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Lyndall Harrison Warren

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USING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE TO DEVELOP EMPATHY AND COMPASSION IN PRESERVICE TEACHERS: A FIRST STEP IN PREPARING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHERS

by

LYNDALL HARRISON WARREN

Under the direction of Dr. Ming Fang He

ABSTRACT

The study explored possibilities for change in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program in the John H. Lounsbury School of Education at Georgia College & State University (GC&SU). Concern for the lack of diversity in the teaching population increased when the demographics for preservice teachers were examined. Reports by Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Danne Davis, and Kim Fries (2004) show that there is an overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher education. These data show that, depending upon the institution and location, 80-93% of the students enrolled in collegiate education programs are white (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). These phenomena are represented in the enrollment of the teacher education programs at GC&SU. For this reason the study addressed issues of diversity that have implications for teacher education programs not only locally but also nationally. Nationwide, teacher education is faced with the growing challenge of not only recruiting a more diverse population of perservice teachers but also, more immediately, preparing predominately white teachers who not only understand culturally responsive pedagogy but also are well prepared to implement effective teaching strategies for children who are different from themselves.

The theoretical framework for this study has two distinct strands. The first is culturally responsive teaching as it has been theorized in the work of Geneva Gay (2000).
The second strand is Martha Nussbaum’s (1997) theory of narrative imagination, which is supported by Maxine Greene’s (1995b, 1978) notion of cultivating the literary imagination to improve judgment and enhance sensitivity. This framework represents one way to explore programmatic changes that can assist in the preparation of preservice teachers who respond to the diversity found in classrooms by implementing teaching practices that are culturally responsive to the students.

The study was conducted using the cross-cultural narrative method of inquiry (He, 2003). The participants included four white, middle class females who were enrolled in the senior cohort of the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU. Data collection methods included the school portraiture, participant profiles, autobiographies that explored the cultural roots of the participants, critical writings completed by participants, and participant interviews. Data was analyzed to determine existing stereotypes; to assess the participants’ awareness of group dominance, stereotypes, racism, and/or oppression; to ascertain whether or not the experiences of the study influenced change in the personal, cultural and/or racial attitudes and beliefs of participants who will become more culturally responsive in their teaching practices.

Diversity is not a choice but a way of life. Using multicultural literature to develop empathy and compassion towards others is only the first, perhaps a most appropriate, step to prepare culturally responsive teachers in an increasingly diversified society. Although my study focuses on the White middle class female population of the teaching force in predominant White and rural areas in the United States, I believe that it has implications for enhancing mutual respect and understanding, cultivating empathy
and compassion, and developing culturally responsive pedagogy for all children to reach their highest potential.
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Lyndall Harrison Warren
B.S., Georgia College, 1977
M.Ed., Georgia College, 1981
Ed. S., Georgia College, 1994

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LYNDALL HARRISON WARREN

Major Professor: Ming Fang He

Committee: Michael McKenna
Dee Russell
William Reynolds
John Weaver

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DEDICATION

To my life partner and best friend,

David,

For your constant love, support, and encouragement

For your willingness to freely give of yourself,

Your time and your talents

For believing in me and encouraging me to achieve my dreams

For being there to share the disappointments

But most importantly the celebrations

Thank you

I love you.

To my wonderful children,

Amy and Andy

For understanding and encouraging me

For your patience and willingness to listen

Most of all,

For your unconditional love.

Remember always that I believe in you and wish you the best

Stay true to yourselves, follow your dreams

I love you both.
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A special note of love and appreciation goes to my parents for their support throughout this process. They were there for me whenever I needed them, willing to do whatever was necessary to help.

I must also recognize my “extended academic family,” Carla Ross, Paula Baker, and Carol Williams. These women accepted me with open arms, offered support, and provided me with a safe place to question my own cultural roots.

Sincere appreciation is also extended to the faculty of John H. Lounsbury School of Education. This group of people has helped me to achieve a dream. Without them I would not be where I am today. I am truly grateful to be a part of such a wonderful academic family.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the following study is to explore the use of multicultural literature as a genre to assist in the preparation of teachers who are adequately equipped to effectively teach diverse groups of students. By encouraging preservice teachers to develop empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves through utilizing the concept of “narrative imagination” as it is described by Martha Nussbaum, preservice teachers will be provided with opportunities that will help them in gaining a better understanding not only of themselves but also of others. It is this understanding that can lead to respecting and valuing differences and, ultimately, to more culturally responsive practice.

Context of the Study

I sat quietly to observe a lesson in a kindergarten classroom. Most children gathered anxiously on the carpet sitting informally around the teacher. A couple of children had been quite obviously separated from the rest of the group. These children were in chairs on opposite sides of the back of the classroom. The teacher was in a prominent position in front of the group perched in a chair placing her on a higher plane than the children. The lesson began with the teacher showing a picture of a baby to the class. The picture was actually of the teacher when she was about a year old. Upon seeing the photograph, the children became very excited. It was obvious that they knew a great deal about being a baby and the changes that take place as “growing-up” occurs.
Impatient hands waved in the air. Some children who just could not wait to be recognized called out enthusiastic comments to the teacher. As the children, who were visibly excited to have a direct connection to the impending lesson, offered their ideas, experiences, and questions, they were firmly reminded by the teacher that it was time to listen and not to share. Eventually the children sat quietly, attentive to what the teacher was saying. Emphasis was placed over and over upon the fact that the picture and the events related to being a baby and growing up centered on the experiences of the teacher. The teacher told the children that there would be a time at the end of the lesson for sharing. This lesson was about how babies change over time. The children needed to listen to the teacher in order to learn what had previously been determined as important information. The time for sharing never came; other more important information needed to be covered in order to meet the objectives for the day.

What was wrong with the scenario described above? The children were interested and enthusiastic. The lesson was obviously connected to the prior knowledge of the children in the class. Children who had trouble being a part of the group had been removed so as not to cause distractions. The teacher was visibly in control of the lesson. So, what could possibly be wrong with this? This is a question that many may ask. I contend that there is much to be found “wrong.” Sadly too, this description represents what happens quite frequently in many early childhood classrooms today. The teacher is the dispenser of knowledge. The children are not seen as being knowledgeable, capable, or legitimate. They are the “blank slates” upon which the teacher must make her mark. The experiences, prior knowledge, and interests of the children are not valued or respected by the teacher. Those children, who for whatever reason are different, are
excluded from the group and ultimately from the lesson itself. The contributions of these children, the ones excluded, are the least valued of all. The teacher encourages the children to conform rather than to think, to question, to challenge.

As a teacher educator for seventeen years, I have observed countless lessons conducted by both preservice and inservice teachers in which the culture, experiences, inquiries, and interests of the children are devalued or ignored. As a result, I have become more and more aware of the responsibility that teacher education programs must accept in order to adequately prepare teachers to effectively respond to the diversity found within the walls of their classrooms. In support, recent research stresses concern for the fact that where there has been an increase in diversity within the public school student population, conversely, there is an overwhelming presence of Whiteness in teacher education as well as White teachers who are ill-prepared to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Marx & Pennington, 2003; LeCompte & McCray, 2002; Kailin, 1999; Reed, 1998; McIntyre, 1997). In addition, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Danne Davis, and Kim Fries (2004) report that, depending upon the institution and location, 80-93% of the students enrolled in collegiate education programs are White.

Although teacher education programs show evidence of an increase in diversity and some alternate programs are beginning to attract more minority students, “it seems clear that the teaching force will remain primarily White European American for some time to come” (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004, p. 934). The implications of the demographics are much larger than the obvious numerical differences between student and teaching populations (Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries, 2004). There are marked
differences in life experiences, socioeconomic levels, and cultures. Teachers possess frames of reference and points of view that are quite different from their students.

Mary Kalantzis and William Cope (1997) further substantiate the need to address these concerns. They state that “multiculturalism, the reality of living with diversity, is not a matter of momentary controversy. Indeed, it may well prove to be the issue of our epoch” (Kalantzis & Cope, 1997, p.B3). Teacher education is, therefore, faced with the growing challenge of preparing teachers who are not only culturally sensitive but also well prepared to teach children who are different from themselves.

Within the Early Childhood Education Program at Georgia College & State University, I have witnessed the phenomena described above. The teacher candidates entering the teacher preparation program are becoming less and less diverse. An excellent example is found in the enrollment for the last three and the upcoming Early Childhood cohorts. In the group of fifty students that entered as a cohort in the fall of 2002, there are two African American females, two White males, and forty-six White females; in fall of 2003, of the forty-eight students entering the program, there is one African American female, three White males, and forty-four White females; for the forty who began the program in the fall of 2004, there was one African American male and thirty-nine White females: and of the almost 80 applicants who qualified for interview to enter the cohort in fall of 2005, there were two White males, the remaining were White females. For this reason, it is my intention to focus my doctoral research on the implications that such data hold for the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU.

As I consider possibilities for improving teacher preparation within the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU, I keep firmly in mind the fact that
this is a group of preservice teachers who are primarily represented by White middle class females who will be teaching a population of children that is rapidly growing more and more diverse. In addition, it is important for me to remember that many prospective teachers have had very little experience with diversity (Nieto, 2000). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001) states that “the average white teacher has no idea what it feels like to be a numerical or political minority in the classroom” (p.81). The demographics of students in the Early Childhood Program at GC&SU as well as conversations with these students about diversity issues continually remind me of how true this statement is for preservice teachers in the middle Georgia area.

As a teacher educator considering the dilemma of preparing teachers who are adequately equipped to effectively teach diverse groups of students, the questions for me have become ones of identifying ways to increase sensitivity to and understanding of diversity as well as finding ways of inviting dialogue about race, racism, and discrimination. What revisions can be made in the current Early Childhood Teacher Education Program that will ultimately lead to the preparation of teachers who are more culturally responsive in their practice? What experiences can be effective in encouraging preservice teachers to explore their own cultural roots, to question stereotypes, and to develop an appreciation for differences? Can multicultural literature be used to encourage the development of empathy and compassion for those who are different from oneself? Can stories be helpful in opening up conversations that can challenge the silence surrounding issues of race and racism?

Across the nation the student population is becoming more and more diverse. Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) report that in 2000, 40% of the student
population in public schools was represented by students of color. In addition, they predict that children of color will constitute the statistical majority of the student population by 2035 and increase annually to an estimated 57% in 2050 (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). Conversely, as the student population grows more diverse, classroom teachers have become less and less so (Reed, 1998). In 1997 national statistics indicated that 86% of the teaching force was comprised of White teachers and 14% was represented collectively by teachers of color (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). This trend is clearly represented by the demographics of Georgia public schools. The 2002-2003 Georgia Public Education Report Card compiled by the Office of Student Achievement shows that 52% of all public school students are White while the remaining 48% is represented by students of color. In addition, the 2001-2002 Georgia Public Education Report Card presented by the Georgia Department of Education shows that almost 78% of all public school teachers, prekindergarten through grade 12, are White, while only 22% are teachers of color. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) argues, however, that the diversity gap between teachers and students is not limited to demographics of culturally diverse students. The social and economic conditions of the students should also be considered a concern. Christine Sleeter (2001) states that the teaching force increasingly does not reflect the profile of the student population, culturally or demographically.

Geneva Gay (2002) adds yet another dimension to this point. She stresses that though this growing diversity gap is not new, “U.S. society and schools are not known for their ready acceptance of difference” (Gay, 2002, p.614). She points out that a strong resistance toward diversity exists and that society socializes individuals to ignore,
devalue, and suspect those who are different from the Eurocentric mainstream. Differences are viewed as deficiencies that require eradication. The goal appears to be to create a society of sameness where everyone believes the same things, acts the same way, and possess the same values (Gay, 2002).

Along with the reluctance to accept differences, “we live in a society that nurtures and maintains stereotypes” (Delpit, 1995, p. xiii). In addition, as a result of our own experiences and cultures, we each have developed our own realities which we carry with us. For each of us, those realities are decidedly different. We tend to make judgments about others based upon our own ideas of what is “right” or “wrong,” our culturally generated stereotypes, and our sense of reality. Most “are totally unable to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision” (Delpit, 1995, p. xiv). This being true, how can teachers hope to understand the children who sit in their classes unless they can make connections with the families and communities from which these children come? In order to do this, Lisa Delpit (1995) suggests that teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators explore their own beliefs about those who are different from themselves.

Differences many times are hard to negotiate. When these are differences of religion, gender, race, class, and national origin, the task of understanding becomes much more difficult. “These differences not only shape the practical choices people face but also their ‘insides,’ their desires, thoughts, and ways of looking at the world” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 85). Rather than face the discomfort or fear of rejection that comes from confronting differences, it is natural to give in to “a powerful tendency to gravitate toward people who remind us of ourselves. People who are in some way similar make us
feel safe. We understand their motives, we share some of their experiences” (Steele, 2002, p.18). Julie Landsman (2001) states:

Teachers are not alone in such hesitation. Many of us, in all walks of life, are nervous talking about race. We are so often afraid we will say the wrong thing, and so we say nothing. We become quiet, defensive, ashamed, or unwilling to respond. We pretend race does not exist. (p.xi)

A study completed by Karon Nicol LeCompte and Audrey Davis McCray (2002) presents the argument that if teachers are to teach children different from themselves, they must first examine their own personal and cultural values and identities. This call for self examination is supported by Landsman (2001) as she challenges that “it is time to study our memories: to explore what it was in our childhood that formed our racial definitions, our prejudices” (p. xii). The chance to look closely at the origin of one’s personal and racial identities as well as how these influence and inform his/her beliefs about race, racism, and multicultural education is necessary in order to develop new possibilities for educating all children (McIntyre, 1997). This challenge, however, is likely to be met with resistance as many prospective White teachers are unable to see themselves as a part of a race or as having a culture (LeCompte & McCray, 2002). This difficulty is compounded by the fact that teachers have commonly avoided engaging their students in discussions about race and racism because it is too dangerous or “best left untouched” (Nieto, 2000, p.306). For this reason, many times, teacher education students have had very little practice talking about racial issues in meaningful and productive ways (Marx & Pennington, 2003). “This soul searching is difficult, but it is a needed step in developing an antiracist multicultural philosophy” (Nieto, 2000, p.308).
In *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Martha C. Nussbaum (1997) extends the possibilities of literature through the use of narrative imagination as a means of cultivating the powers of the imagination as well as improving judgment and enhancing sensitivity. She defines narrative imagination as “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum, 1997, pp. 10-11). Employing the concepts of narrative imagination along with the selected forms of literature seems to be the next step in helping teachers and students move from personal understanding to the understanding of others and develop the ability to listen without defensiveness or guilt when those who are different acknowledge mistakes, question understandings of their experiences, or describe an offensive act (Landsman 2001).

Narrative imagination offers a means by which one can explore the world from another’s point of view. By doing so, they are better able to understand the context of the “other’s” history and social world as well as the meanings behind actions. Narrative imagination, however, is not uncritical. In making these interpretations, individuals consider a part of themselves, their experiences, and their judgments. According to Nussbaum (1997):

The first step of understanding the world from the point of view of the other is essential to any responsible act of judgment, since we do not know what we are judging until we see the meaning of an action as the person intends it, the meaning of a speech as it expresses something of importance in the context of the person’s history and social world. (p. 11)
Through the imagination, the other person can become one that is qualitatively different yet worthy of respect.

The development of empathy, the ability to imagine what it would be like to be in the place of another, is not enough. Compassion, which involves the recognition that someone, through no personal fault, has suffered some significant misfortune, is also essential. In addition, compassion requires a sense of one’s own vulnerability to pain, suffering, or misfortune. The capacity for sympathetic imagination enables one to comprehend the motives and choices of those who are different. They are no longer seen as forbidden, alien, or other, but as having commonalities, as sharing problems as well as possibilities (Nussbaum, 1997). When a common ground has been discovered, the differences between individuals can actually serve to strengthen their shared ideas deepening the relationships and interactions. This is the time when connections can happen, collaboration can begin, and a safe, equitable classroom can be created that fosters respect, tolerance, and appreciation for all individuals.

Discussions and conversations related to equity, discrimination, race, and racism need to begin in a safe place, at a level where the participants feel secure, in an environment that is open and respectful (Florio-Ruane, 2001). Dialogue that begins in a context that is not quite so personal can possibly offer a comfort zone that will be more likely to lead to in-depth discussions. Stories found in multicultural literature could very well offer a risk-free place where the conversations could be initiated. It is through stories that the reader comes to know the characters, understand their actions, connect to their emotions, and find commonalities in experience.
Using multicultural literature as a genre by which preservice teachers can increase their understanding not only of themselves but also of others represents a first step in an effort to move preservice teachers toward more culturally responsive teaching practices. Multicultural literature, for the purposes of this study, is defined as “literature that reflects the multitude of cultural groups within the United States” (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 1998, p. 84). In addition, multicultural literature focuses on “literature that reflects ethnic and regional groups whose cultures historically have been less represented than European cultures” (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 1998, p. 84). The hope is that through the dialogue that is encouraged by the exploration of personal and cultural self-identity, narrative imagination, and multicultural literature these prospective teachers will become more comfortable and confident in talking frankly to each other about differences, that they will be less likely to be silent in the face of race, racism, and discrimination, and that they will encourage their own students to speak out, to question, and to take risks. Lisa Delpit (1995) states that listening to alternative points of view “takes a special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds” (p. 46). This is the kind of listening that I hope that preservice teachers will develop as they open their hearts and their minds to those who are different from themselves. Teachers, preservice and inservice, must learn to listen, even if such listening is difficult, painful, or even disruptive of the clear and distinct boundaries that have been set. To do so, however, means that “we must be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness” (Delpit, 1995, p. 47).
Research Questions

The general question for the research study is:

- How can the concept of narrative imagination be applied in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University to assist in the preparation of more culturally responsive teachers through the development of empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves?

The specific questions are:

- How can multicultural literature be used to encourage the development of empathy and compassion among the White, middle class, preservice teachers for those who are different from themselves?
- How does the participation in narrative imaginative to develop empathy and compassion change one’s thinking?
- In what ways do discussions based on multicultural literature help in opening up conversations that challenge stereotypes as they relate to cultural differences, race, and racism?
- How can the exploration by White, middle class, preservice teachers of their own cultural roots contribute to the questioning of stereotypes and help to develop an appreciation for differences?

Autobiographical Roots

For me, this study represents a means of expressing and acting upon a passion that has developed as a result of experiences in both my personal and professional lives. My now intense interest in the importance of respect and equity for all individuals regardless of race, religion, culture, or personal beliefs began to form within me even as a child. The
drive to find ways to reconcile my discontent with the acts of discrimination that are so often imposed on those, who for whatever reasons, find themselves outside the boundaries of the norm has continued to grow and develop throughout adulthood and in my professional development as a teacher and teacher educator.

On May 27, 2000, along with a group of 250 people representing educators from thirty states, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Australia, and India, I arrived in the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Emilia is a city of approximately 130,000 people located in northern Italy in the prosperous and progressive region of Emilia Romagna. Having heard this, one might ask why so many educators would travel so far to a rather small town in Italy. What common purpose could there possibly be? The answer to this question is found in the municipal early childhood system which has been recognized world-wide as one of the best systems of education (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993).

In the December 2, 1991, issue, Newsweek published an article entitled, “The 10 Best Schools in the World: And What We Can Learn from Them.” Within the text the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools of Reggio Emilia were recognized among the ten best schools in the world. As an early childhood educator with a strong foundation in child development, I was immediately drawn to this article. The history, philosophy, and curriculum of the system were described with just enough detail to give the reader a taste of what the schools were like. However, rather than this essential background information that explained the workings of the municipal schools, it was one outstanding quote that truly spurred my interest toward further, and later more intensive, study of the schools of Reggio Emilia. Pia Hinckle (1991), author of the section on the schools of Reggio Emilia, quoted Loris Malaguzzi, one of the founders of the system, as
saying, “A school needs to be a place for all children, not based on the idea that they are all the same, but that they’re all different” (p. 54). Because of my educational background and my personal beliefs, it was this profound statement that appealed to me and eventually led to my participation in the study tour to Reggio Emilia in May of 2000.

During the years between 1991, when I was first introduced to ideas surrounding the education of young children in Reggio Emilia, and 2000, when I visited the Italian town in order to study the schools, I spent much time attending conferences, reading books and articles, and participating in many conversations as I searched for an understanding of this unique school system for very young children. As a result, I found that the approach developed by educators of Reggio Emilia could be characterized by the following: The opinions and ideas of children are valued. The curriculum is designed around the interests and inquiries of children. And because of these two principles, the projects that develop as a result are meaningful to the children and their lives. The students are responsible for their own learning, while the teacher’s role is to listen, observe, and support. Children are encouraged to revisit and reflect upon projects and tasks in order to revise their perceptions or theories (Gandini, 1997; Houck, 1997; Malaguzzi, 1993a; Malaguzzi, 1993b; Rinaldi, 1993).

The Reggio Approach seems to encompass everything that I believe about the nature of children: the necessity for the valuing of difference, the need for respect for the individual, the understanding of how young children learn, the importance of the learning environment, the role of the teacher in the learning process, the design of curriculum, the importance of relationships, and the role of parents in their child’s education. Lella Gandini (1997) emphasizes that first and foremost the educators of Reggio Emilia speak
about the image of the child as a guiding principle for all interactions. Carlina Rinaldi (1993) strongly reinforces this in the following statement: “The cornerstone of our experience, based on practice, theory, and research, is the image of the children as rich, strong, and powerful. The emphasis is placed on seeing the children as unique subjects with rights rather than simple needs” (p. 102). Children are viewed as individuals who have preparedness, potential, flexibility, and curiosity. They are individuals who possess the desire to grow, to be amazed, to construct their own knowledge, to negotiate the environment, and to communicate and relate to others (Bredekamp, 1993; Gandini, 1993; Rinaldi, 1993). In the schools of Reggio Emilia, the children are no longer considered as “other.” They are respected and accepted as legitimate. This image is consistent with the challenge that is set forth by Gaile S. Cannella (1998), “In our construction of childhood, younger human beings have become the ultimate ‘Other.’…The everyday lives of younger human beings must be viewed as legitimate, multidirectional and multidimensional” (p.175).

When the opportunity arose for me to personally experience the schools of Reggio Emilia, I knew without question that I would go. For some reason, I felt driven to do this. I knew that between October of 1999 and May of 2000 I would find a way. I would do what was necessary to visit the schools that I had been reading about for years. It was not until later, however, that I began to wonder about the source of this determination and persistence. Never in my life had I taken on such a task on my own. What follows is a narrative reflection of the experiences in my life that I believe were critical in bringing me to a point where I felt such an overwhelming need to travel to Italy as a part of my search for ways to provide risk-free learning environments where children’s unique
qualities are respected as well as supported, where children’s ideas and inquiries are valued, and where the voices of children, teachers, and parents are heard. As I begin, I will narrow the focus to three major influences in my life: family, education, and travel. My goal is to explore experiences in these areas that have strongly influenced what I believe about myself, others, and life experiences and to briefly explain how these beliefs now influence my current interest in research.

Explaining such a complex process is quite a difficult task for I believe that “who I am” is still developing and constantly changing. The woman that I am today has slowly evolved from the naive, blonde-haired girl growing up in a White, middle class home in a rural county in middle Georgia. There have been many forces that have served to shape me into the individual that I have become. I believe, however, that this identity, along with my sense of reality, will continue to change in the future with the varying opportunities and experiences that I encounter. I am confident that throughout my life I will meet with challenges and opportunities that will continue to refine my beliefs, my ideas and actions, as well as my expectations for myself and others.

