Knowledge to Create Meaning

- _____ plans for, collects, and analyzes information about students' preferences, abilities, knowledge, and talents
*example:
- _____ taps student interest and expertise in daily content-area work
*example:
- _____ expands/offers materials which reflect students' experiences and life outside school
*example:
- _____ changes/adapts incentives for students (knows what motivates different individuals in classroom)
*example:
- _____ mirrors student and community talk patterns as part of classroom community building (recognizes and uses students' most comfortable modes of expression during instruction; ties classroom interaction patterns into home language used to praise, remonstrate, share ideas)
*example:

II. Promotes Academic, Social, and Cultural Success for Students

- _____ notices when methods and/or materials are not meeting needs of all learners
*example:
- _____ shares high expectations of students' academic and social development with learners explicitly and frequently
*example:
- _____ designs lessons which invite talk and collaboration among peers
*example:
- _____ plans for and offers assistance outside school (provided by self or expert others)
*example:
- _____ provides access to essential services, learning tools, and caring school and community members
*example:

III. Empowers Students and Families in their Own Learning

- _____ notices if some families are not effectively included in communication and school outreach efforts
*example:
- _____ finds ways to strengthen parent/teacher relationships
*example:
- _____ helps students and parents critically examine assignments and curriculum goals
*example:
- _____ uses community resources in students' home language(s) to help students learn grade-level content materials prior to assessment in school language
*example:

Appendix B
CCE Assignment Description

Community Cultural Exploration

The premise behind this partner assignment is simple: It's a way of giving ourselves a taste of how second language speakers exist in our communities. For this assignment, you (or you and your partner) need to:

1. Identify TWO places (they can't be public schools) where speakers of languages other than English go as part of daily living in our communities;
2. Go to those places and "hang out" (for a minimum of 2 hours at each place);
3. Reflect in writing about what you saw/heard/felt/experienced/did there.

This is your chance to imagine that you're an anthropologist here studying people in the Treasure Valley and to describe in detail what you find. Be creative in finding places where you imagine second language speakers might be. It's up to you to decide what you'll do at those places. If you go to a church, you may want to attend a service; if you go to a laundromat, you may want to do your laundry. If you go to a health clinic, you may decide just to "hang out" in the waiting room and watch and listen as people interact. If you can without being rude, take some notes while you're hanging out about what everybody's doing and how they are interacting. You may also ask people questions while you're in a place. For example, if you go to a Spanish-language grocery store, you may decide to tell the clerks or customers you're in a class about language and culture, and ask them a few questions about their work and to explain their business to you.

Once you have spent at least 2 hours in one place, you and your partner need to write about what you experienced. Your writeup (just one for each pair of students) should be at least one full page, typed, for each place. You may wish to use the following format to help you do your writeups:

I. Name:

II. Place:

III. Community:

IV. What happened while I was there:

(Pay special attention to how language is used in your setting. Can you tell whether people know each other? Is it a friendly place? What is the atmosphere like? Are people using different languages? How do people treat each other? How do parents interact with children? With other adults? How are children acting? What are they doing?)

V. Something I learned which I didn't know before I was hanging out here:

VI. Why might this be important for me to know as an educator?