I begin my story with my childhood because this was a time of great conflict for me that I believe has set the tone for most of the decisions that I have made in my life thus far. To those on the outside looking in, I am sure that I appeared to be a part of the perfect White, middle class family. We had a beautiful new home; my mother and father both worked; they appeared to be happily married; my sister and I seemed to have all of our needs met; we had a maid that came three days a week to help out. We were a small, close-knit family. Both sets of grandparents lived very close by to allow for frequent visits and overnight stays. What more could one want?
The problem, however, is revealed by looking at the situation from the inside rather than from the outside. My memories of childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood as they relate to my family are ones of conflict, guilt, and rejection. These emotions were the norm rather than the exception. I lived in constant fear of my mother’s rejection. During most of my life my mother has been, in my opinion, an unstable person with a strong tendency toward deep depression, quite often leading to open threats of suicide. These bouts were intermingled with frequent arguments between my parents, many times leading to serious discussions about separation and divorce. As a child, I never understood that I was not the one at fault. I always felt that I must have done something wrong that initiated these all too frequent episodes. My mother’s open rejection of my sister and me contributed to my feelings of blame and guilt. We were always left wondering what we could have done differently to have avoided the conflict. How could we be so unworthy of love unless we had done something terribly wrong? As the years passed, I became more and more insecure; I grew quieter, less and less willing to take the risks; I became as close to a perfect child as I believed possible. All the while, I longed for the unconditional love of a mother, the security of a home, the feeling of being free from guilt, the sense of confidence that I was “good enough.”

Proving that I was worthy of love and acceptance needed to be accomplished outside the home, in a place much more secure. School became that place of refuge for me. I could excel there. Being quiet and shy, teachers saw me as the model student. I always appeared to be prepared. I spoke only when spoken to. “Straight A’s” were my goal, and with only a few exceptions over my academic career, I succeeded. From the outside, this only added to a flawless facade of the perfect family. In reality, however, all
the efforts at school gained only the approval from teachers. Nothing changed at home. The good grades and the academic awards were not enough to gain the love and acceptance that I sought.

In high school, while still trying to use academics as a means to acceptance, I excelled, completing my freshmen year of college with a 4.0 gpa during my senior year. I was only then beginning to realize that school and grades were not a means to an end, at least, not within themselves. Still searching for a safe and secure environment, one that would finally allow me to be on the inside rather than the outside, I married at age eighteen after having graduated from high school. Surely between school and a home of my own I would find the security and love that I so needed. Thus far, I had spent my life fearing rejection while seeking acceptance.

I believe that this continuing search for acceptance from others and the resentfulness that was building up inside me due to the constant feelings of rejection, blame, and guilt caused me to view many situations differently than I would have otherwise. At an early age, I began to question the acceptance and rejection of others as well as my own. I can vividly remember the first incident that truly opened my eyes causing me to take notice of how others, others who were different from me and my family, were treated with acts of prejudice.

As a young girl, I could not understand why I could not have a drink from what I considered to be the most beautiful glasses in my grandmother’s kitchen. They were even kept in a cabinet separate from the others we used for every day and even the ones used on Sundays. Then one day when I was about five or six years old, the realization hit me. It was quite a rude awakening for me. I didn’t have the words to describe it, but I knew I
didn’t like what was happening. It was hay baling season. My father had hired several black men to help in the fields. Papa drove the truck for hauling the hay to the barn. Daddy drove the tractor until all the hay was on the ground, then he joined the black men in the back-breaking work of loading, unloading, and stacking hay. The work was long, hard, and hot. During a break in the work, I saw my grandmother come out of the house and approach the black men with a gallon jug of ice water and those beautiful glasses. At this point, I still did not realize the gravity of what was happening. It was not until the break ended, and the men went back to work that it all became clear. My grandmother collected the glasses, returned them to the kitchen, made a pan of steaming hot dish water, added bleach to the water, and proceeded to sterilize the glasses. Without a word spoken, I understood why the glasses were forbidden. I can remember beginning to question my grandmother but received only the admonition to go on outside to play.

For years after this, I continued to notice obvious examples of prejudice. Many were related to race, but not all. I watched as some of my classmates were shunned because of their physical appearance. Students who came from families of low socioeconomic backgrounds were ridiculed. Adults and children with disabilities were the brunt of jokes. I saw how gender determined expectations for education and other opportunities. Even as a child these situations disturbed me greatly. I needed to find a way to reconcile these situations. I took my stand early on in elementary school by making the decision to refuse to participate in such activities and to advocate for those being exploited.

One such incident that I remember well happened when I was in the fourth grade. A new girl, Chris, had recently moved into town and was in my class for the first time.
She had an outgoing personality and everyone seemed to like her immediately. Almost overnight she became one of the most popular girls in the class. On a warm autumn day a small group of girls and I were enjoying some “girl talk” while sitting under a huge elm tree on the edge of the playground. After a few minutes, Chris joined our group. Immediately she began making hurtful comments about one of our classmates. This was a boy who walked with a very definite limp and spoke in a slow, slurred voice. Chris did not know or seem to care that this boy had made what all considered to be a remarkable recovery after being hit by a transfer truck. I can easily recall the anger that I felt. I spoke up, asking her to stop, trying to explain. At that instant, in order for her to save face in the group, I became the target of her ridicule. As a result, I was no longer accepted by many of my peers. My memory is of this group of girls along with Chris walking away leaving me alone, standing on the outside wondering how things could change so quickly. I became an outcast, one of the “others.” In most situations, I seemed to fall outside the norm of the group. I had different ideas, opinions, and goals. I remained on the outside looking in because I was determined not to compromise my own principles by playing the game in which the rules were based upon exclusion, ridicule, and harassment. For years, I accepted this imposed position quietly. I tried always to appear as if being excluded did not bother me. Most of the time, I successfully hid my feelings of hurt and rejection from others while inside the anger at the rudeness and disrespect of others’ behavior festered.

With a sense of quiet determination, I completed a degree in Home Economics Education with a concentration in child development and began teaching in a high school in a neighboring county. At this time, I listened, accepted, and responded to others. I
never questioned; I quietly assumed that others knew what was best for me, for my
students, and for the profession. I lived silently in the world of teaching.

Over a two year period, I taught a variety of home economics classes. These
classes were comprised primarily of low income, black females. There was, however, the
occasional black male. It was the exception for White students, male or female, to be
placed in these low level classes. What I came to realize about my position, my classes,
and, most importantly, my students was that no one really seemed to care what was
happening as long as the students behaved appropriately and met classes. Initially, this
exclusion did not disturb me greatly. I was free to teach the way that my students learned
best. The students and I could set the pace for instruction; we could follow our areas of
interest without interference. No one cared as long as we were silent. And we were that. I
played the game. I did not even realize at this point in my career that I had a choice.

Near the end of my second year of teaching, my daughter was born. Her birth
marked a definite change in the direction of my life. I stopped teaching and was lucky
enough to be able to stay at home with her. I took this opportunity to continue my
education. By the time my son was well on the way, I had completed a Master’s degree in
Home Economics Education. Motherhood, however, was still my priority. I greatly
enjoyed the time with my children: watching them grow, seeing their unique personalities
develop, and witnessing their interactions with others. My years of education in child
development came to life in my children. After several years, however, I began to feel
unsettled. I was someone’s wife, my children’s mother, and my parents’ daughter. I
needed something more. My children were getting older, becoming involved in preschool
activities. It was time for me to move forward.
I was certain of several things. First, I did not want to continue in vocational education, teaching random home economics classes to secondary students. Second, I wanted to focus on young children. I wanted to put the child development knowledge that I had gained through my years of study into practice. Third, I needed to define myself as an individual. I needed to find my personal identity. I needed a voice of my own, and that voice needed to be heard. The time had come for me to find a way to speak up for myself and for others who found themselves in the margins rather than the mainstream. The task now was to define the path that would lead me to these goals.

As happens many times in our lives, decisions are made, experiences are planned, and opportunities happen. This was the case for me. Having considered my goals, I decided to continue my education by adding on certification at the master’s level in Early Childhood Education. This seemed to be a natural fit with my background in child development and the most obvious route for working with young children. As I finished my coursework, an unexpected opportunity came my way. Kathryn Powell, the director of Peabody Child and Family Center at Georgia College & State University, called to offer me a part-time teaching position in the lab school. I could not have asked for anything better. I could meet the needs of my family while working under the supervision of a dedicated mentor in an environment that was supportive of my professional and personal goals. Only later did I realize that this was a turning point in my life.

This unexpected but fortuitous event began to open many new doors for me. I was provided with opportunities that I never dreamed possible. Finding the courage to take advantage of all that was offered did not come easily. It was only under the guidance of Kathryn, who had become not only a thoughtful and caring mentor but also the mother
that I had never known, that I was able to find the strength and determination that I
needed to pursue my dreams. After many years of searching, I had found in Kathryn the
acceptance that I needed. I was finally “good enough” in someone else’s eyes.

Over about a ten year period, this job offer evolved from teaching part-time to
directing the center as a full-time faculty member in the Department of Early Childhood
Education. Through the years, there were many opportunities readily available that
assisted me in defining myself as an individual, refining my beliefs, and establishing a
voice. In preschool and kindergarten classes, I worked directly with diverse groups of
children and their parents, reaffirming my commitment to the acceptance and respect for
difference. As a part of my role, I had the daily task of working with groups of preservice
teachers. I was able to exercise my newly developing “voice” as I taught undergraduate
curriculum classes. I was able to share with others my beliefs about children, the need to
honor their differences, to respect them as individuals, and to value their inquiries.
Gradually, I taught more and more undergraduate classes. During this time I also
continued my professional growth by completing a Specialist Degree in Early Childhood
Education which extended my teaching opportunities to graduate classes.

In addition to the experiences within the lab school and university setting, I was
couraged to travel. Many opportunities associated with local, state, and national
conferences and other professional development seminars and meetings were arranged,
allowing for exposure to different populations, perspectives, ideas, and experiences. At
first, my mentor shepherded me through the process of writing proposals, making travel
arrangements, and making presentations. As I became more self-assured, I was left more
and more on my own, often being asked to guide others in the process. In 1998, I
accompanied nineteen preservice teachers to England where they completed student teaching requirements. As a result of the self confidence that I had gained over the years, I was successful in not only directing the trip and supervising the students’ work but also in traveling on my own in England, Scotland, and Amsterdam. The exposure to different cultures, languages, dialects, lifestyles, and educational systems increased my awareness of the range of diversity. Many times during my travels, I found myself in the position of the “other.” I, myself, was on the outside, the one who was considered different. I believe that being in this position has strengthened my commitment to honor and respect those who represent the “other,” those who for whatever reason find themselves on the outside.

In her own gentle way, Kathryn continued to challenge me to accomplish tasks that I never considered myself capable. My confidence continued to grow as she willingly gave support. Through her encouragement and persuasion, I have been able to search for the answers I needed. I traveled to Italy; I began a doctoral program. I continue to develop my “voice.” I thank Kathryn for pushing me to take the risks that have allowed me to accomplish many things so far in my life. Through her devotion to me, both personally and professionally, I began and continue to follow my dreams; I have developed a kind of faith in myself that I never knew I could have. I have found a place in teacher education where I believe that I can help others to find their “voices,” where I can be instrumental in creating environments for children that are respectful and supportive of their differences, environments that not only encourage but also value the inquiries of children, environments where the “voices” of children and teachers are heard.

On June 6, 2000, I returned from a ten day study tour of the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Even though I arrived home with
more questions than answers, I felt reaffirmed and committed to both my personal and professional beliefs about young children and the importance of valuing them as unique individuals whose differences represent possibilities rather than deficits. Visiting and observing the schools in Reggio Emilia brought fulfillment; however, there was also a great sense of frustration. Coming home meant coming back to the realities of Georgia classrooms, classrooms where all children are expected to meet the same standards, where difference is viewed as a problem to be resolved. How could ideals focused on the value of difference and the respect for children found in the Municipal Preschools of Reggio Emilia be utilized in Middle Georgia? In every conversation, in every seminar, educators of Reggio Emilia stressed that their approach was not a model. It was defined as an approach to education that has been built around their unique culture and that is ever evolving as educators continue to gain a deeper understanding for teaching and learning. If the Reggio Approach cannot be “transplanted,” then what implications does it hold for educators of young children in Georgia?

These questions have been in the back of my mind throughout my work in the Curriculum Studies Program at Georgia Southern University. In many ways they have guided my study as I have continued to search for answers, for connections that would lend insight into ways to infuse the principles that characterize the Reggio Approach into the classrooms in middle Georgia. As a result, I have found solid connections between my personal and professional beliefs in works of scholars that advocate for social justice through culturally responsive teaching. I hope to define more specific implications for these principles by encouraging preservice teachers to examine their own cultural roots
and by exploring the use of children’s literature to develop a strong sense of empathy and compassion through narrative imagination.

During my life, I have met with many experiences and opportunities all of which have played a role in shaping me into the person I have now become. Some have had a greater influence than others. In this telling of my story, I have tried to highlight those events that seemed to have had the greatest impact upon me in becoming an educator of preservice teachers in the field of Early Childhood Education. The common thread in all is the continuing search for acceptance and respect not only for myself but also for others. This very need was the driving force that sent me to Reggio Emilia, Italy, and the one that motivates and guides my research in the doctoral program. I believe that this lifelong struggle has not only provided me with insight into living on the outside but has also allowed me to develop the courage to take a stand for my beliefs even when doing so causes me to remain on the margins. I am confident, however, that this person that I have become will continue to evolve, that my commitment to the respect for difference will deepen, and that my “voice” will grow stronger.

**Summary of the Study**

The growing national demographic disparity between the teaching force and the student population challenges teacher educators to seek out ways to adequately prepare preservice teachers to effectively teach students who are different from themselves. The John H. Lounsbury School of Education at Georgia College & State University represents but one program serving a small population. The dilemma, however, that has been recognized nationwide is clearly represented in these teacher education programs and public school populations. The study represents a first step in revising the existing Early
Childhood Teacher Education Program so that preservice teachers are provided with the opportunities and experiences that will assist in the development of more culturally responsive teaching practices. The theoretical framework for this study has two distinct strands. The first is culturally responsive teaching as it has been theorized in the work of Geneva Gay (2000), and the second is Martha Nussbaum’s (1997) theory of narrative imagination, which is supported by Maxine Greene’s notion of the literary imagination. A review of literature is included which explores the connections between the use of literature as a genre for releasing the imagination and encouraging narrative imagination to develop empathy and compassion for those who are different from oneself and the development of culturally responsive teaching practices.

The study utilizes cross-cultural narrative inquiry (He, 2003) as a methodological framework. Because of the emphasis and value placed upon lived experience, I believe that this form of inquiry can serve as a solid methodological foundation for the proposed study. The primary goal for this research is to determine effective revisions for the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU that will offer opportunities for moving preservice teachers toward more culturally responsive teaching practices; allowing them to see possibilities for success in all children; enabling them in helping students to make connections between their local, national, racial, and cultural identities; encouraging them to build equitable relationships with all of their students; and promoting a view of knowledge as being continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In order to accomplish this, preservice teachers need opportunities to critically explore their own cultural roots; to engage in honest and open dialogue with others about stereotypes, discrimination, race,
and racism; to develop a sense of empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves; and to increase their understanding of how their personal beliefs influence their attitudes toward students and classroom practice. Data will be collected from autobiographies, critical writings describing personal reactions and insights related to designated readings, group discussions related to these readings, and personal interviews.

As a teacher educator, I must accept my part in the challenge to prepare preservice teachers in such a way that they enter a classroom with the knowledge and confidence needed to respond effectively to the diversity within public school classrooms. The study represents a first step in responding to the call made to teacher educators. My hope is that it will eventually lead to substantive changes that will improve the preparation of preservice teacher in the Early Childhood Program at GC&SU.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature explores the relationship between teaching for social justice and the development of the narrative imagination as a means of preparing teachers who are more culturally responsive in their teaching practices. To establish this connection, the works found in two bodies of literature are reviewed: first the works of Geneva Gay, William Ayers, Linda Darling-Hammond, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, and Gary Howard that support culturally responsive pedagogy as a means of teaching for social justice and, second, the works of Martha Nussbaum and Maxine Greene that promote the possibilities of using literature as a means of encouraging “wide-awakeness” and cultivating the powers of the imagination to enhance sensitivity, increase understanding, and improve judgment.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Step Toward Teaching for Social Justice

“Becoming a teacher is risky. This is because – all the curriculum guidelines, layers of supervision, and connect-the-dots school improvement packages notwithstanding – there are no guarantees in teaching. In a world in flux, in transition, often in chaos, teaching is the least certain of professions” (Ayers, 1995b, p.3). Every moment of every day teachers’ personalities, preferences, judgments, values, and abilities are on display. Their classrooms are filled with children who possess unique personalities and capabilities, children who may be quite different from themselves in many ways. The teachers’ challenge is “to see each student as a growing, dynamic, developing, stretching
being—a fellow human creature—with specific needs and demands and hopes and desires and potentials” (Ayers, 1995b, p.2). Teachers must respond to each student fully and fairly. They must see the promises rather than deficits. They must establish classroom environments that challenge and nurture this diverse group of students. They must strive to create classrooms, schools, and a world fit for all children, a place characterized by peace and justice.

William Ayers (1998) describes education as “an arena of hope and struggle—hope for a better life, and struggle over how to understand and enact and achieve that better life” (p. xvi). He suggests that educators should enter this arena by teaching consciously for social justice and social change. This type of teaching requires many times that educators teach against the grain, seek possibilities rather than accept what exists. Ayers (1998) defines teaching for social justice as “teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move against those obstacles” (p. xvi). It demands that teachers see the students and the world in which they live, focusing not only on the students’ identities, skills and abilities, and aspirations, but also on context, including significant historical events, cultural influences, and the economic reality. When teachers teach in this way, they provide students with multiple entry points for learning and a wide range of pathways for success. Education becomes an avenue for opening doors, challenging minds, and offering possibilities.

Geneva Gay (2000) supports the premises of teaching for social justice as set forth by William Ayers (1998) in that she strongly advocates for school reform that recognizes, honors, and incorporates the “social variance of students, attending
deliberately and conscientiously to such factors as ethnicity, culture, gender, social class, historical experiences, and linguistic capabilities” (Gay, 2000, p. xiii). As a part of her work, Gay (2000) coined the term “culturally responsive pedagogy” to represent a compilation of similar ideas and explanations related to the consistency between classroom instruction and the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students. Gay (2000) states:

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 29)

In addition, culturally responsive teaching is characterized in the following ways. It acknowledges and legitimizes the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups. It builds meaningful connections between the home and school experiences as well as academic abstractions and sociocultural realities. It recognizes different learning styles by utilizing a wide range of instructional strategies. It helps students to learn about and appreciate the cultural heritages represented by themselves and others. It routinely incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials into all subject and skill areas. In other words, it encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, instructional strategies, performance assessments, and student-teacher relationships. Ultimately, culturally responsive teaching is empowering, emancipatory, and transformative by encouraging students to find their own voices, to explore multiple
perspectives, to engage in many ways of thinking and learning, and to become active participants in shaping their own learning (Gay, 2000).

If the potential of culturally responsive pedagogy is to be realized, Gay (2000) suggests that widespread reform is necessary. Changes must be considered not only in the area of instruction but also in professional development. Teachers’ knowledge, attitudes, expectations, and practices are of utmost importance. Gay (2000) stresses five essential characteristics for teachers. Teachers must possess:

1. thorough knowledge about cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, contributions, and achievements of different ethnic groups;
2. the courage to stop blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems;
3. the will to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural universality and/or neutrality in teaching and learning;
4. the skills to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices; and
5. the tenacity to relentlessly pursue comprehensive and high-level performance for children who are currently underachieving in schools. (Gay, 2000, p. 44)

Gay’s (2000) concept of culturally responsive pedagogy is supported in the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994). In her call for culturally relevant teaching, Ladson-Billings (1994), like Gay, advocates for a form of teaching that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). In addition, she states that “culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while
succeeding academically” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). She argues that in order to accomplish this goal, teachers must understand and practice culturally relevant methods. These teachers can be identified by the way they see themselves and others. Ladson-Billings (1994) states:

They see their teaching as an art rather than as a technical skill. They believe that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some. They see themselves as a part of the community and they see teaching as giving back to the community. They help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities….Their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. They demonstrate a connectedness between the students. They encourage a community of learners; they encourage their students to learn collaboratively….They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike. They view the content of the curriculum critically and are passionate about it. Rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning. (p. 25)

This description of culturally relevant teachers, their beliefs and their practices, reinforces the magnitude of the roles that teachers must play in fostering the kinds of interactions that support the individual in the group context and encouraging success of all students.

Facing diversity is the central challenge for educators in the 21st century (Darling-Hammond & Garcia-Lopez, 2002). Teachers today enter classrooms that are more diverse than ever before. There are students who are of different races and ethnicities, but
there are also students who are different in other ways as well. There are those who have 
grown up with parents who are constantly unemployed, addicted to drugs, or 
incarcerated. There are those who have no parents or homes. There are those who are in 
foster care or are being bounced from one relative to another (Ladson-Billings, 2001). In 
addition, there is diversity in learning styles, interests, experiences, intellectual and 
physical abilities, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond & 
Garcia-Lopez, 2002).

The teachers entering the classroom, however, are less and less diverse. In a 
recent study, Daisy Reed (1998) stresses that “the number of white, female, middle class 
preservice teachers is increasing, while the number of teachers from diverse populations 
is decreasing. Thus the teaching population is becoming more monocultural, while the 
student population is becoming more multicultural” (p.224). In addition, many 
prospective teachers have had very little experience with diversity (Nieto, 2000). Gloria 
Ladson-Billings (2001) states that “the average white teacher has no idea what it feels 
like to be a numerical or political minority in the classroom” (p.81).

For these reasons, if teachers are to achieve success with all students, they must 
find ways to understand and honor the students’ differences, their sense of humanity and 
dignity. In other words, it is essential that teachers become more culturally responsive in 
their teaching by exploring and developing specific understandings of the following:

how students’ learning experiences are influenced by their home languages, 
cultures, and contexts; the realities of race and class privilege in the United States; 
the ongoing manifestations of institutional racism within the education system;
and the many factors that shape students’ opportunities to learn within individual classrooms. (Darling-Hammond & Garcia-Lopez, 2002, p. 9).

In addition, teachers must have a firm foundation in more general theories about teaching and learning to assist them as they make connections to students’ prior knowledge, support motivation, encourage risk-taking, and establish a climate of trust between students and adults. Without a strong knowledge base of how culture, experience, readiness, and context influence how students grow, learn, and develop, Linda Darling-Hammond (2002b) contends that it is extremely difficult for teachers to make good judgments about the planning and implementation of learning experiences as well as other more specific classroom situations.

Culturally responsive pedagogy defies the conventions of traditional educational practices specifically as they relate to racial, cultural, and ethnical differences. It assumes that teaching is a contextual and situational process, therefore challenging the Eurocentric framework which currently shapes our schools. It is in many ways teaching against the grain by challenging cultural neutrality and the homogeneity syndrome in teaching and learning (Gay, 2000). As a challenge to traditional methods, culturally responsive teaching, with all its possibilities, is not without obstacles.

One of the most stubborn of these barriers is that of tradition itself. The educational institutions of United States are “notoriously conservative and resistant to change. They pride themselves on being consistent over time, and the recurring appeal for the resurrection of our nostalgic past (e.g., ‘back to basics’) in opposition to innovations … is not surprising” (Gay, 2000, p. 204). Gay (2000) explains that the problem is that the good times in education, the traditions, that are being resurrected were
actually the worst times for many minority students. In addition, the cultures and contributions of ethnic groups were not honored as curricular changes were made. Memory continues to be selective and short term, tending to forget certain conditions from the past.

A second hindrance to the implementation of culturally responsive teaching at a large enough scale to affect change is the practice of professional volunteerism (Gay 2000). Teacher educators, administrators, and policy makers must stop promoting or tolerating the idea that understanding and responding to diversity in the educational process is a choice or that the issues of diversity need only be addressed if there is extra time after all other tasks are completed. If substantive changes are to occur, preparation for and the practice of culturally responsive teaching must be required of everyone. Because the achievement of many students of color is dependent on teachers’ willingness and abilities to embrace their ethnic and cultural differences, “teachers cannot be allowed or enticed to think that culturally responsive teaching is anything other than an obligatory and necessary part of their professional preparation and performance”(Gay, 2000, p.204).

The third obstacle described by Gay (2000) is that of professional racism. Professional racism is perpetuated by the insistence that the way to raise the achievement levels of students who are ethnically and culturally different is to recruit and secure more teachers of color. This solution, however, is based on the fallacious assumption that membership in an ethnic group is necessary or sufficient for teachers to do an effective job in teaching in a culturally responsive manner. The supposition also ignores the research findings that shared group membership is much less important in raising student achievement levels than knowledge and the integration of the cultural heritages,
experiences, and perspectives of ethnic groups (Gay, 2000). Similar ethnicity, where it is possibly beneficial, provides no guarantee for students’ success or pedagogical effectiveness. In addition, Gay (2000) argues that racial or ethnic identity cannot be used as the excuse for less than maximum performance levels for teachers or students. She calls for all teachers to be taught and held responsible for culturally responsive teaching of diverse students.

The fourth difficulty blocking culturally responsive teaching is the emphasis placed on individualism and compartmentalization in conventional schooling. “Many educators genuinely believe that it is only the individual, not his or her race, ethnicity, culture, or gender, that counts in the learning process” (Gay, 2000, p. 207). These elements, however, cannot be ignored in the planning and implementation of pedagogical practices for improving student achievement. Individuals cannot be separated from the contexts of their lives if their human integrity is to be respected, their differences and individuality truly honored, and their achievement maximized. Teachers must understand the critical influences that culture has on teaching and learning. Gay (2000) argues that in order to best serve diverse students instructional programs should “deal simultaneously with the realities of their human wholeness, their ethnic and cultural particularities, and their individual uniqueness” (p.208).

The fifth and possibly the greatest obstacle to culturally responsive teaching is mainstream ethnocentricism and hegemony. The assumptions, standards, expectations, protocols, and practices that are normative in the educational system are generally reflective of the cultural standards and values of but one ethnic group, European Americans. These have been imposed on all others as if they are absolute and
indisputable. Gay (2000) argues that this cultural system of values is a human creation and is, therefore, fallible and alterable. The biggest fallacy is the assumption that this Eurocentric value system is universal and representative of what is right for all. “The imposition of Eurocentric values and orientations on everyone else is ‘un-American’ not to mention being morally suspect and pedagogically unsound” (Gay, 2000, p. 208). U. S. society and culture, in fact, are quite diverse, comprised of the contributions and influences of many varied cultures, ethnicities, and religions. This in itself obligates schools in both their curriculum and practices to reflect multiculturalism. This change, however, represents the challenge of transforming prevailing paradigms of power, privilege, and normality.

As can be seen from the obstacles to culturally responsive pedagogy as described by Gay (2000), the legitimacy and viability of honoring diversity as an essential factor in teaching and learning are not commonly accepted among educators. In addition, many times those who are receptive do not have the knowledge, understanding, or competence necessary to initiate the kinds of pedagogical practices required. Recognition and positive attitudes for ethnic and cultural diversity are not sufficient. “Culturally competent instructional action is essential to achieving genuine commitment to educational equity, justice, and excellence for students of color” (Gay, 2000, p. 209). Teachers must truly care about their students, about their performance, about their achievement. They must possess a genuine commitment for transforming educational opportunities. They must be persistent and diligent in their efforts to ensure that their expectations are realized. Teachers must have an in-depth understanding of their students, the cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups, the many ways that culture affects teaching and
learning, and the pedagogical skills to translate this knowledge into new opportunities and experiences for teaching and learning. Ultimately, teachers must have the courage and the will to persist in challenging the existing system even in the face of opposition.

Competence and confidence are required if teachers are to implement culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (2001), and Darling-Hammond (2000a) contend that the cultivation of these characteristics should begin in teacher education programs. Gay (2000) describes the tasks for teacher education programs. To meet the challenges of preparing future teachers, teacher educators should assist perservice teachers in acquiring information related to the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups, in developing an understanding of pedagogical principles, and in obtaining the skills, methods, and materials necessary to address ethnic and cultural diversity. This knowledge should be complemented with opportunities for preservice teachers to determine through critical examination whether or not existing paradigms of educational thought and practice need to be modified or replaced to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity. These analyses should be supplemented with supervised practice in designing and implementing alternate or replacement models.

Ladson-Billings (2001) questions whether or not teacher education programs are currently preparing preservice teachers to effectively serve the diverse groups of students who occupy the classrooms of today’s schools. She states:

Teacher education has been dominated by a narrative that begins like this: ‘Public school way back when…’ In this narrative we reminisce about some mythical days when all the children were smart and well behaved. In public school way
back when (PSWBW) the parents and teachers all agreed about what to do and how to do it. (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 3)

These wonderful days of the “public school way back when,” however, were interrupted by the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education. Public schools were ordered to desegregate and to accommodate “other people’s children” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 3).

This ruling required a response by teacher education programs. The solution was not to design a new program of study or to replace the tried and true but to add a new requirement to the current practices. The addition of a new course, workshop, or practicum which focused on diversity was seen as sufficient and suggested that real change was actually occurring within the teaching profession.

Even as the twenty-first century begins, teacher education still languishes in the practices of years gone by. Although the population of prospective teachers is becoming less and less diverse, currently represented predominantly by White, middle class females, and the student population is becoming more and more diverse, many programs are still failing to respond to the challenges brought forth by the diversity found within the public school classrooms of today. Maintaining the traditional approach to teacher education is counterproductive for teachers working in diverse classrooms. Delpit (1995) states:

Our teachers are exposed to descriptions of failure rather than models of success. We expose student teachers to an education that relies upon name calling and labeling (“disadvantaged,” “at-risk,” “learning disabled,” “the underclass”) to explain its failures, and calls upon research study after research study to inform
teachers that school achievement is intimately and inevitably linked with socioeconomic status. Teacher candidates are told that “culturally different” children are mismatched to the school setting and therefore cannot be expected to achieve as well as white, middle-class children. They are told that children of poverty are developmentally slower than other children. (pp.177-178)

Teachers are misled into believing that there are substantial numbers of “abnormal” children in every classroom and that their jobs are to remediate these deficiencies (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Geneva Gay (2002) adds yet another dimension to these points. She stresses that though the growing diversity gap is not new, “U.S. society and schools are not known for their ready acceptance of difference” (Gay, 2002, p.614). Gay (2002) also argues:

Instead, there is a strong resistance to diversity. Individuals are socialized to devalue, suspect, and pretend to ignore differences, especially those that derive from class, race, ethnicity, and culture. Much of the socialization equates differences with deficiencies that should be eradicated. The ultimate goal seems to be to make everyone believe, value, and act the same. The standard of this sameness is mainstream, European-American cultural norms. (p. 614)

Ladson-Billings (2001), Delpit (1995), and Darling-Hammond (2000a) argue that it is time that teacher education be reconceptualized to address social justice issues of race, class, and gender. Teacher education must change if it is “to offer new teachers a fighting chance to both survive and thrive in schools and classrooms filled with students who are even more dependent on education to make the difference in their life circumstances” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 6). Teacher educators must work to find ways
to design or reorganize programs for preservice teachers so that the voices of all students are heard and their opinions valued. “As white students and faculty learn to listen to and respect the words of people of color, perhaps they will carry these new attitudes of openness and acceptance of difference to other aspects of their lives, and certainly to their future teaching” (Delpit, 1995, p. 127).

**Imagination and Literature: A Means for Developing Empathy and Compassion**

Having the strength and courage to challenge existing programs, confront stereotypes, and question acts of oppression and racism is no easy task; however, the responsibility of providing an education for all children that is culturally responsive does not end there. It represents but one capacity required for the cultivation of humanity in today’s world (Nussbaum, 1997). In addition, classroom teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators must also find ways to step outside of their own cultures to gain an understanding of those who are different from themselves. They must develop the “ability to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human being by ties of recognition and concern” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10). They must also possess narrative imagination, “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum, 1997, pp. 10-11). Maxine Greene (1995a) argues that the educator’s task is not to continue to conceive of the “surrounding society as a system of impersonal or invisible forces working upon them, raising the obstacles, determining from outside what he/she can do” (p.69). It is
rather to find “a way of being in the world as someone reaching toward community, trying to understand, feeling interest and concern” (Greene, 1995a, p.69).

The educator’s task is clearly not one of ease and simplicity. A sense of “‘wide-awakeness’” (Greene, 1995b, p. 35) is essential. Greene (1995b) defines “wide-awakeness” as an “awareness of what it is to be in the world….to recall the existential experience shared by so many and the associated longing to overcome somnolence and apathy in order to choose, to reach beyond” (p. 35). She argues that many times teachers’ feelings of being dominated and powerless are so overwhelming that without this sense of “wide-awakeness” teachers are unable to effectively meet the needs of their students. Meeting students’ needs involves three basic functions: preparing students to identify alternatives, to seek possibilities, and to confront situations open-mindedly; teaching principles and alternative perspectives by which situations can be assessed as well as teaching the norms required of those who wish to be a part of particular communities; and enabling students to make principled decisions, to reflect critically, to communicate ideas, and to engage in decisive actions in good faith (Greene, 1978). Greene (1978) continues by suggesting:

Such feelings can to a large degree be overcome through conscious endeavor on the part of individuals to keep themselves awake, to think about their condition in the world, to inquire into the forces that appear to dominate them, to interpret the experiences they are having day to day. Only as they learn to make sense of what is happening, can they feel themselves to be autonomous. Only then can they develop a sense of agency for living a moral life. (p. 44)
Teachers must be willing to find their own voices, to perceive their own visions, and to challenge conformity and thoughtlessness (Greene, 2001). Once teachers are awakened to the world around them, once they are released from the confinements of the established, “particularly the confinements to the world of techniques and skill training, to fixed categories and measurable competences” (Greene, 2001, p. 44), only then are they able to move from “what is” to “what could be.” It is this kind of “wide-awakeness” that allows teachers to tap into their imaginations, “to look with new eyes, hear with new ears” (Greene, 2001, p. 44) to experience wonder, unease, questioning, and pursuit (Greene, 2001). Such awareness and openness to the world not only allows one to become conscious of alternative possibilities but also allows for the willingness and desire to risk encounters in the world (Greene, 1995).

The imagination, with its power to “create order, to provoke authentic vision, and to surprise” (Greene, 2001, p. 83), enables the perception of possibilities. It allows one to see beyond what is considered normal or fixed, to create new experiences, “to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos” (Greene, 2001, p. 83). Dewey (1933) further explains the purpose of the imagination. He states that “[t]he imagination is not necessarily the imaginary; that is, the unreal” (Dewey, 1933, p.291). Imagination becomes a source of meaningfulness, its proper function being to provide “vision of realities and possibilities that cannot be exhibited under existing conditions of sense perception. Clear insight into the remote, the absent, the obscure is its aim” (Dewey, 1933, p.291). In addition, Dewey (1980) states that imagination is a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in
contact with the world. When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination. When the new is created, the far and strange become the most natural inevitable things in the world. There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of mind and universe, and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination. (p.267)

Once givens are seen as contingencies and that which is taken for granted is questioned, then there are opportunities to suggest alternatives and possibilities and to make choices. “But the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected” (Greene, 1995, p. 28).

Greene (2001) suggests that situations, experiences, and opportunities have to be created that encourage individuals to move past what is accepted and to reach beyond (Green, 2001). Exposure to the arts can play a vital role in the cultivation of the imagination (Nussbaum, 1997 & Greene, 1995b). Martha Nussbaum (1997) states that the arts have the potential to “cultivate capacities of judgment and sensitivity” (p.86). Attending to the arts can also provide a sense of alternatives and enhance the awareness of possibilities (Greene, 2001). All art forms, including music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture, and architecture, have the potential to play a role in shaping one’s understanding. Literature, however, “with its ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts, makes an especially rich contribution” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 86) for the development of “wide-awakeness” and the powers of the imagination, specifically the narrative imagination. Greene (2001) emphasizes the need for the provision of experiences with the arts, specifically literature.
You are familiar with the importance of encouraging encounters with subject matter (including the arts) that involve a sense of agency, of achieving dimensions of that subject matter as meaningful, not uncovering some hidden meaning others have predefined. We know as well the range of understandings that are necessary in the ongoing effort to create meanings, efforts going beyond the cognitive, to include intuition, imagination, feeling, perception – all the acts of consciousness, perhaps especially where the arts are concerned. This becomes particularly clear when we become engaged with the works of literature, considered as an art form. (Greene, 2001, p.193)

In an effort to assist prospective teachers in developing a strong sense of “wide-awakeness” and narrative imagination, both Greene (1978, 1995b) and Nussbaum (1997) call for the inclusion of literary works into teacher education programs. Literary works provide the most accessible experiences that offer opportunities to see possibilities, to look past the habitual and mundane. Greene (1978) further justifies the use of literary works to develop the imagination by pointing out that experiencing these works allows individuals to enter an imaginary world of awareness and to permit the author to lead them on a journey. The author, through the story, has the power to shock, causing one to think, to notice, to question, to search for meaning. Nussbaum (1997) adds that literature has the power to show possibilities for what can happen in life, to invite the reader into places that are occupied by others, to encourage the reader to assume the experiences of the characters, to involve the readers’ narrative imagination, to present social situations that frequently differ greatly from those of the reader, to summon powerful emotions that disconcert and puzzle, and to force the reader into confrontations with their own thoughts.
and intentions. For these reasons, the reading of literature which engages the narrative imagination helps to develop within readers the emotions of empathy and compassion for those who, for whatever reason, are different from themselves.

Narrative imagination offers a means by which teachers can explore the worlds that are quite different from their own from the perspective of others. Because the reading of a literary work engages the narrative imagination of the reader, a sense of empathy develops as an intense concern for the characters is inspired. The reader cultivates sympathetic responsiveness or compassion toward the needs of others and understands the way circumstances influence those needs (Nussbaum, 1997). By doing so, they are better able to understand the context of the “other’s” history and social world as well as the meanings and motivations behind judgments, choices, and actions. Through the narrative imagination, the other person can become one that is qualitatively different yet worthy of respect. When making interpretations about others, however, individuals naturally consider a part of themselves as well, their sense of what is right based on their own experiences, values, and judgments (Nussbaum, 1997). Therefore, Nussbaum (1997) stresses in the following statement what must be remembered:

The first step of understanding the world from the point of view of the other is essential to any responsible act of judgment, since we do not know what we are judging until we see the meaning of an action as the person intends it, the meaning of a speech as it expresses something of importance in the context of the person’s history and social world. (p. 11)

Nussbaum (2001) states that “‘[p]ity,’ ‘sympathy,’ and ‘empathy’ all appear in texts and in common usage, usually without clear distinction either from one another or
from what I am calling ‘compassion’” (p.301). In an effort to clarify the terms for the purposes of her work, Nussbaum (2001) expounds on each explaining their current connotations and connections. She explains that pity has commonly been associated with the undeserving misfortune of others, its meaning being interpreted as synonymous with that of compassion. However, “[p]ity has recently come to have nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 301). Empathy is defined as “the imaginative reconstruction of another person’s experience” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 302). Empathy includes no evaluations of the other person’s situation or of the experience whether they are happy, sad, painful, pleasant, or neutral. In addition, Nussbaum (2001) defines sympathy. She states that sympathy is as an emotion equivalent to compassion. Compassion is an emotion that requires the belief that suffering is serious rather than trivial; the recognition that someone, through no personal fault, has suffered some significant misfortune; and the sense of one’s own vulnerability to pain, suffering, or misfortune (Nussbaum, 2001). “If there is any difference between ‘sympathy’ and ‘compassion’ in contemporary usage, it is perhaps that ‘compassion’ seems more intense and suggests a greater degree of suffering, both on the part of the afflicted person and on the part of the person having the emotion” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 302).

Considering the definitions offered above, Nussbaum (1997) argues that empathy, the ability to imagine what it would be like to be in the place of another is not enough. Compassion for others is also essential. Together the capacities for empathy and compassion enable one to comprehend the motives and choices of those who are different. They are no longer seen as forbidden, alien, or other, but as having commonalities, as sharing problems as well as possibilities (Nussbaum, 1997). When a
common ground has been discovered, “the differences that blanket it will make our shared ideas stronger, more complicated and complete” (Steele, 2002, p.21). This is the time when connections can happen, collaboration can begin, and a safe, equitable classroom can be created that fosters respect, tolerance, and appreciation for all individuals.

**Meeting the Challenge of Diversity**

Diversity is not a choice; however, the responses to it are. Educators can continue to view diversity as a problem to be fixed by forcing all differences into standardized boxes, or they can recognize and respect that the diversity of thought and worldview in their classrooms provides resources for exciting possibilities in education for all children, allowing them to actively deal with issues of equity and social justice. In the face of a teaching population that is predominantly White and culturally isolated, a student population that is growing increasingly more diverse, an educational system that is based primarily upon Eurocentric standards, values, and expectations, and educational outcomes that reflect inequities across ethnic and culturally differences, it is essential that educators analyze equity issues surrounding race, class, and gender and actively seek possibilities for meaningful reform (Howard, 1999).

Too often the problem of diversity is seen by White educators as being outside of themselves. They tend to view their role as one of helping minority students. Gay (2000) states:

While most teachers are not blatant racists, many probably are cultural hegemonists. They expect all students to behave according to the school’s cultural standards of normality. When students of color fail to comply, the teacher finds
them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation. Rather than build on what the students have in order to make their learning easier and better, the teachers want to correct and compensate for their “cultural deprivations.” This means making ethically diverse students conform to middle-class, Eurocentric cultural norms. (p. 46)

“Seldom have we helped White educators look deeply and critically at the necessary changes and growth we ourselves must achieve if we are to work effectively with the real issues of diversity” (Howard, 1999, p. 3).

“We live in a society that nurtures and maintains stereotypes” (Delpit, 1995, p. xiii). Judgments are made about the actions, words, intellects, families, and communities of others based upon preconceived ideas of what is “right” or “wrong,” stereotypes, and one’s own sense of reality. Maxine Greene (1995a) states:

We live in what we experience as an interlude between a lived past and what we conceive to be some future possibility. Depending on our location and, in large degree, on our gender, class, and what is now called ethnic identity, we interpret the historical as well as our personal pasts contingently. What we see and how we interpret are deeply affected by our situations, by our membership, and by the kinds of intelligence we use in reading the landscapes spreading around us and extending back in time. They are focally affected as well by the way we view ourselves in relations to the many manifestations of power, …and the degree and quality of freedom we think we can achieve as we live. (pp. 65-66)

Ayers (1995) states that “teaching requires thoughtfulness…. Thoughtfulness requires ‘wide-awakeness’” (p. 59). This “wide-awakeness” demands the willingness of teachers
to examine the “conditions of our lives, to consider alternatives and different possibilities, to challenge received wisdom and the taken for granted, and to link our conduct with our consciousness” (Ayers, 1995, p. 59).

Many times differences are hard to negotiate. When these are differences of religion, gender, race, class, and national origin, the task of understanding becomes much more difficult. “These differences not only shape the practical choices people face but also their ‘insides,’ their desires, thoughts, and ways of looking at the world” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 85). For this reason, most people “are totally unable to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision” (Delpit, 1995, p. xiv). Many teachers harbor prejudices and stereotypes about ethnic groups and classes different from their own that, through the conditioning of the larger society, have been blindly accepted. In order to overcome this tendency toward the stereotyping of others, educators at all levels need opportunities to challenge these stereotypes and to learn the value of the ideas and experiences of others. Lisa Delpit (1995) suggests that classroom teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators explore their own beliefs to gain understanding into not only who they are but also how they are connected to and disconnected from those who are different from themselves.

A study completed by Karon Nicol LeCompte and Audrey Davis McCray (2002) suggests that many prospective White teachers are unable to see themselves as a part of a race or as having a culture. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that teachers have commonly avoided engaging their students in discussions about race and racism because it is too dangerous or “best left untouched” (Nieto, 2000, p.306). Because of this tendency to avoid these difficult conversations, preservice teachers have had very little
practice talking about racial issues in meaningful and productive ways (Marx & Pennington, 2003). LeCompte and McCray (2002) and McIntyre (1997) state that if teachers are to teach children who are different from themselves, they must first examine their own personal and cultural values and identities and explore how these influence and inform beliefs about race, racism, and multicultural education in order to develop new possibilities for the education of all children. In support of this call for a personal examination of cultural rootedness, Maxine Greene (1978) states that “persons are more likely to ask their own questions and seek their own transcendence when they feel themselves to be grounded in their personal histories, their lived lives” (p.2). Teachers should understand the grounding of their own values as well as their conceptions of what is good and of what is possible (Greene, 1978).

Because individuals tend to see others, make judgments, and determine courses of action based on a biased viewing lens that is formed by their childhood experiences; their family memberships; their involvement in schools; and their participation in the larger societal, economic, and political communities, educators need to find the courage to view themselves critically and reflect upon their own beliefs and values as they relate to race, culture, ability, and gender (Balaban, 1995). “Facing our biases openly, recognizing the limits imposed by our embeddedness in our own culture and experience, acknowledging the values and beliefs we cherish, and accepting the influence of our emotions on our actions are extraordinary challenges” (Balaban, 1995, p.49). Greene (1978) contends that this type of critical reflection upon personal realities is something that many avoid. It is necessary, however, if educators are to shape a new viewing lens, one that reflects anti-biased views. Ayers (1995) suggests that breaking from this cycle requires strength and
courage – “the strength to think in a time of thoughtlessness, the courage to care in a
culture of carelessness” (p.60).

Despite the difficulties, which are partially a function of denial and defensiveness, White educators must develop an adequate lens for viewing and confronting their own whiteness along with the power and privilege that is implied (Howard, 1999). Gary Howard (1999) strongly suggests that if substantive reform is to occur in the current educational system, White educators must explore specifically the topic of white dominance by thoroughly examining the cause of social inequalities. White educators must, while avoiding the cycles of blame, guilt, anger, and denial, seek to understand their own histories by acknowledging occurrences of past and present racism and dominance. Howard (1999) warns that “if we do not face dominance, then we may be predisposed to perpetuate it” (p.26).

Howard (1999) describes the exploration of dominance as a developmental process. He describes three distinct “White Identity Orientations,” (p.100) the fundamentalist, the integrationist, and the transformationist (Howard, 1999). For each orientation, Howard (1999) offers characteristics of thinking, feeling, and acting. He describes the fundamentalists as individuals who are very literal and fixed in their thinking, are focused on a single dimensional truth, and are unaware of the construction of White dominance because of ignorance or denial. These individuals tend to feel that their perspectives are right. They are threatened by difference and often become angry and defensive. Their responses are commonly ones of fear, hostility, denial, or avoidance. The fundamentalists’ approach to teaching is that all students are the same. Through their practices they perpetuate White dominance and Eurocentric ideas.
The second orientation is the integrationist. Howard (1999) describes the integrationists as those individuals who acknowledge diverse perspectives but continue to defend Western superiority. They try to understand the victim’s perspective which many times leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and confusion as they question their roles in White dominance. The integrationists become curious about other cultures and possess a missionary zeal for helping others. They emphasize commonalities and advocate for special programs for special people. The integrationists are willing to invite “others” into “their” house.

The third of Howard’s (1999) orientations is the tranformationist. Those of this orientation are individuals who see legitimacy in diverse perspectives and view truth as ever changing. Transformationists are self-reflective and have an understanding of Whiteness that is enhanced by connections with different groups. They are accepting of their responsibilities to challenge and dismantle White dominance without the feelings of guilt or shame. They are advocates and social activists.

White educators who are committed to the provision of equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students must understand the concept of white dominance and that their inherited hegemonic position continues to influence the educational system of today. In order to do this, it is crucial that they explore the research in the areas of minimal group paradigm, social positionality, social dominance theory, and systems of privilege and penalty. Howard (1999) explains that through the examination of these findings White educators can more easily avoid the common pitfalls of blame, guilt, anger, and denial. These findings clearly demonstrate that social dominance is a common human phenomenon rather than one that is uniquely White.
The minimal group paradigm as described by Howard (1999) suggests two implications that should be considered specifically by educators. First, humans tend to favor those within their own groups. They tend to draw distinctions between themselves as individuals and the group even when these distinctions have very little significance to a larger context. Second, humans tend to demonstrate negative in-group and out-group dynamics between members. Values of superiority or inferiority are assigned to the in-groups and out-groups that they themselves have created. This human tendency to identify with groups can present difficulties in intergroup relationships. When a visible marker such as race is introduced to this process, the difficulties are compounded with an extreme resistance to change. Howard (1999) argues:

If human beings are predisposed to categorize and negatively discriminate against perceived out-groups, even when the basis for that differentiation is trivial and meaningless, then it might appear overwhelmingly difficult to reduce group-based biases related to more significant issues of human difference such as race, gender, religion, ability, and sexual orientation. (p.29)

The concepts introduced by the minimal group paradigm signal not only the difficulty of working toward greater intergroup harmony but also the necessity.

The issue of dominance is further clarified by the concepts of social positionality. Researchers in the area show that human beings not only draw in-group and out-group distinctions but also determine differences in terms of dominance and subordination (Howard, 1999). “How we view the world, how we construct reality, how we ascribe meaning and value to our lives are intimately connected to our position within social and historical hierarchies of dominance and subordination” (Howard, 1999, p.29). Social
positionality has both subjective and objective implications. The subjective relates to how individuals see themselves and how others see them. The objective relates to the social position in terms of more quantifiable and observable measures including income, job title, or educational level. This explanation of social positionality helps to clarify collective White identity. From the perspective of those who are not White, it is evident both subjectively and objectively that “whites have been collectively allocated disproportionate amounts of power, authority, wealth, control, and dominance” (Howard, 1999, p.29).

Howard (1999) contends that social positionality in Western societies has provided a sense of invisibility. White dominance is accepted so widely as a societal norm that whites are many times unable or unwilling to critically analyze their own social positionality. For White educators it is essential they not only confront how their own lives are defined by their social positionality but also develop an understanding for how the lives of their students are influenced by their own group memberships that differ in degrees of social dominance and marginality.

To further increase their understanding of dominance, educators should look closely at social dominance theory. According to Howard (1999), social dominance theory is based on four assumptions. First, humans are predisposed to create social systems with hierarchies. These social hierarchies are characterized by hegemonic groups at the top and negative reference groups at the bottom. Second, the hegemonic groups within the social hierarchy tend to be disproportionately male. Third, racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression are seen as manifestations of group-based social
hierarchies. Fourth, many species of primates, including humans, have chosen the
development of social hierarchies as a means for survival.

Once established, social hierarchies maintain stability through forms of individual
and institutional discrimination. To avoid social instability and excessive conflict, forms
of discrimination and oppression must be used cautiously. In the most stable societies, the
negative reference groups accept the legitimacy of the hierarchical structure and
rationalize their oppression as being a part of their place within the system. Howard
(1999) argues that social hierarchical systems are more concerned with social equilibrium
and stability than with equity and social justice.

In addition to the minimal group paradigm, social positionality, and social
dominance theory, educators must also consider the system of “privilege and penalty”
(Howard, 1999, p. 33). The assumption of this system is that social arrangements of
dominance provide privileges for certain groups whether or not those privileges are
earned. Conversely, penalties, punishments, and inequities are suffered by members of
other groups by no fault of their own other than group membership. The concept of
privilege and penalty is similar to the hegemonic and negative reference groups in the
social dominance theory and to the group based categorization and discrimination
described in the minimal group paradigm. “Both approaches are descriptive of the actual
history of the interaction between dominant and subordinate groups, wherein group-based
inequalities are intrinsically linked to the very foundations of personal and institutional
behavior” (Howard, 1999, p. 33).

If teachers are to achieve a sense of effectuality, Greene (1978) argues that they
must critically examine and remain in touch with their personal histories, their lived lives,
their “perceptual landscapes” (p. 20). “If they can be critical and aware, they may be able to overcome passivity and the temptation to withdraw” (Greene, 1978, p. 20). It is through the stories of others found in multicultural literature and the narrative imagination that preservice teachers, teachers, and teacher educators can begin not only to examine themselves and but also can explore, from the perspective of others, worlds that are far different from their own. As understandings are gained and meanings are found in the context of others’ judgments, choices, and actions, then they can begin to develop empathy and compassion for those who are different. Through these stories, the other person, the one who is different, can become worthy of respect and equity. Literature, therefore, can provide the key that opens the doors to some very different conversations about stereotypes, race, racism, and oppression.

**Summary of the Literature**

The works of Geneva Gay, William Ayers, Linda Darling-Hammond, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, and Gary Howard that support culturally responsive pedagogy as a means of teaching for social justice and the works of Martha Nussbaum and Maxine Greene that promote the possibilities of using literature as a means of cultivating the powers of the imagination to enhance sensitivity, increase understanding, and improve judgment have been reviewed. In addition, an effort has been made to draw connections between these two bodies of literature to provide support for the relationship between teaching for social justice and the development of the narrative imagination as a means to prepare teachers who are more culturally responsive in their teaching practices.

As a whole, the literature presents a challenge to teacher educators to critically analyze current teacher preparation programs and to initiate reforms that will better
prepare teachers to more effectively deal with the issues of diversity that they will inevitably face as they enter public school classrooms. Teacher education programs must find ways to assist preservice teachers in developing an understanding and respect for those who are different from themselves as well as to prepare them to implement cultural responsive teaching practices. In order to accomplish these goals, preservice teachers need to be provided with experiences and opportunities that encourage them to personally confront issues of culture, race, racism, and oppression. It is not enough, however, to understand oneself and to respect others. Preservice teachers must accept the responsibility of identifying alternatives, seeking possibilities, and confronting situations open-mindedly; in other words, they must develop a sense of “wide-awareness.” In addition, they must cultivate both empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves.

The task which lies ahead is no small task. Conformity has been challenged. Diversity is not a choice but a part of life. The information presented in the two bodies of literature offers guidance and direction to teacher educators who are willing to undertake the task by confronting the difficult issues of culture, race, racism, and oppression as well as accepting the challenge to become “awakened” to the world around them, seeing the possibilities of what can be rather than focusing on what is.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework for this study has two distinct strands. The first is culturally responsive teaching as it has been theorized in the work of Geneva Gay (2000). The second strand is Martha Nussbaum’s (1997) theory of narrative imagination, which is supported by Maxine Greene’s (1978) notion of cultivating the literary imagination to improve judgment and enhance sensitivity. This framework represents one way for teacher educators to explore programmatic changes that can assist in the preparation of preservice teachers who respond optimistically and confidently to the diversity found in classrooms by implementing teaching practices that are culturally responsive to the students.

Theoretical Framework

Mary Kalantzis and William Cope (1997) state that “multiculturalism, the reality of living with diversity, is not a matter of momentary controversy. Indeed, it may well prove to be the issue of our epoch” (Kalantzis & Cope, 1997, p.B3). Educators must heed this statement, realizing that diversity is not a choice but that responses to it are. Educators can continue to live in the world of generalizations ignoring the value of difference and the context of students’ lives; they can view diversity as a problem to be fixed by forcing all differences into standardized boxes; or they can recognize and respect that the diversity found within their classrooms provides resources for stimulating
possibilities in education of all children, encouraging them to actively deal with issues of equity and social justice. Gay (2002) states:

Instead, there is a strong resistance to diversity. Individuals are socialized to devalue, suspect, and pretend to ignore differences, especially those that derive from class, race, ethnicity, and culture. Much of the socialization equates differences with deficiencies that should be eradicated. The ultimate goal seems to be to make everyone believe, value, and act the same. The standard of this sameness is mainstream, European-American cultural norms. (p. 614)

The time has come in education to accept the challenge presented by Ayers (1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1998), Gay (2000, 2002), Darling-Hammond (2002a, 2002b), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2000), and Howard (1999) to prepare teachers who understand what it means to teach for social justice and are equipped to meet the needs of diverse student populations through the implementation of culturally responsive practice. Considering the reality of a teaching population that is predominantly White and culturally isolated; a student population that is growing increasingly more diverse; and an educational system that is based primarily upon Eurocentric standards, values, and expectations, it is imperative that educators analyze issues of equity and social justice surrounding race, class, and gender actively seeking possibilities for meaningful reform (Howard, 1999).

The works of Maxine Greene (2001, 1995a, 1995b, 1978) and Martha Nussbaum (2001, 1997, 1995) offer alternatives through the development of “wide-awakeness” and the narrative imagination to prepare teachers who not only understand themselves as cultural beings but also possess respect for the implications that one’s lived experiences,
culture, and ethnicity have on education. Exposure to multicultural literature in the context of the narrative imagination provides a teaching population of predominately White teachers the opportunity to development empathy and compassion for those that are different from themselves.

Maxine Greene (1978) suggests that teacher education be complemented with the study of works of imaginative literature. She argues that literature has the potential to challenge one’s ideas and beliefs, to engage the imagination. When readers open themselves up to works of literature, there is the possibility that they will change their perceptions of their lives and the world around them. There is the possibility that they will move past their “own taken-for-grantedness” (Greene, 1978, p. 23).

The kind of engagement described by Greene (1978) is defined by Martha Nussbaum (1997) as narrative imagination. Narrative imagination is “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum, 1978, pp. 10-11).

Engaging the narrative imagination through literature offers a way in which individuals can explore the world from another’s point of view in an environment that is not directly their own. As they read and become involved in a story, the readers begin to connect personally with the characters, the relationships, and the events. By doing so, they are better able to understand the context of the “other’s” history and social world as well as the meanings behind actions. Through the imagination, the other person can become one that is qualitatively different yet worthy of respect (Nussbaum, 1997).
The initiation and participation of group discussions or personal conversations related to equity, discrimination, race, and racism require a safe place, where the participants feel secure, an environment that is open and respectful (Florio-Ruane, 2001). When discussions begin in a context that is outside one’s own personal experiences, a more comfortable space is provided where the possibly for the occurrence of in-depth conversations is much greater. Works of multicultural literature can offer this risk-free place where difficult dialogues can begin. It is through stories that the reader comes to know the characters, understand their actions, connect to their emotions, and find commonalities in experience.

**Cross-Cultural Narrative Inquiry**

Having examined the historical and theoretical foundation of cross-cultural narrative method of inquiry (He, 2003), I firmly believe that this form of inquiry, which emphasizes and values lived experience along with the development of understanding, empathy and compassion for those who are culturally different, serves as a solid methodological foundation for this study. The purpose of the research was to explore the use of literature and narrative imagination, as defined by Martha Nussbaum (1997) as a means of preparing teachers who are more culturally responsive in their teaching practices; to determine if engaging the narrative imagination encourages the development of empathy and compassion among the preservice teachers; to find out if conducting discussions based on multicultural literature help in opening up conversations that challenge stereotypes as they relate to cultural differences, race, and racism; and to contribute to the questioning of stereotypes by promoting the exploration of one’s own cultural roots. In order to accomplish this, preservice teachers were asked to critically
examine their own cultural roots; to engage in honest and open dialogue with others about stereotypes, discrimination, race, and racism; to complete critical writings in response to selected activities and experiences; and to participate in structured interviews.

The cross-cultural narrative method of inquiry developed by Ming Fang He (2003) is rooted in Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (1995) suggest that “our best understanding of teacher knowledge is a narrative one…. [T]eachers know their lives in terms of stories. They live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed possibilities, and relive the changed stories” (p. 12). In other words, the experience inside and outside the classroom, for the teacher and the students, happens narratively. “Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19).

One of the primary goals for this type of research is to more fully understand how teachers think, feel, and act (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2002). The works of scholars such as Connelly, Clandinin, Schubert, and Ayers are based strongly upon the work of John Dewey (1938). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) credit Dewey (1938) for their focus on experience. They state that “experience is a key term in these diverse inquiries…Dewey transforms a commonplace term, experience, in our educator’s language into an inquiry term, and gives us a term that permits better understandings of educational life….experience is both personal and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). In addition, Dewey (1938) held continuity as one criterion for experience. His belief is that experience grows from experience and that experience leads to future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that
their reliance upon Dewey’s (1938) definition of experience assists in the exploration of an individual’s experiences while understanding learning and interrelationships within a social context.

The theoretical roots for the research of Clandinin and Connelly are not limited to those of educational theorists. In order to strengthen their own sense of narrative and to gain new perspectives, Clandinin and Connelly pull from other disciplines as well. These include the research of Clifford Geertz (1973) and Mary Catherine Bateson (1990) in the field of anthropology, Donald Polkinghorne (1988) from psychology, Robert Coles (1989) from psychiatry, and Barbara Czarniawska (1998) in field of organizational research. They state that “it has been instructive for us to read in other social sciences and in the humanities for insights into these changing inquiries and changing phenomena, which resonate with and inform our own narrative inquiries” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 5).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that by bringing narrative into their work, each of the five authors, Geertz (1973), Bateson (1990), Polkinghorne (1988), Coles (1989), and Czarniawska (1998), offered new dimensions to the study of narrative inquiry. Geertz (1973) in particular provides a strong sense of temporality. He warns that it is impossible to look at one event or one space in time without looking at it as a part of and in the context of the whole (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Other dimensions from the works of Bateson (1990), Coles (1989), Polkinghorne (1988), and Czarniawska (1998) are also considered to be significant. Through her research efforts to understand how one understands the changing world, Bateson (1990) contributes a sense of tentativeness as it relates to how researchers interpret and write about people and events (Clandinin &
Connelly, 2000). Work completed using narrative methodologies must always be open for revision. In addition, Bateson (1990) offers strong relational aspects by linking life to research. Coles (1989), like Bateson (1990), “offers us as researchers a trust in life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). He encourages researchers to listen to their own teaching, to the stories that they themselves tell, and to the stories that are told by students. Finally, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that Czarniawska (1998) and Polkinghorne (1988) offer a way to bridge research with practice through the use of borrowed theories, metaphors, and terms from other disciplines.

Cross-cultural narrative as a form of inquiry allows the researcher to incorporate personal experience into inquiry, to think narratively, to live in the midst of lives, and to analyze relationships as a part of experience by

- seeing research as having autobiographical roots, as connected to rather than disconnected from life…
- seeing experience as the starting point of inquiry, as changing rather than fixed, as contextual rather than decontextualized…
- seeing research as long-term, passionate involvement in daily lives of participants, rather than short-term, in and out, detached observation…
- developing understanding in relationships, rather than making meaning in isolation. (He, 2003, p.145)

This form of inquiry assists in the development of understanding for evolving cross-cultural lives by examining life experience in the contexts of the historical, temporal, and physical as well as encouraging empathy and compassion for others in the contexts of their lived worlds in relation to past experiences, desires, needs, expectations, beliefs. Thus, the cross-cultural narrative method of inquiry enables the researcher to move beyond the confinement of labels and stereotypes (He, 2003). “Narrative, about how
people experience their lives, how they interact, how they shape and are shaped by the contexts in which they live and work, incorporates a cross-cultural awareness of humanity that is philosophically compatible with cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities central to multiculturalism” (He, 2003, p. 3). Ultimately, it aids in the cultivation of hope and possibilities for improving life in a increasingly multicultural society (He, 2003).

Cross-cultural narrative inquiry offers promise for exploration of the experiences of preservice teachers; the use of multicultural literature to develop a strong sense of empathy and compassion; and the possibilities for dialogue about race, racism, and discrimination. Through this mode of inquiry, one which explores the relationships between life experience and the educational journey in the context of lived worlds, preservice teachers are encouraged to become directly and intimately involved in the study of their own personal and professional beliefs. This is accomplished systematically and intentionally, thereby strengthening their judgments and improving their own classroom practices.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data collection methods included the school portraiture, participant program profiles, autobiographies that explore the cultural roots of the participants, critical response papers and reflective journal entries completed by participants, and structured interviews with each participant. The study explored the attitudes and responses toward diversity and culturally responsive pedagogy of teacher candidates enrolled in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University as they explored their own cultural roots and become involved in literature through narrative
imagination to develop empathy and compassion for diverse students. Permission for participation was obtained from each teacher candidate before any data was collected. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

**School Portraiture**

Georgia College & State University, now recognized as Georgia’s public liberal arts university, is located in Milledgeville, Georgia. Milledgeville, the antebellum capital of Georgia, is a center for history and culture for central Georgia. With a population of approximately 20,000, it is county seat for Baldwin County. Milledgeville is only a few miles from the geographical center of the state and is located approximately 100 miles from Atlanta, Augusta, and Columbus and about 30 miles from Macon.

GC&SU was founded in 1889 as Georgia Normal and Industrial College. Its emphasis at the time was largely vocational with its major task involving the preparation of young women for teaching or industrial careers. Today, however, GC&SU offers both graduate and undergraduate degrees from the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the J. Whitney Bunting School of Business, the School of Health Sciences, and the John H. Lounsbury School of Education. The university now enrolls approximately 5,500 students from almost every county in the state of Georgia, from other states, and from fifty foreign countries.

Even as GC&SU has grown and changed through the years, teacher preparation has continued as a notable endeavor for the institution. Currently, the John H. Lounsbury School of Education offers programs for both initial and advanced certification in Early Childhood Education, Middle Grades Education, Special Education, Physical Education,
Music, and Secondary content areas. The commitment to providing excellent teacher preparation programs is evident in the mission statement for the school:

The mission of the John H. Lounsbury School of Education is not only to maintain our long tradition of excellence in teacher preparation and professional development, but also to be architects of change for schools mandated to assure children’s success in the increasingly diverse, complex, and technological society of the 21st century. Our mission extends well beyond the certification and career development programs we offer our students, to meaningful and significant partnerships with community schools, their districts, other academic institutions, and professional education agencies. (John H. Lounsbury School of Education, n.d., p. 2)

In an effort to meet the goals set within the mission statement, the School of Education designed a conceptual framework for all programs that promotes “educators as architects of change.”

In order to set forth a continuum of teacher development within the conceptual framework, the faculty of the John H. Lounsbury School of Education looked toward the standards set by three professional bodies: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). “These standards and the assessments that grow out of them identify what it takes to be an effective teacher” (John H. Lounsbury School of Education, 2003, p.). Teachers must be experts in subject matter as well as the knowledge of how students learn and develop. They must have the skill to use a range of teaching strategies and technologies that
engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Teachers must possess sensitivity toward working with students from diverse backgrounds as well as the ability to assess and analyze students’ learning and make appropriate changes to encourage increased learning for all students. In addition, the teacher must assume the role of collaborator demonstrating the ability to work with parents and other educators to orchestrate learning experiences that not only respond to curriculum goals and student needs but also challenge students to high levels of independent performance.

All teacher education programs within the School of Education are designed to support and maintain the goals of the mission and conceptual framework. This has been accomplished through initial and advanced certification programs that are constructed upon a professional knowledge base which focuses on the following core concepts: Foundation in Liberal Arts, Foundation in Professional Preparation, Foundation for Addressing Human Relations and Diversity Issues, and Development of Dynamic Leadership Abilities.

In order to fully support these core concepts, initial certification programs are based on a cohort model and possess an extensive field component. Undergraduates, wishing to join the fields of early childhood, middle grades or special education, enter the School of Education each fall through an application process at the completion of the sophomore year. When accepted into the desired program, candidates are assigned a mentor leader and a cohort with whom they remain for the entire two-year program of academic courses and field experiences. At the present, cohort size is limited to 20 students who have fully met the requirements for the program. Due to the number of
applicants and available resources for each program, there are typically two cohorts in early childhood, one in middle grades, and one in special education.

Candidates enter undergraduate programs in fall semester of the junior year. During the first week of classes, they participate in an extensive orientation. Experiences are focused on four primary goals: to increase the candidates’ understanding of the requirements and guidelines for the programs, to introduce candidates to professional ethics, to familiarize the students with the communities and schools in which field placements are completed, and to provide opportunities for students in individual cohorts to begin to build a sense of camaraderie within the group. Following this first week’s experiences, candidates begin a regular class schedule along with field placements. Candidates within each cohort meet all scheduled classes as a group and report to individually assigned field placements on the same days each week. As a part of the class schedule, each cohort meets for a one hour seminar session each week. During fall semester, the focus for these sessions is on teambuilding in an effort to establish a group support system, build relationships, and develop group problem solving strategies.

Field placements are an essential part of the teacher education programs within the School of Education. During the junior year, candidates typically spend two full days per week in public school placements. Placements are made by individual mentor leaders for their cohorts with consideration for requirements set forth by the Professional Standards Commission (PSC) for certification, elements of diversity, personalities, and teaching styles. During the junior year, candidates complete two placements each semester allowing for experiences in four different classrooms in at least two different county systems. In order to provide candidates with the widest range of diversity possible
for the Milledgeville/Baldwin County area, field placements are primarily completed in Baldwin, Jones, and Putnam Counties. The Office of Student Achievement: 2002-2003 Annual Report Card on K-12 Public Schools outlines the demographics of the students enrolled in elementary schools in Baldwin, Putnam, and Jones Counties. The chart below reports information for these three counties as it relates to race/ethnicity and eligibility for free or reduced lunch only. In addition, information is reported only for the schools in which field placements are completed.

Table 3.1

Demographics for Putnam, Baldwin, and Jones County Elementary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putnam</td>
<td>Putnam Co. Elementary School</td>
<td>White 45% Black 49% Other 6%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin</td>
<td>Blandy Hills Elementary</td>
<td>White 44% Black 53% Other 3%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creekside Elementary</td>
<td>White 38% Black 56% Other 6%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Davis Elementary</td>
<td>White 41% Black 58% Other 1%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Midway Elementary</td>
<td>White 31% Black 67% Other 2%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>Mattie Wells Primary</td>
<td>White 72% Black 25% Other 3%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dames Ferry Elementary</td>
<td>White 84% Black 15% Other 1%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gray Elementary</td>
<td>White 71% Black 26% Other 3%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Program Profiles

The four participants for the study were randomly chosen at the end of fall semester 2004 from teacher candidates enrolled in the senior level cohort for Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University. During fall semester 2004, all potential participants were enrolled in EDEC 4960 Special Topics, a one credit hour course designed for teacher candidates at the senior level in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University. The focus of the course, which was planned and implemented by me as the researcher, was to increase the teacher candidates’ awareness and understanding of role of imagination in culturally responsive teaching practice. The four participants for the study were randomly chosen when all requirements for the course had been completed. Each participant was a White, middle class, female member of the early childhood cohort that began the program fall semester of 2003. Each had successfully completed one year of a program that is based on a cohort model with an extensive field component.

Upon entrance into the program, all participants engaged in an extensive orientation designed to not only familiarize teacher candidates with program requirements and expectations but also to encourage the development of group dynamics through group activities and organized team building experiences. In addition, during the first year, all teacher candidates in the cohort were enrolled in the same academic courses that were scheduled specifically for this cohort. Throughout that year, candidates completed a total of four seven-week placements in at least two different school systems. These field placements were made in a limited number of partner schools located in two counties with a group of significant size assigned to each so that candidates remained
within a support group while in the field. Finally, to increase levels of trust and risk
taking within the cohort, there was a seminar session planned weekly. Once each month,
during this seminar session, the cohort participated in counseling sessions which were
organized by GC&SU Counseling Services. These counseling sessions specifically
focused on coping skills and group dynamics.

During fall semester of 2004, the cohort continued with the requirements for the
senior year. As in the junior year, teacher candidates were enrolled in the same schedule
of academic courses. In addition, candidates completed two extended full-time
placements, one in the fall and the other in the spring. During the fall semester only,
seminar sessions were held which continued to focus on connections between theory and
practice.

Participant Autobiographical Papers

To assist in the development of understanding for their own personal, cultural,
and racial awareness, each participant was asked to write an autobiographical paper
reflecting critically upon the experiences and events in her life that had served to shape
her personal, cultural, and racial beliefs. In addition, each participant shared her
autobiography orally with the group of students enrolled in EDEC 4960. The participants
were allowed to use their own discretion as to what was shared within the group.
Realizing that this might very well evoke feelings of reluctance or fear in some
participants, I shared my own personal and professional experiences relevant to the study
with the group prior to their writing and sharing. The written autobiographies were
analyzed to determine previous experiences that participants had had in confronting
diversity as well as whether they tended to harbor traditional stereotypes for those who are different from themselves.

**Critical Response Papers of Participants**

As a part of EDEC 4960, each potential participant was asked to complete several critical writings. These included two short (two to three page) responses as well as one formal critical response paper. The following paragraphs offer a brief description of each of the writing samples that was examined as a part of the study. All writings of the students enrolled in EDEC 4960 were collected by the researcher, however, only those of the four randomly chosen participants were analyzed by the researcher to determine the participants’ awareness of group dominance, stereotypes, racism, and/or oppression communicated through media as well as that addressed in literature; and to examine the participants’ understanding of the role of imagination in developing empathy and compassion for those who are different.

First, after participating in the creation of a cultural collage, an activity in which a collage was assembled from pictures of people that were collected from popular magazines, sale papers, travel brochures, newspapers, etc., participants were asked to closely examine the collage as a whole. Before taking part in a group discussion, each was required to complete a reflective journal entry expressing personal reactions and feelings, collective implications, and hidden messages. The entry was completed as a “quick write” activity, one in which the writer records thoughts, reactions, and feelings without concern for accuracy in spelling, grammar, or style. A group discussion was held following the writing activity. Following the discussion, participants were free to add other comments that were inspired by the discussion.
Second, potential participants read the chapter entitled, “Imagination, Community, and the School,” from *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, by Maxine Greene (1995). In this chapter, Greene (1995) explains the need for utilizing the imagination as teachers work toward meeting the diverse educational needs of the students in today’s classrooms. She explains the role of literature and other forms of art in enabling teachers and students to think imaginatively, to develop empathy for those who are different, and to develop a sense of “wide-awakeness,” an awareness of what it is like to live and be in the world. Having read the chapter, each potential participant wrote a two to three page critical response paper focusing on the role of imagination as a means of developing empathy and compassion for those who are different from herself as well as the importance of thinking in imaginative ways and what this holds for providing an education that is culturally responsive.

Third, potential participants were asked to read *White Teacher*, by Vivian Gussin Paley (2002). This text describes the experiences of one White teacher as she confronts and addresses the cultural differences of the students in her classroom. The book was read in two sections (preface – chapter 12, chapter 13 – epilogue) and discussed during group seminar sessions. Prior to each group discussion potential participants were asked to complete a two to three page critical response paper describing the role of imagination in developing an understanding for students’ actions and motivations, examining the need for imagination in developing empathy and compassion for students in the classroom who are different from herself, and exploring relationships between the text and personal experiences.
Fourth, potential participants watched the video, *Conrack*, directed by Martin Ritt (1985). The movie is based on the book, *The Water is Wide*, by Pat Conroy (2002). Based on a true story of a White, liberal teacher who is sent to fill-in at a poor, all Black school on an island off the coast of South Carolina, the story describes how one teacher used whatever was available to educate illiterate, impoverished children. During his time at the school, Conrack implements non-traditional and often unorthodox strategies in order to reach the students in class. Even though these methods bring challenges by the administration, Conrack continues to seek ways to best educate his students. After viewing the movie, each potential participant completed a six to seven page critical response paper focusing on her understanding and application of narrative imagination as it relates to the text; explaining the importance for understanding and respecting the unique culture represented by a group of students in addition to addressing the individual needs of students; exploring the motivation and actions of the Conrack, the teacher, administrators, and the students; and examining relationships between the text and personal experience.

After the completion of the above activities, four participants were randomly chosen from the group of students. Letters of informed consent were obtained from the study participants at this time. All writings for participants were analyzed to determine the participants’ awareness of group dominance, stereotypes, racism, and/or oppression communicated through media as well as that addressed in literature.

**Participant Interviews**

After the participants had completed the informed consent procedure, a structured interview was scheduled with each of the four chosen participants and conducted by me,
the researcher. To provide a neutral environment, interviews were completed individually in a local coffee shop. Questions were designed to determine possible changes in attitudes toward differences, any immediate affects on the planning and implementation of experiences during field work, and any potential affects on practice. The interview questions included but were not limited to the following:

- In what ways have the experiences of this study affected your personal, cultural, and/or racial beliefs?

- Which activities (completing the cultural collage, the autobiography, critical writings, reading multicultural books, group discussions, etc.) were most challenging for your personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values? For the activities selected, explain how the activity required you to confront these issues.

- How has the participation in the study influenced your overall practice (classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of lessons, working with parents, etc.) during your current field placement?

- In what way does your practice in this placement differ from that in placements completed prior to the study?

- How do you see these experiences affecting you as a beginning teacher?

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed by me as the researcher. Transcriptions were also analyzed by me, the researcher, to ascertain whether or not the experiences of the study influenced change in the personal, cultural and/or racial attitudes and beliefs of participants that would lead toward more culturally responsive teaching, to identify any evidence of culturally responsive practice that had occurred in field work as
a result of the study, and to determine which of the experiences were viewed as most effective in challenging racism, oppression, and stereotypes.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that are found not only within the methodology but also in myself as the researcher. The first of these is my own Whiteness as the researcher. I, like the participants, am a White, middle class female who has lived as a member of the dominant group and enjoyed the privileges of Whiteness throughout my life. Even though I have experienced forms of oppression or discrimination as a female and, because of my personal beliefs and values as they relate to respect and appreciation for diversity, I have found myself an outsider, I do not have the same experiences or understandings of prejudice, stereotypes, and racism that those of color might have. In addition, where my personal beliefs have led me to explore my own Whiteness and to examine the implications this has for me as a member of society and as a teacher educator, my views as they have been influenced by my own Whiteness still held the potential to limit my perspective as I collected and analyzed data.

The second limitation is in the sample size of the study. Only four participants were involved. All were White, middle class females enrolled in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU; however, as a result of their own life experiences, each participant possesses a unique set of personal, cultural, and racial beliefs and values. Their individual beliefs and values influenced their receptiveness to the concepts presented in the study as well as their willingness to examine themselves critically and confront issues of prejudice, oppression, and racism, including the implications of their own Whiteness. Therefore, the generalizations that may be drawn as
a result of participant responses are limited in their connection to all other teacher candidates.

The third limitation is directly connected to the second. This is one of resistance to vulnerability. “Humanity desires invulnerability” (Garrison, 1997, p.18). “Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal” (McIntosh, 1990). For this reason, those who have typically benefited from social position, race, or gender, examining the ways in which their own attitudes and practices are influenced by their backgrounds or their ignorance is quite difficult (Nieto, 2000). In addition, considering differences such as race, religion, gender, and social position tends to place people in the role of either the victimized or the victimizer; therefore, to remain invulnerable one must avoid the confrontation of difference. By examining Whiteness, individuals must also explore differences thereby making them vulnerable. They open themselves up to a multitude of feelings including those of guilt and confusion. They may find themselves struggling to find something good about Whiteness, making excuses for the White race, or denying responsibility for participating in a system that perpetuates oppression and privilege based upon skin color (McIntyre, 2002). Based upon the design, the study required the participants to explore and reflect upon the development of their personal, cultural, and racial beliefs. In addition, the participants of this study were White, middle-class women, all of whom have experienced privilege based upon their Whiteness. For these reasons, the factor of vulnerability must be considered.

The fourth limitation is found in the fact that my relationship with the participants is one of researcher and one of instructor and mentor leader. The nature of my relationships with the participants had the potential to influence both their oral and
written responses. In an effort to please, there may have been the temptations to respond in ways they thought I wanted rather than with their true reactions or feelings.

Finally, the proposed study utilized narrative inquiry as the research methodology. This in itself presents the fifth limitation by affecting the credibility and importance of the study for some readers. “Narrative and experiential inquirers are also vulnerable within the academic community” (He, Phillion, & Connelly, in press, p. 16). Positivism, which attempts to establish generalized patterns in human behaviors, is still prevalent in the field of education. Positivist researchers strive to identify interventions and reforms regardless of context. Conversely, narrative research is rooted in the perspective of the researcher and tells situated stories from the space from which they emerge. He, Phillion, and Connelly (in press) list three key points that offer credibility to work of narrative researchers. First, data can be presented in ways that are life-like offering readers the opportunity to vicariously experience people and events. Second, researchers may link autobiographies or biographies to their lending a sense of trust to the reader that the researcher is knowledgeable and informed. Third, the researcher’s voice may offer a sympathetic understanding to the plight of the participants involved in the study. Sleeter’s (2001) view of narrative inquiry supports these points for credibility. She states that narrative researchers examine relationships and interactions among identity, experience, and knowledge (Sleeter, 2001).

Significance of the Study

This research study addressed issues of diversity that have implications for teacher education programs not only locally but also nationally. Recent data show that the population of public school students continues to grow more diverse, while the
population of classroom teachers has become less and less so. In 1997 national statistics indicated that 86% of the teaching force was comprised of White teachers and 14% was represented collectively by teachers of color (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). This trend is clearly represented by the demographics of teachers in Georgia public schools. As previously stated in the Context of the Study, the 2001-2002 Georgia Public Education Report Card prepared by the Georgia Department of Education shows that almost 78% of all public school teachers, prekindergarten through grade 12, are White, while only 22% are teachers of color. In addition, Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) report that in 2000, 40% of the student population in public schools was represented by students of color. The 2002-2003 Georgia Public Education Report Card compiled by the Office of Student Achievement shows that 52% of all public school students are White while the remaining 48% is represented by students of color.

The concern for the lack of diversity in the teaching population increases when the demographics for preservice teachers are examined. Reports show that there is an overwhelming presence of Whiteness in teacher education. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Danne Davis, and Kim Fries (2004) report that, depending upon the institution and location, 80-93% of the students enrolled in collegiate education programs are White. Although teacher education programs show evidence of an increase in diversity and some alternate programs are beginning to attract more minority students, “it seems clear that the teaching force will remain primarily White European American for some time to come” (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004, p. 934).

Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) point out that the implications of the demographics is much larger that the obvious numerical differences between student and
There are marked differences in life experiences, socioeconomic levels, and cultures. Teachers possess frames of reference and points of view that are quite different from their students. In addition, recent research studies show that White teachers are ill-prepared to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Marx & Pennington, 2003; LeCompte & McCray, 2002; Kailin, 1999; Reed, 1998; McIntyre, 1997).

Teacher education is, therefore, faced with the growing challenge of not only recruiting a more diverse population of perservice teachers but also, more immediately, preparing predominately White teachers who not only understand culturally responsive pedagogy but also are well prepared to implement effective teaching strategies for children who are different from themselves. Teacher educators must consider possibilities for program changes that will be successful in preparing future teachers. Reforms are needed that organize teacher education programs to assist perservice teachers in acquiring information related to the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups, in developing an understanding of pedagogical principles, and in obtaining the skills, methods, and materials necessary to address ethnic and cultural diversity (Gay, 2000). This knowledge should be complemented with opportunities for preservice teachers to determine through critical examination whether or not existing paradigms of educational thought and practice need to be modified or replaced to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity. These analyses should be supplemented with supervised practice in designing and implementing alternate or replacement models (Gay, 2000).

Facing the issues of diversity through programmatic changes in teacher education programs represents possibilities for the achievement of more immediate results in
preparing culturally responsive teachers than does the process of recruiting more diverse students into teacher education. While recruitment offers long term alternatives, exploring means of preparing teachers who are more culturally responsive offers possibilities for all teachers to develop a greater understanding for themselves and the students in their classrooms.

This study represents a first step for one teacher education program in meeting the challenges of diversity in the public school classrooms. Considering the dilemma of preparing teachers who are adequately prepared to effectively teach diverse groups of students, the tasks become ones of identifying ways to increase sensitivity to and understanding of diversity as well as finding ways of inviting dialogue about race, racism, and discrimination. The experiences included as a part of this research, which encouraged students to explore their own cultural roots, to question stereotypes, and to develop empathy and compassion for those different from themselves, offer possibilities for changes in the current Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU that can potentially lead to the preparation of teachers who are more culturally responsive in their teaching practice.

Summary

Over the years as a teacher educator, I have continued to become more and more frustrated with situations that I observe daily in public school classrooms. I see children who are penalized for not understanding the expectations of schools that ignore their lived experiences, their cultures, and their ethnicities; who have “tuned out” because they see no connections in the requirements of school and their lives; who are constantly silenced, their voices seen as being insignificant and unimportant to the workings of the
classroom. I also see teachers who are disillusioned with teaching, the excitement and enjoyment gone; who are frustrated with the diverse groups of children who enter their classrooms, viewing the differences as problems they must solve; who are overwhelmed with standards and accountability. Saddest of all, I see teachers who accept the system as being “the way things are.”

For me, the results of this study offer an opportunity for me to take action, to move past the stage of imagining what could be and hoping that the changes will occur. It represents a way that I, as a teacher educator, can initiate change, however small, in the area of teacher preparation. By determining effective ways to increase the understanding of cultural responsive pedagogy in preservice teachers, I can help to prepare teachers that value and respect the diversity of the children in their classrooms, to see diversity as a resource which offers possibilities rather than deficits that must be remediated.

Once Georgia’s children are seen by educators as being competent individuals who are capable of taking responsibility for their own learning and who are respected, valued and trusted, educators of these children will be better prepared to accept and support a curriculum that places the children, with all the diversity they represent, at its center. To accomplish this, teachers must be willing to analyze equity issues surrounding race, class, and gender and actively seek possibilities for meaningful reform. They must be willing to critically examine their own beliefs to gain understanding into not only who they are but also how they are connected to and disconnected from those who are different from themselves. According to Gay (2000), they must possess:

1) thorough knowledge about cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, contributions, and achievements of different ethnic groups; 2) the courage to stop
blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems; 3) the will to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural universality and/or neutrality in teaching and learning; 4) the skills to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices; and 5) the tenacity to relentlessly pursue comprehensive and high-level performance for children who are currently underachieving in schools. (p. 44)

They must be willing to take the risk to move away from the familiar, the habitual, the comfortable. They must venture into the world of the uncertain.

The findings of the study have the potential of providing implications for not only the Undergraduate Early Childhood Teacher Education Program but also other programs housed within the John H. Lounsbury School of Education at GC&SU. It is my hope that the findings from this study will serve to guide immediate changes in the Undergraduate Early Childhood Teacher Education Program but also provide information that will be valuable as the faculty work to redesign the graduate programs in Early Childhood Education.
CHAPTER IV

REPRESENTING PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR RESPONSES TO THE CULTURAL COLLAGE AND THE WORKS OF GREENE, PALEY, AND RITT

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of multicultural literature to prepare teachers to become more culturally responsive in their practices in order that they may effectively teach diverse groups of students. As a part of required course work for the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program, experiences have been provided that were designed to encourage preservice teachers to develop empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves by utilizing the concept of “narrative imagination” as it is described by Martha Nussbaum (1997). In addition, preservice teachers have been offered opportunities that would help them gain a better understanding not only of themselves but also of others. The four participants for the study were randomly chosen from the 41 White, middle-class females who began the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program on the Milledgeville Campus at Georgia College & State University in the fall of 2003. Each participant agreed to her inclusion in the research study by signing a letter of informed consent.

In this chapter, I have provided both program profiles and autobiographical profiles for each of the four participants, an overview of the critical response experiences which were included in the study, and representations and analyses of the data that were collected from each participant. In addition, I have offered an explanation of my role in
the study as it has changed and developed during the process of collecting and analyzing data, the implications that assuming multiple roles present, and my interpretations and reflections on the experiences from the perspective of a participant as well as a researcher. To more clearly distinguish between these components, the overviews of the experiences and the representations of data are presented in regular type while the analyses are in italics.

**The Evolving Role of the Researcher:**

**The Shift from Researcher to Facilitator to Participant**

During the development of the dissertation, my role as the researcher began to evolve, becoming more complicated than I initially expected. As I had assumed, throughout the process I remained the researcher; however, over time I had consciously and unconsciously assumed other roles. It was not until I was nearing the completion of the data collection process that I realized the complexity of these roles.

As I conducted the study by presenting the designated experiences, I became a facilitator. I found this to be one of my more difficult roles. As the facilitator for an experience, whether it was the sharing of personal stories or a discussion of a required reading, I found myself reflecting on my personal ideas and reactions. I knew that by verbalizing these, however, I could greatly influence the direction of the participants’ responses. For this reason, to the best of my ability, I maintained the role of facilitator. I introduced the topics for discussion encouraging conversations by asking questions or offering clarification only as needed.

Although I remained silent as I continued my role as facilitator of group discussions, I slowly came to understand that even this level of involvement had quite an
unexpected impact upon me. I began to recognize that I had actually assumed an additional role. This was the role of participant. I realized that being silent had not removed me from the impact of the experiences. I began to question my own teaching practices, looking for ways that I could improve interactions with my own students. I found that as I listened I continued to clarify my personal beliefs. I became increasingly aware of how my beliefs about race, culture, racism, stereotypes, and prejudices consistently find their way into all aspects of my life. I seemed to be listening and observing more closely and with a stronger awareness of ways that differences are handled.

Prior to requiring that the teacher candidates in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program explore their personal histories, I spent quite a bit of time examining my own beliefs and the experiences that influenced these. I did this by completing an autobiography addressing the development of my personal, cultural, and racial beliefs. Once this was accomplished, I shared my story with the teacher candidates. Initially, I did this to help them to better understand the requirements of the assignment, and because I wanted them to share their own stories at a later date, I hoped that this would decrease the risk involved. Ultimately, what I realized was the impact was much deeper. I had not anticipated the effect that the sharing of personal stories would have on me as the teacher of these young women.

From my reading, I understood the importance of exploring and sharing personal histories in the development of empathy for others and of teaching practices that are more culturally responsive. I had not considered, however, that by becoming involved in this process I was allowing my students to see me in a much more personal way, and I was
developing a much deeper understanding of them as individuals. As I shared my story with the class, I watched the faces of the students. I could see the concern in their eyes. I heard the comments affirming their connections to my experiences. As class ended that day, individual students stopped to comment about parts of my story. I was no longer just the professor for a course; I was a person who had experienced hardships and triumphs. I had struggled to come to grips with my own beliefs. I was someone that this group of students could connect with and begin to understand.

A week later, it was time for the students to share their stories. Before the sharing began, I reminded the students that they were not required to share anything that would make them uncomfortable. They could convey as much or as little information as they chose. The sharing began slowly. However, once the ice was broken, the monologue of sharing became a conversation. They listened and responded to each other. Connections were evident. They began to see commonalities that even after a year together in the cohort they never realized. I listened as well, trying very hard to stay on the periphery. I acted as facilitator to the discussion by asking clarifying or guiding questions. I saw this not as my time to speak but my time to listen.

As I listened, I learned. I learned about my students whom I thought that I knew. I began to see them as individual young women, not just a group of students. I realized as I followed the conversation that I had unconsciously prejudged these students without really taking the time to get to know them, to understand their actions and motivations. I had made assumptions about their experiences or the lack thereof. Having heard the personal stories, I could now see them in a much different way. They not only had commonalities with each other but with me as well.
This experience had implications not only for me as a teacher but also for me as the researcher for this study. Listening to the participants as they shared the development of their personal, cultural, and racial beliefs through their autobiographical papers enabled me to begin to understand the experiences that they had had that influenced their abilities to accept differences. This background provided me with one way to document changes that occurred as a result of participation in the research experiences. In addition, I believe that it assisted me in viewing the participants as individuals with unique ways of understanding and responding to others. For this reason I believe that I was more inclined to look for unique changes in individual participants rather than the same changes for all.

Program Profiles

The four participants for the study were randomly chosen at the end of fall semester 2004 from a group of teacher candidates enrolled in the senior level cohort for the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University. Each participant had successfully completed the courses outlined for the two semesters of the junior year. In addition to the courses listed for fall semester of the senior year, each participant completed the requirements for EDEC 4960 Special Topics in the fall of 2004. EDEC 4960 was a one credit hour course uniquely designed for teacher candidates at the senior level in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program. The course, which was planned and implemented by me as the researcher, focused primarily on experiences that were designed to increase the teacher candidates’ awareness and understanding of the role of imagination in the development of culturally responsive teaching practices. The four participants were chosen at the end of fall 2004 following the completion of all
course requirements. The table following this section delineates the course requirements for the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program.

Each participant is a White, middle class, female who was a member of the early childhood cohort and entered the program fall semester of 2003. At the time that data were collected, each had successfully completed the first two semesters of course work for the program and four seven-week field placements, each at a different grade level and within at least two different public school systems. In addition, each participant was enrolled in course work for the third semester for the program and was involved in a fifteen week placement that began in the fall during the preplanning period for each host school. The section provides a brief overview of the placement history for each participant as well as the sequence and brief description of the program of study.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 3212</td>
<td>Developmental Learning: Theory into Practice</td>
<td>Study, analysis, and application of learning theory in culturally diverse classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDIS 3414</td>
<td>Integrating Language And Culture</td>
<td>Strategies for developing awareness and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity across the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDIS 3415</td>
<td>Investigating the Natural World</td>
<td>Planning and implementing developmentally appropriate activities by which children explore scientific concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDRD 3221</td>
<td>Literacy Instruction I</td>
<td>Theory and process of literacy learning: methods and materials that encourage and support the development of literacy with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Number</td>
<td>Course Name</td>
<td>Course Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAED 3000</td>
<td>Foundations of Mathematics</td>
<td>Introduction to mathematical logic, set theory, and number theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 3001</td>
<td>Field Placement I</td>
<td>As a part of the teacher education program, the student demonstrates in public school classrooms the abilities to draw on deep content knowledge in order to plan, implement, and evaluate curriculum; to foster and to assess student learning; to identify and plan for needs of diverse learners; to contribute to the educational life of the school and community</td>
</tr>
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### Spring Semester Junior Year

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDRD 3215</td>
<td>Teaching Reading Through Children’s Literature</td>
<td>Methods and materials for literacy instruction that encourages the use of literature to develop independent readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDIS 3223</td>
<td>Creative Expressions</td>
<td>Understanding creative and artistic development: methods and strategies for integrating the arts across the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDIS 4223</td>
<td>Connecting the Social Sciences to Enhance Teaching</td>
<td>Planning and implementing activities that develop and integrate basic social studies concepts across the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAED 3001</td>
<td>Number Systems I</td>
<td>Fundamental topics underlying elementary school arithmetic including problem solving, real numbers and their subsystems, elementary number theory and selected geometry topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 3002</td>
<td>Field Placement II</td>
<td>As a part of the teacher education program, the student demonstrates in public school classrooms the abilities to draw on deep content knowledge in order to plan, implement, and evaluate curriculum; to foster and to assess student learning; to identify and plan for needs of diverse learners; to contribute to the educational life of the school and community</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Choose one:  
ARED 3100  
Art in the Elementary School  
This course is designed to develop and understanding of art education theories and teaching methods as well as a knowledge of materials and resources for use by the prospective classroom teacher.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MUED 3909</td>
<td>Elementary Music Methods</td>
<td>Emphasis is placed on how children learn, selecting content for teaching and on choosing strategies which deal with movement to music as well as making, creating, and analyzing music. Emphasis is placed integrating theatre into the elementary classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEA 4950</td>
<td>Theatre and the Classroom Teacher</td>
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### Fall Semester Senior Year

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 3214</td>
<td>Integrating EEC Curriculum</td>
<td>Overview of strategies and techniques for planning and implementing integrated curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 3222</td>
<td>Managing the EEC Classroom</td>
<td>Proactive strategies to manage behavior, time, and resources that support successful learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 4212</td>
<td>Assessing Early Learners</td>
<td>The development of classroom assessment strategies and the interpretation of standardized test results as a means to meet children’s developmental needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDRD 4211</td>
<td>Literacy Instruction II</td>
<td>Methods and materials for literacy instruction that encourage the development of independent readers and writers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAED 3002</td>
<td>Number Systems II</td>
<td>Focuses on an intuitive development of geometric ideas, including point-set, Euclidian geometry, the metric system, measurement, area, perimeter, volume, symmetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 4001</td>
<td>Field Placement III</td>
<td>As a part of the teacher education program, the student demonstrates in public school classrooms the abilities to draw on deep content knowledge in order to plan, implement, and evaluate curriculum; to foster and to assess student learning; to identify and plan for needs of diverse learners; to contribute to the educational life of the school and community</td>
</tr>
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### Spring Semester Senior Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 4960</td>
<td>Student Teaching Internship</td>
<td>An individually designed and planned learning experience involving off-campus field experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Code</td>
<td>Course Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 4222</td>
<td>Teachers as Leaders in Schools and Society</td>
<td>Focuses on leadership strategies for team teaching, developing integrative curriculum, and collaborating with administrators, parents and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 4243</td>
<td>Capstone Experience</td>
<td>The experience is planned with the mentor leader and may involve full-time teaching in public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEC 4218</td>
<td>Logical Thought for Young Children</td>
<td>Focuses on the thinking processes of young children and on concepts appropriate for young children</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Rebecca** had completed field placements in both Baldwin and Jones Counties. These include the following seven week placements: second and fourth grades at Gray Elementary in Jones County, pre-kindergarten at Baldwin County Child and Family Development Center in Baldwin County, and first grade at Wells Primary in Jones County. Her fifteen week placement was in kindergarten at Eagle Ridge Elementary School in Baldwin County.

**Heather** had completed placements in schools located in Baldwin and Jones Counties. These include the following seven week placements: second and fourth grades at Davis Elementary in Baldwin County, kindergarten at Wells Primary in Jones County, and third grade at Gray Elementary in Jones County. Her fifteen week placement was in first grade at Wells Primary in Jones County.

**Allison** had completed placements in both Baldwin and Jones Counties. These include the following seven week placements: first and fourth grades at Davis Elementary in Baldwin County, second at Gray Elementary in Jones County, and kindergarten at Dames Ferry Elementary in Jones County. Her fifteen week placement was in kindergarten at Dames Ferry Elementary.
Amy had completed all placements in two elementary schools located in Jones County. These include the following seven week placements: fifth and second grades at Gray Elementary, and kindergarten and fourth grade at Dames Ferry Elementary. Her fifteen week placement was in third grade at Gray Elementary.

**Autobiographical Profiles**

Although each of the participants has been presented with similar experiences as a part of the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program, they are quite unique in their life experiences which have led to the development of their personal, cultural, and racial beliefs and values. The purpose of this section is twofold. First, I have provided an autobiographical profile for each of the participating teacher candidates. In each profile I offer a description of the life experiences which influenced the participant’s development of her personal, racial, and cultural beliefs prior to the participation in this particular research study. The information for each profile comes primarily from the autobiographies written by the teacher candidates as the initial experience of the research study. Second, I have described the implications that this process held for me as a teacher and a researcher.

**Rebecca** *(Rebecca’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)*

Rebecca lived the first nine years of her life as a part of a blended middle class family in the city of Marietta located on the outskirts of Atlanta, Georgia. From the beginning, her parents seemed to have different outlooks on parenting. She describes her father’s desire as wanting “me to be highly independent” and her mother’s as wanting “me to feel as if she were the only one I could count on in this cold world.” As her mother’s only child, she describes herself as “being sheltered from the outside world.”
These differences continued, leading to much conflict between her parents. Rebecca states that she remembers “being the brunt of most fights.” Regardless of the tension, she enjoyed quality time with both her parents. When Rebecca was nine years old, her parents divorced. As a result, she and her mother left Marietta to live with grandparents in the small town of Eastman. This proved to be a quite a change in lifestyle.

Eastman “is a very small town with just three red lights, a Wal-Mart, and close-knit families.” During the summer before her fourth grade year, Rebecca’s mother went back to work for the first time in nine years. Rebecca spent the summer days with her grandfather. In the fall, she began fourth grade at a local public elementary school. She found the school quite different from the one the she attended near Atlanta. The students were no longer represented by “a mixture of many ethnic groups.” She no longer rode the bus to and from school, eliminating the opportunity to interact with different children. Rebecca was now chauffeured to and from school by her grandfather until she was old enough to drive herself.

Child care, classmates, and transportation were only the beginning of the differences that Rebecca was to experience. In Marietta, Rebecca states that “the children I knew, both Black and White, were middle class and had nice homes, cars, and clothes.” However, moving to Eastman brought with it the exposure to low income housing projects. Rebecca now “saw the other end of the spectrum.” She adds that “down the road and across the street from my house are projects or low income apartments, and on the road running parallel to my house are solely African-American homes.” Rebecca and her cousin played basketball with “the children from the apartments across the street,”
they went to school together, but she says that she “knew there was a difference between us.”

As Rebecca grew into her teenage years and young adulthood, she became more and more aware of the differences as well as the explicit and implicit discrimination that occurred as a result. In contrast to her experience in Marietta, where her father befriended Black co-workers and it was not unusual to have Black people in her home, in Eastman Rebecca began to encounter first-hand the results of racial prejudices both in her home and her work places. She describes several significant experiences that presented her with a perspective of race that was quite disturbing.

Rebecca’s first job was at a discount store while she was still in high school. She states that “when I started to work at Fred’s, there were approximately seven Black girls, three White girls, one Black man, and one White man.” After she had been there several months, the employees began to shift. Several of the Black girls had quit and been replaced by White girls. One day Rebecca heard the manager comment that in order to comply with laws in Georgia she would soon have to hire more Blacks. This reality was quite shocking to her. However, while in this position, she met Erica, a Black female whom she now considers her best friend. It is this friendship that causes Rebecca to ultimately question acts of racial discrimination.

Being several years older than Rebecca, Erica soon began college. Both Rebecca and Erica left their jobs at the discount store and went their separate ways to find better jobs. As time went on, they continued to keep in touch, while Rebecca began her college pursuits, and Erica continued to pursue a degree in early childhood education from a reputable university. Rebecca, also interested in early childhood, found a job at a local
daycare center where she worked holidays and summer breaks. At the center “there were absolutely no African-American students…, only one Chinese and one Indian child.” Even in this environment, Rebecca never considered acts of racism or discrimination that might be taking place at the center until Erica, having finished her degree, applied for a position at the daycare. The assistant director confessed to Rebecca that she “would not have a chance because of the color of her skin.” Hurt and fearful of losing her own job, Rebecca pondered the best way to handle the situation.

After a while, Rebecca approached the assistant director about the incident. Even after having voiced her concerns about the unfairness of dismissing an employment application based solely on race, Rebecca received little satisfaction, for during the conversation, Rebecca learned information that further disturbed her. Parents, Black or White, could apply for their children to attend the center. However, no Black children were included in the student population. These two pieces of information only made Rebecca question why Black parents never submitted applications for their children. She began to wonder if there was “an unspoken rule around town.” Later, Rebecca’s fears were confirmed, “it was indeed an unspoken rule that this daycare was primarily for White children.”

It was not until Rebecca entered the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University that she was required to examine her personal, racial, and cultural beliefs or that she had significant experiences with children and parents who were a different race than she. Before her first placement at Baldwin County Child and Family Development Center, Rebecca states that she had not encountered or worked with Black children.
Walking into the Baldwin County Child and Family Development Center, looking at sixteen African-American students stare me in the face, I could feel my heart drop with fear. I was scared I did not have what it took to interact or appreciate their culture. After the first ten minutes, I knew I would be just fine. I enjoyed every second with those children. They were full of life and spunk. They were quick to entertain and color my world with such character. I often sit and wonder how I could have lived without this experience in my life. I learned a lot from the children, and they learned a lot from me. My beliefs and views changed from accepting African-Americans in my daily life to enjoying and appreciating their culture. *(Rebecca’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)*

At the writing of her autobiography, Rebecca attributes her personal beliefs and values prior the participation in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Georgia College & State University to the influences of her family and the environments in which she lived, learned, and worked. She also recognizes, however, the limitations of these early experiences and realizes how the opportunities in initial field placements and early course work are causing her to question and explore her views.

*Heather* *(Heather’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)*

Until Heather was eight years old, she lived in what she describes as “one of the least diverse states in the United States.” Living in Minnesota, with its lack of diversity, greatly limited Heather’s interactions with other cultures or races. She explains that “looking back, I can see that I never had friends of a different race…Because of the lack of diversity, I and the people around me never had the opportunity to experience very many racial differences or the downfalls that come with those differences.”
Moving to Georgia presented Heather with a “whole different ball game.” Living in Marietta offered challenges that Heather never expected. Even though she still had little experience in negotiating racial differences, she did encounter issues of discrimination that were focused on religious beliefs and sexual preferences. Heather’s best friend in elementary school was a young Muslim girl from Iran. Heather remembers “being worried during the Gulf War because her father was in the Middle East conducting business.” Heather’s concern for her friend and her friend’s family continues as the discrimination and prejudices against Muslims have been heightened by the recent terrorist attacks of September 11. Heather’s friend and her family are now “Muslims in a nation that seems to hate Muslims.” She believes that in today’s world “being a Muslim is a bigger issue than being African American.” Heather recognizes the continuing discrimination and lack of equality for African Americans but is strongly aware of the position in which Muslims now find themselves in the United States.

A second form of discrimination that found its way into Heather’s young world centered on sexual preference. Her first encounter with the discrimination against homosexuality occurred during a seventh grade dance. While at the dance, Heather experienced an act of middle school cruelty. Rumors were being spread that she and her best friend had been seen kissing in a bathroom stall. “Regardless of the fact that the rumor was a lie,” Heather’s friend took the rumor to heart as she ran crying from the dance. At the time Heather admits that she did not understand the true gravity of the act; however, she now realizes that it could have had negative effects on both herself and her friend. It is not uncommon for a teen dealing with such discrimination to experience
isolation by peer group members, to develop deep seated anger, or to experience depression.

Not long after this first experience, when Heather was in the ninth grade, her church hired two women as youth pastors. Heather reports that “the youth group soon found out that they were partners, but because of the beliefs that our church passed on to us, the youth group didn’t see anything wrong with it. These two women became not only our youth pastors but also our friends.” Eventually the two women moved on. Shortly after, however, the church hired a gay man as the choir director. “The reason he came to our church was that when the church that he previously attended found out that he was gay, they disapproved.” Heather’s relationships with her youth pastors and choir director have given her insight into the kinds of prejudice and discrimination that can occur when individuals exhibit qualities that are outside the boundaries of what is traditionally accepted by a society. She states that “each of these experiences has strengthened my belief that homosexuality is not a sin and, furthermore, that it is not a choice…These situations have also made me more sensitive to the ignorant or cruel comments about homosexuality and homosexuals.”

Heather’s sensitivity to the discrimination against homosexuals unexpectedly played a role with her early childhood cohort members in the fall of 2003. All teacher candidates enrolled in early childhood were required to attend the Project Yes Workshop organized by Counseling Services at Georgia College & State University. The purpose of the workshop was to raise awareness and increase sensitivity by examining myths and facts that surround the homosexual lifestyle. Even before attending the workshop, Heather began to hear complaints from her colleagues regarding the attendance
requirement. She admits that “I wanted to tell them all just to shut up. Instead I tried to explain that I thought the purpose of the workshop was to teach us how to deal with situations similar to the ones I have experienced when they come up in our classrooms, which they will, no matter how much teachers try to avoid them.”

The experiences previously described are ones that Heather believes have made her convictions about open-mindedness and generosity stronger. She attributes the development of these values to the teachings her parents and her church. Heather realizes, however, that there was an even more important component involved: modeling. She confirms this in the following statements: “Just because I was taught these values doesn’t necessarily mean that I would have picked them up. The reason I did and do try to exhibit these qualities is because my parents and relatives modeled them for me as well as teaching them to me.”

Heather describes her church, the United Church of Christ, as being “very liberal.” She states: “I think that even more than my parents my church emphasized to me the importance of being open-minded.” The congregation is characterized as “open and affirming,” meaning that they “respect the beliefs and lifestyles of all people and will not turn away anyone who seeks to have a closer relationship with God.”

Generosity is another value that Heather had accepted but has not until recently acted upon. When she arrived at Georgia College & State University, she was very quiet and shy. Therefore, she sought out a way to make friends more quickly and easily. This search led her to a national service sorority, Gamma Sigma Sigma, whose primary goal is to volunteer in the community. Through this organization, Heather became involved with
others who shared her value of generosity. In addition to making many friends, she strengthened her own commitment to helping others.

Heather recognizes that she has had many unique experiences in her life that have served to shape her into the individual that she is today. “The reason beliefs and values are so important is that each person went through different experiences to develop their beliefs. No two people who experience the exact same situation will react the exact same way.”


Allison grew up as the youngest child and the only girl in a White, middle class home and attended school in the suburbs of Atlanta. She describes her home life as one that has been filled with many experiences and opportunities that have contributed to shaping her into the young woman that she is today. Allison recognizes, however, that “growing up in the suburbs, I did not get the chance to view as many things as I would have if I lived in the city. I went to school with very few African Americans, and the ones that went to my school were from middle class families just like mine.”

Allison describes her parents as supportive but controlling. She states that “ever since I was little my parents have always pushed my brothers and me to do the right things. If they felt like we were not going to make the right choice, they would make the choice for us and tell us what to do.” Allison stresses that throughout her life she has feared the prospect of disappointing her parents. Ultimately, this power structure led Allison to the point where she was afraid of her parents and their reactions, what they would think of her, and what punishments would lie ahead. She maintains that
today, I still get scared to tell my parents things because I am afraid of their reactions….Every time that I go to make a decision I still think about what would my parents want me to do or what would they say…I struggle sometimes to be who I am, and I feel as if I live for my parents. (Allison’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)

Allison credits her parents, however, with her willingness to consider an individual’s character over his or her appearance. “Growing up I was always taught by my parents that it does not matter what you look like on the outside, it is who a person is on the inside.” She attributes her ability to have many friends and to resist the lure of popularity and participation in cliques to the emphasis that was placed on the value of the individual.

Allison recalls a particular friendship that presented quite a challenge for her and her family.

One thing that I do remember about middle school was that I had an African American guy friend that was like my best friend. There came a point in our friendship where he began to like me. This worried my parents because even though they had taught me to treat everyone equally they never would have approved of me dating him. (Allison’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)

The knowledge of her parents’ disapproval required that Allison continually reassure them that the two of them were just friends and nothing more. The friendship continued but was strained by the fact the young man knew that Allison’s parents did not support a relationship between them that extended past mere friendship. She admits that this
experience has had an effect on her. “I don’t date people outside of my race, but I don’t have a problem with others doing it.”

In her junior year of high school, Allison met the young man that she considered to be her first love. Even though this young man was White, he was indeed different from Allison, and she worried about the reactions of her parents. “He was one of those boys who wore his pants down around his ankles and listened to rap music. This was not the kind of person that I was, and so many people were shocked to see us together.”

Regardless of the differences, from the time they met they seemed to connect. The two remained together for three years. Ending the relationship was difficult for Allison. She had to realize that what had started out well had ended up as a very unhealthy relationship. To save herself from both physical and emotional abuse, Allison had to distance herself. With the guidance and support of family and friends, this experience, however, did have positive outcomes for Allison. As a result, she sees herself as being much more independent and self-reliant.

Outside of her immediate family, Allison’s support system includes her grandmother, two very close friends, and her cohort members. All of these individuals have been a significant influence for Allison. The commonalities among all seem to be their willingness to accept and support Allison for the individual that she is, their ability to listen, their dedication, and their eagerness to help. Allison states that it is the influence of these individuals that have helped her to become a more generous individual.

Finally, Allison recognizes that it is the experiences that she has encountered that have shaped her personality and her beliefs. Each event, each role model, each lesson, good or bad, has made an impression. Allison openly admits that she “would not be as
strong as I am if I did not have people along the way to challenge me or to show me the way. I am grateful for being able to experience all that I have.”

*Amy* (*Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004*)

Amy grew up in Lawrenceville, Georgia, with her parents and two brothers. Her father served as the minister of music for a small church which was two blocks from her home. Religious beliefs and a strong sense of family were ever present in her household.

You could guarantee that Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and any other special events would be hosting five members of my family….As a family, we would have Bible studies about once a week. We had a certain room that we all would sit in, and I remember often dreading having to sit through yet another tedious and monotonous Bible study because I was angry and wanted to finish my television show. At other times, when driving to visit my grandparents or when we would take family vacations, I also remember begging my father, along with my brothers, to play Bible Jeopardy. (*Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004*)

Amy confirms that her family’s values and the religious environment in which she was raised had a significant influence in shaping her into the young woman she is today. She admits, however, that she did not always conduct herself as her parents would have desired. Amy states that “being fully immersed in an environment that was teaching me about the Lord and encouraging me to live a moral life ultimately affected me in a positive way.”

Amy’s descriptions of her parents seem to be at two ends of the continuum as far as their attitudes toward race. She explains that her father “never made one racist
comment around me, and he has always encouraged me to love all people equally as Jesus Christ did.” In contrast, Amy expresses her genuine concern for her mother’s racially derogatory comments. She explains that her mother’s prejudices against Black people have always been evident to her.

She has never taken any physical action against a person of another race or culture, but I have come to realize that words can be just as detrimental. Even if her comments have only been made within our household, how safe is it if affects me and my brothers? (Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)

In the following scenario, Amy clearly depicts how her mother’s racial comments continue to affect her and how she struggles within herself to erase this voice from her head.

It was finally here, spring break, two days off from school, and it could not have come at a more perfect time. Here I was, sitting on a beach towel at the park and reading my Bible. Relieved to finally spend some time with the Lord, I had realized that I had neglected my time with Him over the past week due to a busy schedule and unnecessary excuses that I had managed to create. I had finally gotten situated and started to read when all of a sudden I heard loud voices. These two people were yelling across the park, and I mean yelling. “Girl, my back hurts, I’m tired,” said one while the other replied, “What? Hurry up!” The conversation continued on for about ten minutes. Irritated and tired, suddenly my mother’s voice rang in the back of my head, “Black people, they are so loud, ugh!” I looked up to see who was yelling; sure enough it was two women of African American descent.
These derogatory comments that I have often heard my mother say are words that we often argue over and words that I have to fight from remaining in my head. In defense, I quickly pushed the thought out of my head. “Amy,” I thought to myself, “Stop that. You are just tired and irritated. If it was a White person yelling, you would have felt the same way. Just because it is a Black person does not mean that you have to think that, even if it may be the words of your mother. Besides, who says that people cannot come and yell in the park? It’s the park, for crying out loud. You are supposed to laugh and have fun.” (Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)

This is a battle that Amy continues to fight. She is conscious of her mother’s prejudicial remarks and strives to eliminate them from her own thinking.

In addition to the experiences with her family, Amy presents several school events that she believes were influential in clarifying her personal beliefs. The first of these happened when she was in middle school. She states that this was probably the first time that other people’s beliefs about race became openly apparent to her. “One of my best friends started to date an African American boy, with whom I also happened to be good friends. This, of course, caused some controversy within our circle of friends.” Feelings were mixed. Like Amy, some saw no problems, while others, including Amy’s mother, saw only the problems. This difference in opinion presented yet another struggle, forcing Amy to continue to define her own beliefs.

The second experience occurred when Amy was in high school. This was the time when she began to notice how diverse her environment was. She describes her school population as being 50% Caucasians, 30% African American, and 20% Bosnian.
“Walking down the hall, I would often see people of different races and cultures sharing lockers, holding hands, or laughing together.” Amy was accepting of this; however, she explains that witnessing these behaviors is not the reason she has a sense of respect for others. What did make an impact were the ninth grade cheering tryouts. Amy had tried out and been eliminated. Being upset by the failure, Amy chose to tryout for the dance team. After all, dancing was her favorite part of cheering. Unexpectedly as Amy entered the room the day of tryouts, she realized that she was the minority.

As I looked around the room and observed African Americans, Bosnians, those of Spanish descent, and a few Caucasians, I realized we were the leftovers. I was not good enough to make the cheerleading squad, but these girls did not even have a chance. The only girls that made the cheerleading squad were White, and this began to disturb me. *(Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)*  

Amy remained for tryouts, made the team, and gained many friends over the next four years. While they were all different in many ways, they shared at least one commonality: they loved to dance.

The last experience that Amy offers is one that occurred during her senior year in high school. As a part of a class related to careers in education, Amy had the opportunity to work in a kindergarten classroom at a local elementary school. She soon realized that several children in the class did not speak English. The challenge of helping these children to succeed in learning basic skills helped Amy to understand and appreciate the need for providing all children with a quality education. This is a commitment that Amy has brought with her into the teacher education program.
Amy says that “I am fully aware of the fact that there are people and, sadly, teachers out there that do discriminate and think derogatory comments about people due to the color of their skin.” She vows that for her the prejudices will not win out over what she believes is right. She defines her role as a teacher as providing a quality education for all children regardless of race, culture, or religion.

**Data Collection Procedures**

As a part of EDEC 4960 Special Topics, I required that each participant complete several critical writings based upon predetermined readings and a video. The response papers for each participant included two short (two to three pages) responses as well as one formal critical response paper. I collected and read the writings from each participant in order to determine their awareness of group dominance, stereotypes, racism, and/or oppression communicated through media as well as that addressed in literature; and to examine the participants’ understandings of the role of imagination in developing empathy and compassion for those who are different.

The following sections offer a brief description of each of the writing samples that I examined as a part of the study, a representation of the participants’ responses, and analyses of this data. In order to more clearly distinguish between these components, the descriptions of the experiences along with the representations of data are presented in regular type while the analyses are italicized.

As the instructor for the course, EDEC 4960, I completed all readings along with the students and facilitated all classroom experiences. For this reason, in the sections that follow, I have not only summarized the participants’ responses to each of the experiences
described above but also have included my personal reflections and interpretations as they relate to each of these.

**Cultural Collage**

After participating in the creation of a cultural collage, an activity in which a collage was assembled from pictures of people that were collected from popular magazines, sale papers, travel brochures, newspapers, etc., participants closely examined the collage as a whole to determine the messages conveyed by the visual representation. Before taking part in a group discussion, participants responded to the completed collage in reflective journal entries which critically expressed their personal reactions and feelings, collective implications, and hidden messages. The entry was completed in class as a “quick write” activity, one in which the writer records thoughts, reactions, and feelings without concern for accuracy in spelling, grammar, or style. Following the “quick write” activity, all participants took part in a group discussion. Afterwards, I encouraged participants to make additional comments if they desired. (Photographs of sections of the cultural collage are provided on the following pages.)

The purpose of completing and evaluating a cultural collage was to determine the participants’ awareness of group dominance, stereotypes, or social values that are communicated through media. The primary theme that emerged in the participants’ responses is the concept that the media presents the standard to which many people try to conform. This is clearly evident in the statements by Heather, Allison, and Rebecca as they comment about the standard that is set for society by those who are represented in the collage. Amy’s response supports those of Heather, Allison, and Rebecca, but also
speaks to her emotional reaction to this representation that is unrealistic to most of the population.

Photograph 4.1

Cultural Collage Section 1
Photograph 4.2

Cultural Collage Section 2
Photograph 4.3

Cultural Collage Section 3
From the written responses, the acknowledgment of the representation by the collage of social dominance is almost completely absent. Where all recognized the standard that is represented by the photographs, no one questioned how people of other races would respond to these as the expectations for all of society. Only one participant, Heather, commented in her writing about the presence of White dominance. She did not expand in any way on this idea. There was only the recognition of it.

**Heather:** *(Heather’s Response to Cultural Collage, Warren, 2004)*

The people in our collage are people who are the standard for who we, as Americans, would like to be, or at least what we would like to look like….When I see these pictures, I think about how anyone could live up to these standards. Besides they are fake standards. The people in these ads aren’t perfect. They just have makeup, hair, and wardrobe artists that make them look that way. Most of the people are young, beautiful, skinny, White females or young, handsome, buff, White males. There are some African Americans thrown in there, but even the African Americans are young, beautiful, and skinny.

**Allison:** *(Allison’s Response to Cultural Collage, Warren, 2004)*

The collage that I see seems to show people in real life but at the same time is unrealistic. What I mean by this is that many of these people have been made over to look great: their faces and their bodies. But many times the average American tries to model all of this. These kinds of pictures and “fake beauty” are what cause many to become depressed or hate who they are…. These pictures are not a representation of what real life people are or how they look everyday.
**Rebecca:** (Rebecca’s Response to Cultural Collage, Warren, 2004)

The media shows the trends for the times. The pictures portray an image of America that people look up to.

**Amy:** (Amy’s Response to Cultural Collage, Warren, 2004)

Looking at the collage and thinking about it, I see that this does not represent of our world. It is just a façade. It is just beauty and glamour and glitz. This is not us. It doesn’t represent me. It makes me angry that I am not represented up there.

*It is important for me to note that the cultural collage activity was completed as a whole group class activity with each member of the class being a White middle-class female. At the time that the experience was presented, the participants for the study had not been selected. Therefore, my impressions are based upon both the oral responses from the class, the written responses of the participants, as well as my personal reflections.*

*I remember studying the collage as it hung in the front of the classroom. The “Whiteness” was obvious, almost overpowering. Most of the pictures were of White men, women, and children. The few African Americans who were depicted were light in color, some almost passing for White. In addition, the hairstyles of the women were distinctly White styles. Absent from the collage was anyone who could be easily identified as a race other than White or Black. Other marginalized groups lacked representation: the elderly, the overweight, the disabled. The collage was a fair representation of who and what is readily accepted in our society. The message seems to be that Whiteness, beauty, glamour, fashion, and perfection are the qualities that lead to happiness and ultimately a good life. If individuals, for reason of race, disability, or physical attractiveness, find*
themselves outside the boundaries of the accepted, there seems to be no sense of hope or possibility of moving within the inner sanctum of this select group.

The students in the class seemed open to the fact that the collage was indeed a façade but only from the perspective that the people in the photographs were unrealistically attractive. They were unwilling to admit that the collage was almost completely monocultural. They were sensitive to the absence of the elderly, the overweight, and the unattractive. When asked about the absence of other races, the group first argued that “they” were represented. When asked about the equality of representation, the group turned their focus on the perfection illustrated by the White females commenting that they did not feel that they were represented by the collage either. The atmosphere in the room became quite defensive in nature as if they knew that the lack of representation was legitimate but they just could not voice the admission. Frustrated by my continuous probing, one student finally asked, “Why does everyone have to focus on color? Why can’t all people just be treated the same?”

I remember a series of comments that really disturbed me. I listened as one student plainly stately that the magazines and advertisements where these pictures came from were mainly for White people and that there were magazines published for just Blacks also. She ended by saying, “They have their own magazines and television shows. Why can’t we have ours?” There seemed to be no understanding that newspapers, ads within those papers, and many magazines are published with the intent of serving mainstream America and that the population of mainstream America includes more than just the White race.
I was not prepared for the reaction of the group. I think I really expected these women to look at the predominately White collage and to react in horror that other races and cultures were not fairly represented. Thinking back on the activity, I believe that my expectations were unrealistic and my goals were somewhat off center. This was the second experience following the writing and sharing of autobiographies. I failed to realize that the results of this activity actually provided a means of establishing a baseline for the “White Identity Orientation” (Howard, 1999) for these students.

Howard (1999) describes three distinct “White Identity Orientations,” (p.100) the fundamentalist, the integrationist, and the transformationist. For each orientation, Howard (1999) provides characteristics of thinking, feeling, and acting. The fundamentalists are individuals who are very literal and fixed in their thinking, are focused on a single dimensional truth, and are unaware of the construction of White dominance because of ignorance or denial. They tend to feel that their perspectives are right. They are threatened by difference, often becoming angry and defensive. Responses are commonly ones of fear, hostility, denial, or avoidance. The fundamentalists’ approach to teaching is that all students are the same. Through their practices they perpetuate White dominance and Eurocentric ideas.

The second orientation is the integrationist (1999). Howard describes the integrationists as those who acknowledge diverse perspectives but continue to defend Western superiority. They try to understand the victim’s perspective which many times leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and confusion as they question their roles in White dominance. The integrationists become curious about other cultures and possess a missionary zeal for helping others. They emphasize commonalities and advocate for
special programs for special people. The integrationists are willing to invite “others”
into “their” house.

The third of Howard’s (1999) orientations is the tranformationist. Those of this
orientation are individuals who see legitimacy in diverse perspectives and view truth as
ever changing. Transformationists are self-reflective and have an understanding of
Whiteness that is enhanced by connections with different groups. They are accepting of
their responsibilities to challenge and dismantle White dominance without the feelings of
guilt or shame. They are advocates and social activists.

As I studied these three orientations, it was clear to me that the majority of the
students in the class fell squarely within the fundamentalist orientation. This analysis is
strongly supported by the conversations as well as the participants’ writings. Each
provides evidence of denial and avoidance, a monocultural perspective, and
colorblindness.

Maxine Greene’s Imagination, Community, and the School

The purpose of this section is to summarize the themes that were evident in the
critical response papers of the participants after their reading of “Imagination,
Community, and the School,” from Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the
Arts, and Social Change, by Maxine Greene (1995) and, thereby, provide evidence that
participants not only make a direct connection between imagination and the development
of empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves but also see
strong implications for imaginative thinking for the provision of culturally responsive
education.
The participants were asked to read the chapter entitled, “Imagination, Community, and the School,” from *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, by Maxine Greene (1995). In this chapter, Greene explains the need for utilizing the imagination as teachers work toward meeting the diverse educational needs of the students in today’s classrooms. Greene (1995) encourages teachers to develop a sense of “wide-awakeness,” an awareness of what it is like to live and be in the world. In addition, she explains the role of the arts in the development of empathy for those who are different by enabling both teachers and students to think imaginatively. After reading the chapter, participants completed two to three page critical response papers. The focus was to describe the role of imagination as a means of developing empathy and compassion for those who are different from themselves as well as the implications for imaginative thinking in the provision of culturally responsive education.

There were four central themes that emerged in the participants’ responses: the recognition of imagination as means to overcome the dehumanization of students, the need for imagination in providing for possibilities, the role of imagination in the development of empathy, and the direct implications that imaginative thinking has for the classroom teacher. A discussion of each of these themes follows.

### Theme 1: The Dehumanization of Students

Maxine Greene (1995) begins the chapter, “Imagination, Community, and the School,” by describing the difficulties faced by educators today. As a result of the constant push for success for all, “certain children are conceived of as human resources rather than persons. Much of the time they are spoken of as if they were raw materials to
be shaped to market demand” (Greene, 1995, p. 32). Children are categorized by others, their uses being determined by the constructed category in which they happen to fall. Children considered and labeled as “poor” or “at-risk” are seen as lacking what they require to be a part of mainstream society.

The above description elicited responses from all participants that demonstrate their realizations that children are indeed seen as objects to be manipulated. Amy (Amy’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) expresses her concern that “our society today does not value children as individuals; instead, they are often regarded as human resources.” Rebecca (Rebecca’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) adds to this sense of unease by stating that “every community and school wants to be number one and is less concerned with the happiness and health of children.” Allison suggests that because children have been labeled and categorized as “poor” or “at risk,” the expectations for them to be successful in today’s society are very low. Amy and Rebecca both recognize the fact that children that have been labeled are often neglected or overlooked. In Allison’s (Allison’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) words, “society as it has tried to improve the lives of these children has instead stifled these students’ imaginations and creativeness that is necessary to be successful in life.” In the following statements, Heather seems to summarize the importance of seeing all students as fully human, valuing for each the role of the imagination.

Imagination serves an important role in helping people to become who they are. When you are little, you imagine yourself to be a doctor, teacher, parent, etc. and sometimes this dream plays a major role in the path you take in life. As you grow older, you imagine yourself becoming a better person, striving for self-acceptance
and acceptance of others or even a divine being. Each of these is a way in which imagination may shape who we are or who we become. (Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

When children are denied the encouragement for imaginative thinking by labels and low expectations, they are in a sense being robbed of the many possibilities that life has in store.

Reading the participants’ responses to this portion of Greene’s (1995) work was encouraging. Within their writings is a demonstration of their abilities to question the normative actions of many of today’s schools. These young women seem to realize the importance of valuing children as individuals and the necessity for building upon their strengths as opposed to remediating their deficiencies. The cultivation of imaginative thought is viewed as essential for students if they are to eventually realize the many possibilities that life provides.

Theme 2: The Imagination of Possibilities

A second point in Maxine Greene’s (1995) work which evoked a reaction from all participants was the importance of the arts in encouraging the imagination of possibilities. In her work, Greene (1995) emphasizes the arts as a way “to open perspectives and move the young to look and listen, to overcome the taken-for-granted and the routine” (p. 36). The arts offer opportunities to see a different view of the world around us. “Too rarely do we have poor children in mind when we think of the way imagination enlarges experience. Focusing on remediation for these children, we overlook the ways in which imagination opens windows in the actual, discloses new
perspectives, sheds a kind of light” (p.36). “As the imagination is set free…all sorts of new alternatives for living become clear” (p. 42).

The participants’ responses indicate that they are aware of the importance of imagination in one’s ability to see possibilities for what can be. Their statements indicate that this role is equally important for teachers as it is for children. In the following Heather emphasizes the necessity for educators to employ the imagination.

As education changes it is important to imagine how things could be as opposed to how they are now. We know that some of the practices occurring in schools today are not the most appropriate practices, so we must imagine what we want to change and then bring it to life. *(Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)*

In addition, Heather *(Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)* explains that “if a child is in a harsh circumstance, without imagination he or she would not have much of an escape or much hope at all.”

Allison, too, recognizes the need for children to see possibilities. “Allowing them to use their creativity and imagination throughout the day encourages them to reach beyond their circumstances and rise to a new level of learning” *(Allison’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)*. She sees the teacher’s role as one of providing opportunities for children to engage in imaginative thinking. “Teachers must use creative ways in their classrooms to motivate these children and see beyond their limitations. Using the arts, such as music, dance, art, and storytelling, is a good way to help ‘at risk’ students to perform better” *(Allison’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)*.
Amy and Rebecca also stress the role of the arts to enhance one’s ability to grasp new ideas. Amy (Amy’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) states that “music, poetry, and dance can open one’s imagination…. Using imagination can help children see glimpses of possibility.” Rebecca stresses that teachers and children are learning continuously by being in the world. She states that there are “many ways to actively use the imagination to renew one’s consciousness of possibilities” (Rebecca’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

The responses clearly show that the participants see a purpose for the imagination in education. Their comments stress the importance of imaginative thought for both the students and the teachers. The arts are seen as a means of encouraging the imagination as well as a way of facilitating learning. There is the realization that imagination leads to the ability to see possibilities. It is important that Heather acknowledges imagination as an avenue that leads toward change. If educators cannot imagine possibilities for what can be, how can change in schools and society occur? Equally importance is Allison’s and Rebecca’s realization that children need to be able to imagine possibilities for themselves and the future.

A third concept found in Greene’s work is an emphasis on the arts as a means of encouraging the development of empathy. Greene (1995) asks the reader to consider the following questions:

Is it not the imagination that allows us to encounter the other as disclosed through the image of that other’s face? And is this face not only that of the hurricane survivor, of the Somalian child, or the homeless woman sitting on the corner but
also of the silent or the fidgety or the hopeless child in the classroom, be that child girt or boy? (p.37).

She suggests that by offering experiences in the arts and storytelling, teachers can continue to make personal connections with the students whom they teach. The imagination can cross many boundaries including those of race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, and culture.

It is in response to the ideas presented above that a third theme, the role of the imagination in the development of empathy, emerged in the responses of the participants. In the following statement, Heather emphasizes the importance that the imagination holds in the development of empathy.

Something else that imagination allows people to do is empathize with others. If you cannot imagine yourself in someone else’s shoes, there is no way you will be able to understand what they are going through. Using your imagination can provide a window into someone else’s life and encourage a sense of empathy in the person who is doing the imagining. (Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Allison (Allison’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) suggests that teachers require imagination in order “to see their students as complete human beings, not just as objects sitting in their classrooms.” When the teacher is able to do this, “the teacher interacts with the children with a new outlook of sympathy, tolerance, friendship, love, and charity.” Rebecca acknowledges that it is the responsibility of the teacher to get to know her students. “Teachers need to take the time to listen to children to look at their
work to fully understand who they are” (Rebecca’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Amy also sees the significance of imagination in understanding others and developing a sense of empathy for them.

It is the imagination that allows us to understand where a person is coming from and grants us empathy. It is this ability to imagine that allows us to cope with everyday situations. For example, using our imagination to understand why someone might commit suicide or lash out at us helps us to cope with reality. It allows us to imagine what it would be like to be that person and to see things from his or her point of view. (Amy’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Amy adds that disagreement can develop when an attempt is not made to understand those who are different from us. “Many people do not use their imaginations and end up looking at people as if they were invisible. This is especially true of people of different races or cultures. Not trying to understand the points of view of others can create controversy” (Amy’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004).

The participants make a clear connection between imagination and the development of empathy for others. All view imagination as essential if teachers are to understand the motivations and actions of others and to respect children by viewing them as human beings with real feelings, strengths, and unique ideas.

Theme 4: Implications for the Classroom Teacher

In “Imagination, Community, and the School,” Greene (1995) charges teachers with the responsibility to utilize their own imaginations as well as to engage the imaginations of their students. She presents this as a requirement not only for the
planning and implementation of learning experiences but also for the development of community. The following quote seems to provide a summary of the expectations for classroom teachers.

As teachers, we cannot predict the common world that may be in the making; nor can we finally justify one kind of community more than another. We can bring warmth into the places where young persons come together, however; we can bring in the dialogues and laughter that threaten monologues and rigidity. And surely we can affirm and reaffirm the principles that center around belief in justice and freedom and respect for human rights, since without these, we cannot even call for the decency of welcoming and inclusion for everyone, no matter how at risk. (Greene, 1995, p.43)

It is from this charge that the focus of the fourth theme, the direct implications that imaginative thinking has for the classroom teacher, seems to have evolved.

Heather indicates that it is her belief that imagination is essential for classroom teachers. She states that “imagination is very important not only to children but should be to adults as well, especially to the teachers of the world. Without imagination we would never be able to create appropriate curriculum and assessments. We would also not be as culturally aware or as aware of individual children and their situations” (Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) Rebecca (Rebecca’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) adds to this by pointing out that “teachers have the expectation that children will develop habits that promote an initiative for learning as well as critical and reflective thinking. Teachers who are successful challenge active learners by encouraging the telling of stories and the posing of questions.” Amy agrees with Rebecca
and states that accomplishing this “requires imagination.” Allison (Allison’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) suggests that “teachers must use imaginative strategies in their classrooms to motivate children.”

The teacher’s responsibility does not end with providing quality experiences that require imagination, however. It includes the creation of a community of learners where imagination is welcomed. Amy explains this in the following:

In order to have an effective community, those involved must realize what they want and work together to attain the goal. Being able to imagine what it would be like to be that person and see things from his or her point of view is essential. Simply having projects to complete as a community is meaningless unless there are the characteristics of love, self-control, friendship, charity, and sympathy. As teachers, we must find ways to connect with our students through imagination. Reading stories, allowing children to tell their own stories, constructing works of art, or dancing are ways that can help. Basically this begins in the classroom. Teachers need to create a warm environment where imagination is welcomed. Hopefully by doing this, students will open up and learn to have respect and love for one another. This can start in the classroom and hopefully have an impact on the outside community. (Amy’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Heather agrees with Amy’s comments. In the following, she stresses the role that the imagination plays in the creation of a community for learners:

If teachers do not possess imagination, then they may have the tendency to judge one or more of their students based upon their race, ethnicity, or any other characteristic that is different from themselves. However, if the teacher is able to
imagine herself as being the student she is judging, the teacher would be able to see just how similar the student is to her. Every human being, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, etc. has feelings and we all have the ability to be hurt or loved and to hurt or love someone else. In this way, imagination is the key to community. (Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Allison, too, recognizes the need to develop a strong sense of community if students are to be as successful as possible. It is her goal to create a “caring, thoughtful place where all children can find the joy of learning. I do not want children to feel as if they have been labeled. I want them to feel that they can reach their goals and dreams no matter their background” (Allison’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004).

Imagination is essential to the development of a community for learners that is democratic in nature. Amy (Amy’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) suggests that “imagination should be available to everyone. If a person is not allowed to use his or her imagination then his or her ability to contribute to the community is being denied.” When allowed, Rebecca (Rebecca’s Response to Greene’s Writing, Warren, 2004) states that “children can form a community of dreamers with powerful imaginations.”

The responses of the participants indicate that the teacher has a dual responsibility to the students in their classrooms: first, to provide appropriate experiences that enable students to develop the habits of mind needed for critical learning and second, to provide an environment where all are respected and accepted.
“Imagination, Community, and the School,” from Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change, by Maxine Greene (1995) was the first reading that was assigned to me as I applied for entrance into the Curriculum Studies Program at Georgia Southern University. I received a copy of the chapter by mail in advance of completing the required writing sample. I remember reading the text several times before making any notes as to the content. The more familiar I became with the content the more connections I was able to make between it and who I am as an individual who cares about the education of young children and as a faculty member in the Early Childhood and Middle Grades Department at Georgia College & State University.

Reading the chapter reaffirmed many of my beliefs but also introduced me to ideas that I had never considered. I recognized quickly the validity in two initial points that Greene (1995) makes. First, children are oftentimes viewed as a resource to be used to meet the demands of society. They are shaped in ways that others believe necessary. Second, children are labeled by their deficits. Children who are “poor” or “at-risk” are viewed as lacking what they need to fit within the mainstream of society. They are in need of repair. Sadly, I have witnessed both of these throughout my educational experience, both as a teacher and as a student.

In addition, I could strongly relate to Greene’s call for utilizing the arts as a means of activating the imagination of children, therefore allowing them to consider other perspectives and envision possibilities. This idea fit well with what I had learned in my studies of the schools for young children in Reggio Emilia, Italy. While on a study tour to Reggio Emila, I observed the works of children who were engaged daily in
exploration of their world through the arts. Here children were presented with opportunities to dance, to sculpt, to paint, to build, to role play, to experiment. They were encouraged constantly to question and to rethink the world around them. I had seen children’s imaginations at work and the possibilities that resulted.

Where I understood complexity of the role of the imagination for children, what I had not considered was the magnitude of the role that the teacher’s imagination must play. The following statement by Greene (1995) was truly thought provoking to me:

> Imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively or of releasing students to encounter works of literature and other forms of art are probably also unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies. If it is the case that imagination feeds one’s capacity to feel one’s way into another’s vantage point, these teachers may also be lacking in empathy. (p. 36-37)

Until reading this I had not thought of role that the imagination plays in the development of empathy and its far reaching implications for the establishment a sense of community. Ultimately this has been a guiding force throughout my research process.

Because of the impact of this particular text on me as a researcher, I was specifically interested to learn what the participants would glean from their readings. I was also very cautious not to influence the students prior to their readings of the text. I wanted each of them to experience the text without the imposition of my thoughts. Surprisingly, however, the themes found in the participants’ responses were very similar to the topics that had initially impressed me. The participants focused on the
dehumanization of children, the need to activate the imaginations of children, the role of
the imagination in the development of empathy, and finally the implications that
imaginative thinking has for the classroom teacher.

After written responses were completed, a class discussion was held. This was a
challenging time for me in that I wanted to hear their reactions and thoughts without
imposing my reflections. As I listened, I heard how they related these topics to their own
classroom experiences. They, too, had been exposed to the labeling of students and the
limiting forms of remediation. They had been required to teach the scripted lessons in
which the expectations are the same for all children. I, also, heard the expressed need for
what they had not experienced: the use of the arts to encourage imaginative thinking, the
approval for children to ask questions, the respect for children and their ideas, and the
need for teachers to develop empathy for their students and their families. Where as the
participants communicated that all of these concepts were important, they seemed to be
unsure of how to affect any substantive amount of change. The reading seemed to
increase their awareness of the imagination and its role in education but did not offer
them the solutions that they wanted. As preservice teachers, they, too, fall victim to the
restraints of time and accountability to standards.

Vivian Gussin Paley’s *White Teacher*

As a third response, the participants were required to read *White Teacher*, by
Vivian Gussin Paley (2002). In this text, Paley (2002) describes her experiences as a
White teacher. She details how she works with both parents and children to personally
confront and address the variety of differences found among the students in her class. The
book was assigned in two sections (preface – chapter 12, chapter 13 – epilogue) and
discussed as a group during seminar sessions. Critical response papers were due from each participant prior to discussions. The theme for the papers was to provide a description of the role of imagination in the development of understanding for students, their actions and motivations; an examination of the role of imagination in developing empathy and compassion for students in the classroom who are different; and an exploration of relationships between the text and personal experiences.

This section presents themes that are evident in the participants’ responses to their readings of *White Teacher* (Paley, 2002). These responses offer documentation that the participants see definite connections between the imagination and the development of an understanding for students’ actions and motivations, realize a need for imagination in developing empathy and compassion for students in the classroom who are different from themselves, and see relationships between the text and their personal experiences. Analyzing the responses revealed three overarching themes: first, the importance of the development of empathy for both students and families; second, the need to address difficult topics such as race, religion, and culture; and third, the ability to imagine possibilities as a result of reading a text.

**Theme 1: The Development of Empathy**

In *White Teacher*, Vivian Paley (2002) describes numerous scenarios which illustrate her journey in developing empathy and compassion for the children in her classroom and their families. In the following quote, Paley (2002) summarizes the difficulties that teachers face as they strive to meet this goal:

The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, is valued, and can be talked
about. It is not easy, because we are influenced by the fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us. (p.xx)

The first theme found in the participants’ responses to *White Teacher* is centered on the responsibility of developing empathy for those who are different from themselves.

The responses indicate that the development of empathy is a process that must be negotiated by individuals. Heather (Warren, L., 2004, *Heather’s Response to Paley’s Writing*) comments that “This book is about a teacher’s journey toward self-improvement and the discoveries along the way.” The first step that is suggested is to recognize prejudices within one’s self.

Paley’s (2002) classes taught her that she had subconscious prejudices that she didn’t even realize until a parent, another teacher, and one of her children in her class brought it up….Something that helped her with this realization was that she started reminiscing about her childhood and how she was different from others in school….You can tell by reading this book that Paley (2002) did a lot of reflecting on herself as a teacher, and I realize that this is what we are supposed to be doing as student teachers. (*Heather’s Response to Paley’s Writing,* Warren, 2004)

Amy also remarks about Paley’s (2002) ability to identify her prejudices, to reflect upon them, and to make changes as a result. She makes the following statement:

I find it encouraging that Sonia pointed out to Paley (2002) that what she was saying was wrong. I find more encouraging, however, that she had the strength to notice that using the phrase, ‘the Black girls, kept me from seeing them always as
individuals.’ Once this was pointed out Paley (2002), she realized that each child was an individual, an individual that needed to be loved and had different needs to be met. (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

In addition, Amy explains that Paley’s (2002) suggestion of suppressed or hidden prejudices was threatening to her, “but I thought that maybe she had a point and instantly began evaluating the way I treat my children” (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004).

Rebecca (Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004) suggests that “all teachers need to consider how they feel about confronting racial situations; how they handle dealing with other races, religions, and cultures; and whether or not they respect each child for their individuality and not their color.” In addition, she states that “teachers have to carefully consider problems and situations in a child’s life to fully understand why he or she behaves in the manner that he or she does….This makes us better teachers and allows us to become more empathetic and understanding of each child.”

The second step that is suggested in the participants’ responses for developing empathy is the need not only to recognize the differences in children but also to identify ways that as the teachers of these children we are different. Differences are not limited to ones of race or culture. They extend much further. It is the recognition of our own differences that ultimately allows us to see the world through the eyes of the other.

Heather explains that she was impressed by the emphasis that Paley (2002) placed on differences, not just differences in race, but all differences.

She remembered being a Jew in not only a Gentile school but also in a primarily Gentile nation. Paley (2002) talks about certain students that she’s had in her
classes: an Asian child who didn’t want to share anything about herself or her culture at first, a child who did not know how to pretend or even play, and a violent child who just needed a little tender loving care to change. All of these stories included children that were just a little different from the rest and how Paley (2002) chose to deal with each child. (Heather’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Because of the many differences that exist, teachers must find ways to understand the children and the families with whom they work.

Understanding one’s self is essential to understanding others. Rebecca explains the importance of this in the following statement:

Every teacher must find an example of how they are different from the rest of the world. Often we feel mainstreamed, but everyone has a different perspective or value that makes him or her different from everyone else. If we can all find just one thing, it will help us to relate to the children who are considered a minority in our classrooms. (Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Rebecca (Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004) states that Paley (2002) “often has to find ways to identify with the Black children in her class.” She provides an example of how Paley (2002) identifies a difference of her own that assists in developing empathy for her students. “She considers her faith to be the contributing factor in making her an outcast or different from the rest of society….Vivian is Jewish and is offended when people make comments about her religion. She is very sensitive to being a minority in the school system” (Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)
Amy agrees with Rebecca suggesting that every teacher should identify a
difference within herself that can help her to confront unconscious prejudices. Amy
reacts to Paley’s (2002) method of challenging her own prejudices by asking herself a
question similar to the following: How I would feel if the actions or comments were
aimed at me as a Jew? Amy confirms this in the following statement:

It is wise for Paley (2002) to use the ‘Jewish question’ when trying to put herself
in the place of others. I think everyone should have such a question that will place
her in someone else’s shoes. By doing this, she will begin to understand how that
person may feel. (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

The third step in empathy development that was described in the responses of the
participants involves getting to know the children and their families. From the comments,
it is evident that the participants see this step as essential. Taking the time to learn about
the personalities and cultures of the children and their families communicates a sense of
caring and respect that can otherwise be lost.

Allison acknowledges the importance of getting to know children as individuals
in the following passage:

Mrs. Paley (2002) stood back most of the time and observed how the students
played together, and she intervened only when she thought that the students were
being mean. By letting the students try to work out their own problems and deal
with real life situations, Mrs. Paley got to know her students better. She could
begin to see how her students are affected by their home lives….I think that it is
very important that we let our students act out real life situations that they deal
with at home….Through this the teacher can begin to see what is going on inside of her students’ heads. (*Allison’s Response to Paley’s Writing*, Warren, 2004)

To this, Allison adds comments which stress the necessity for involving parents in the education of their children.

Making sure that the parents are involved in the classroom is another one of the ideas that I like from this book. Most of the time if Mrs. Paley (2002) is having a problem with a student, she will call his or her parents in for a conference. Not only does she call them in to talk about their child, but also she will ask them what they think that she can do to help their child. If parents feel as if they can talk to the teacher and that she cares for their children, they are more willing to help when a problem arises. I will make sure that in my classroom I include parents and have their input on how they think I can best work with their children. (*Allison’s Response to Paley’s Writing*, Warren, 2004)

Amy, too, recognizes the role that building relationships with parents plays in the process of developing empathy for children. In her paper, Amy documents a situation with a child in Paley’s (2002) classroom in which the five year old child, Claire, could not understand what it meant to pretend. Paley worked over a long period of time with the parents to increase her own understanding for the child’s lack of imagination. In response to this scenario, Amy writes:

Making connections with parents and trying to find out more about their lives is a very important to building relationships. Paley’s (2002) persistence with Claire is truly encouraging. In the end, Claire has a breakthrough and slowly starts to learn
how to pretend and to express herself in the classroom. (Amy's Response to Paley's Writing, Warren, 2004)

The significance of understanding children and their families is reflected in Rebecca’s response to Paley’s experiences as well. She, too, describes classroom events that made a strong impression on her. This incident involved a five year old girl, Barbara, who was Jewish. Barbara formed a Jewish club and wanted all of the children to be like her. She excluded a Black child, Ellen, telling her that if you were Black then you could not be Jewish. Mrs. Paley found herself working to find a way to help all of the children in her classroom to be confident in whom they were as individuals and to accept the difference of others. Rebecca describes how the problem was resolved in the following description:

Mrs. Paley (2002) had Ellen’s mother to select Ellen’s favorite Sunday school song. The next day Mrs. Paley shared a Jewish song that Barbara knew, explaining to the children that Barbara was Jewish. Mrs. Paley then shared Ellen’s song explaining that she was Methodist and had learned this song in her Sunday school. Mrs. Paley had other parents to identify a favorite song and to write stories about their families. The students would pick a family each day and sit around the piano singing different songs. This was a way to bring in the home lives of children and to expose them to different cultures and religions. (Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Amy summarizes the importance of empathy and its role in the classroom well in her statement:
“The children want to know that they are safe and loved in the classroom. They want to know that their opinions, knowledge, and efforts are going to be recognized and matter to us as teachers. Most importantly, they have a lot to teach us about themselves, life, and love if we take time to listen” (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004).

The responses of all participants indicate their understanding of the importance of empathy in the classroom. They see the development of empathy as a process. It is not something that happens instantaneously. The steps that were indicated in the process were: 1) to recognize personal prejudices by examining beliefs about race and culture, 2) to recognize the differences in children realizing that these compass more than race or culture, and 3) to get to know the personalities and cultures of children and their families. The participants stress that in order to do what is best for the children in the classroom they must know these children and their families well; they must show that they value and respect the children as individuals.

Theme 2: Addressing Race, Religion, and Culture

The second theme found within the responses of the participants was the need to address difficult topics such as race, religion, and culture. Paley’s (2002) text presents a narrative of her personal experiences in the classroom as she learned over time to talk about difficult topics with children, families, and colleagues. In the following quote, Paley (2002) describes her own inclination to avoid uncomfortable topics:

The narrative in the book describes my experiences with Black children. In the beginning it was more comfortable to pretend the Black child was White. Having perceived this, I then saw it was my inclination to avoid talking about other
differences as well. Stuttering, obesity, shyness, divorced parents—the list was long. My awkwardness with Black children was not a singular phenomenon. It uncovered a serious flaw in my relationship with all children.

The participants’ responses indicate that they can relate to Paley’s (2002) fear of approaching difficult topics. However, they do respect Paley for her continuing efforts and recognize the need to confront these issues, as uncomfortable as it may be at first. In addition, they seem to understand that the first step in starting these conversations is to develop open, respectful relationships with children and their families.

Allison and Amy both comment about the element of fear involved in addressing difficult topics, specifically race and religion, with parents. Amy (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004) states: “Initially her fear and pride hindered her from addressing these issues. I can easily relate to and understand this initial response.” In the following, Allison also relates to this reluctance to approach parents directly:

One thing that I liked was when Mrs. Paley (2002) talked about when she had just started teaching and how she was very nervous to say things in the way that she would now. She was nervous that if she talked about religion or race that she would get into trouble. I think that this is the problem that some have today when they start to teach. Teachers are so afraid that if they say the wrong things, they will get into trouble. I feel, however, that teachers need to be up front with the children and their parents. (Allison’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Confronting topics such as race and religion is difficult and uncomfortable. It will only get easier when children are valued and respected for their differences. This reflected in the fact that Amy (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004) refers
to the quote by Paley (2002), “what you value, you talk about” (p.131). Amy continues by saying, “this really had an impact on me. I feel the quote is so true. Whatever is important to you is what you are to talk about. This makes complete sense to me.”

Sometimes it is the actions of another that opens one’s eyes or offers a sense of possibility. Rebecca explains that for Paley (2002) this was a student teacher named Janet.

Janet was a Black student teacher placed in Mrs. Paley’s classroom. She helped Mrs. Paley to feel more comfortable discussing touchy subjects and to become aware that situations often get better if you address them with the class. Janet led the children as they performed a skit about Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. She was also successful in dealing with a little boy who stuttered. Janet had personal experiences with both situations and, therefore, felt qualified to handle both. By doing so, Janet opened Mrs. Paley’s eyes to the fact that she could discuss controversial topics in the classroom….Mrs. Paley learned to stop ignoring hard to talk about topics and to actually open discussions for the class.

(Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

Allison (Allison’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004) adds: “I think that it is admirable that Mrs. Paley is open-minded about so many situations and that she is not afraid to talk with her students about the color of their skin, their religion, etc. We need more teachers who are not afraid of these issues to teach our children.”

By getting to know and understand her children and their parents, Paley (2002) was able to create a classroom community that was safe and supportive for all her students. Heather reinforces the importance of this in the following statements:
As teachers, we have to make sure that we create a safe environment for every one of our students, especially those who do not feel safe anywhere else….Paley (2002) was able to create an environment that encouraged creativity and social skills. No child was ever pushed to do something that he or she was not ready to do. Paley was able to talk to parents about things that made them uncomfortable and explain her rationale calmly and respectfully….Once she was able to talk about things that made her uncomfortable, she made her classroom a very safe environment for her students. Besides all of this, she learned from her students, their parents, and other teachers to make herself a better teacher, and I would say a better person as well. I can only hope that I will become a teacher as effective and caring as Paley. *(Heather’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)*

*Confronting the topics of race, religion, and culture was a topic with which all participants had grappled. They saw the necessity to do so, but they could also relate to the fear involved. Before issues of this magnitude can be addressed openly, there must be an environment that is respectful, open, and honest. This is not possible without the development of empathy and compassion for others.*

*Theme 3: Imagining Possibilities*

The third theme that is evident within the responses of the participants is the ability to imagine possibilities as a result of reading a text. Three of the participants commented that by reading *White Teacher* (Paley, 2002) they became more aware of possibilities that they had never considered.

Allison emphasizes the impact that the reading of *White Teacher* had on her as a preservice teacher. She states:
I have really enjoyed reading this book. It was an opportunity that opened my
eyes to some things that I have never thought about before. I think that it is an
excellent book for upcoming preservice teachers and veteran teachers. It will
really get them to think about different issues that are relevant to society.


Paley’s (2002) text offered Heather a sense of renewed possibilities. Her
description is as follows:

Sometimes I wonder how I am going to be able to juggle everything that I have to
do as a teacher. I mean, we have to teach the children, not only the academics but
also behaviors and values that are required to get along in society today. We have
to deal with angry parents and parents that just do not understand. Also, we have
to make sure that we create a safe environment for every one of our students.
There is also the paperwork, and, on top of all of that, we always have to look for
ways that we can become better teachers. It seems like so much, sometimes, too
much. However, while reading this book I realized that it is possible. (*Heather’s
Response to Paley’s Writing*, Warren, 2004)

For Amy, Paley’s (2002) autobiographical text provides different perspectives and
new ideas for ways to engage children in the classroom. Amy says:

Overall, Paley (2002) learned a lot about how to deal with issues surrounding
behavior in the classroom, and I think that I have gained a lot of insight about
different approaches that can be taken to open children up more in their
classroom. I particularly like the way that she stresses the importance of play and
imagination in her classroom. Paley’s persistence is encouraging. (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004)

These responses indicate the participants’ ability to engage in narrative imagination. Even though the participants at times disagree with Paley’s methods, there is evidence of openness to others who hold beliefs that are different and new as well as evidence of acceptance and understanding of others who conduct themselves differently. Overall, this is a demonstration of empathy and compassion.

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In the 1986, I began a teaching position at Peabody Child and Family Development Center, the laboratory school at Georgia College (now Georgia College & State University). Kathryn, the director of the center, was someone for whom I had a great sense of respect. I considered her to be both my mentor and my friend. I remember seeing Vivian Paley’s (1979) book, White Teacher, on the table in her office one afternoon. I picked the book up to browse. Kathryn told me a bit about the text, continuing the conversation by sharing with me information about the importance of respecting other cultures, specifically as this information related to the classroom teacher. She recommended that I take the book to read. I did take the book, all the time wondering why Kathryn thought I needed to read this book. Did she think that I was not sensitive to others? Did she think I was not a good teacher? Did she think that I was not able to meet the needs of the children in my classroom? Did she question my abilities to be a role model for the college students who were completing their practicum experiences under my guidance? I read mainly to satisfy my curiosity.
As I read the book for the first time, I viewed it as individual scenarios that offered strategies for handling misbehavior as well as ideas for working with parents to solve school related problems. I understood from the text that it is the teacher’s responsibility to get to know the children in her class, to provide a supportive environment for learning, and to involve families in the education of their children. I did not see the connections between the scenarios nor did I understand the underlying messages. I did not see the “big picture.” I only saw the individual pieces. I felt confident, however, that I did care about all my children. I treated them all the same. I saw no difference. They were all children. I felt good about what I was doing as a teacher.

Years passed before I read White Teacher (Paley, 2002) for a second time. In the fall of 2003, I was presented with the opportunity to reread the text. It was a required text for a doctoral class. I remember thinking that since I had read the book before that I would only need a quick review. Needless to say, I was wrong. Immediately as I started to read, I realized the differences. I saw the text through a new lens. I realized how my years of teaching experience, my research on the schools of Reggio Emilia, and my doctoral studies had changed my perspective. I was much more focused on treating children as individuals, valuing their differences, focusing on their strengths rather than weaknesses, and involving families in respectful ways. The text was no longer a set of strategies; it was a story of understanding differences.

Soon I began to design this research study. As I considered my questions surrounding the study, I chose to have the participants read White Teacher. This choice required a third reading of the text. I was not surprised that as I reread the book I saw
still a different perspective than before. I continued to focus on the treatment of
differences but also was able to make very strong connections between the text and the
need for empathy and compassion for others. In addition, I came to see Paley’s story as
her personal journey. I realized that the narrative described the experiences that played a
significant role in Paley’s growth in understanding racial identity. As I read, I could
directly relate my new understandings to Martha Nussbaum’s (1997) work that
encourages the development of empathy and compassion and to Gary Howard’s (1999)
work on White identity orientations.

Through my third reading of the White Teacher, I saw a journey of a woman, a
woman to whom I could relate. I had traveled along many of the same paths, guided by
similar yet different experiences. I found that I could personally relate to this woman and
to her struggles. When I considered my reactions to this reading and compared them to
the responses of the participants, I noticed that they had not communicated these
personal connections to the text. Their reactions seemed to reflect the characteristics of
those from my second reading with some similarities to my first. The responses of the
participants indicated their understanding for the importance of developing empathy, the
need for addressing difficult issues of difference, and the reality of seeing possibilities as
a result of experiencing the text. What seemed to be missing, however, was the true
connection to Paley. When considering our reactions to first readings, these participants
seemed to be further along than I. What was the difference?

After considering this question, I came to the conclusion that experience or the
lack thereof has a significant role. First, I thought about the experiences and
opportunities that had been provided for all participants as a part of required course
work. Several courses that contain assignments that I believe have the potential to raise awareness and sensitivity to racial and cultural differences stood out above the others. The courses that seemed to be instrumental were EDIS 3414 Language and Culture, EDRD 3215 Teaching Reading Through Children's Literature, and EDEC 3214 Integrating the Early Childhood Curriculum. Each of these courses, in its own way, focuses on the child as a unique and valuable being. They stress the importance of understanding the child, the family, and the community. These courses seem to have laid the foundation for interpreting and understanding the Paley (2002) text. When I changed my perspective for examining the participants’ responses, I could easily see the difference in their levels of preparation and in my own at the time of the first encounter.

**Martin Ritt’s Conrack**

As a fourth experience, participants watched the video Conrack, directed by Martin Ritt (1985). The movie is based on the book, The Water is Wide, by Pat Conroy (2002). The video depicts the true story of a liberal White teacher who is hired as a substitute for a class of poor Black children on an island off the coast of South Carolina. The story describes the experiences of one teacher as he makes use of all available resources to educate the class of illiterate, impoverished children. Despite the challenges presented by the administration, Conrack plans and implements non-traditional lessons with often unorthodox strategies. During his short tenure at the school, Conrack continues to seek ways to best educate his students. After viewing the movie, participants completed a six to seven page critical response paper. Participants were instructed to focus on their understanding and application of narrative imagination as it relates to the text; explain the importance of understanding and respecting the unique culture
represented by a group of students in addition to addressing the individual needs of students; explore the motivation and actions of the Conrack, administrators, and the students; and examine relationships between the text and personal experience.

This section discusses the four major themes that emerged from the participant’s responses to the video Conrack (Ritt, 1985). These include the importance of respecting and valuing students, the significance of family and community support, the value of an experiential curriculum that is focused on the needs and abilities of the students, and the need to persevere in order to affect change. Through the representation of these themes, I have explored how these responses demonstrate the participants’ abilities to apply the concepts of narrative imagination as it relates to the text; document their beliefs in the importance of understanding and respecting culture while addressing the individual needs of students; and explore their understandings of the motivations and actions of Conrack, administrators, and the students. As a part of the final analysis of these responses, I address the lack of recognition of the existence of White power and privilege.

Theme 1: Respecting and Valuing Students

The first theme that emerged in the participants’ responses was the recognition of the importance of respecting and valuing students as individuals. All of the participants acknowledged the benefits to the students when they believed that they are respected and valued by their teacher. The participants also recognized the negative affects of the disrespect and humiliation that were experienced by the students. Within the responses was evidence of an influence from the reading of Maxine Greene’s (1995) “Imagination, Community, and the School,” from Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change.
One of the first scenes in the movie, *Conrack*, was that of Pat Conroy, a White male teacher, arriving on an island off the coast of South Carolina where the vast majority of the population is represented by Black men, women, and children. One of his first encounters is with an old woman who appears to be the island midwife. She considers all of the island children hers, justifying this by the simple fact that she brought them into the world. Allison comments about this scene:

She told Conroy at the beginning of the movie that ‘treat them right, and they will do good for you.’ This is such a true statement. If you treat children as you want to be treated then they will do as you ask. This was not a problem for Conroy because he believed in his students….Conroy was a teacher that never looked at his students as being less than he was. I feel that it is important that we make sure that our students know that we accept them for who they are no matter what the differences….This movie made me see that if you have a passion for teaching and believe that no matter what color skin or where your children come from, they can learn. (*Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

Amy (*Amy’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004) supports Allison in the way that Conroy treated others around him. “He regarded himself as the students’ teacher at all times but did not regard himself as being better than the others around him….When he first arrived on the island, he respected the people around him.”

Rebecca takes Allison’s and Amy’s comments further by making a broader connection as she refers to societal and professional implications.

Children need to be viewed as equals, but often they are not. The classrooms are more diverse in some areas than in others. In metropolitan cities there are more
business opportunities which provide more diverse jobs. People move from around the world to work these jobs, and their children attend these schools. Sometimes these children are viewed as different. Some teachers believe these students are not as smart or capable of doing the same quality of work as the others. This is where diversity becomes an issue. It is difficult to understand each ethnicity and culture. It is, however, important that we as teachers try to understand these children and provide the best education possible. We should not stereotype or label children, as hard as that might be….Every child is unique. They come from different cultures, ethnic groups, and families. As teachers, we must encourage each child to excel and form goals that can be met by all.

(Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

This commitment by the participants to respecting children as individuals with unique strengths and differences had a strong impact on their views of the actions of Mrs. Scott, the Black principal, and Mr. Skeffington, the White superintendent. Each of these people in his or her own way humiliated and belittled the students. The actions of these two characters prompted strong reactions by the participants. Within these responses is evidence of the influence of reading Greene’s (1995) work.

Amy describes her opinions of Mrs. Scott and Mr. Skeffington and how their actions and attitudes evoked anger within her.

Throughout the movie, there were several characters with whom Conrack interacted. The first character that I had a strong opinion about was the principal, Mrs. Scott. Mrs. Scott came off as very authoritative. She did not really approve of Conrack’s decisions and interactions with the children….I had very little
respect for her during the whole movie and found myself very angry with her. The root of my anger came from her attitude. When she first enters the room with the children, she lets them know that they are slow and have to work hard to barely get by. I agree that the students should work hard, but I do not agree with telling the students that they are slow. She thinks the students need discipline at all times and demands respect from them. However, the students do not have any respect for her throughout the movie. There are times when they seem to fear her, but I noticed no respect.

Another character that was introduced in the movie was Mr. Skeffington. I feel that he was a very stern and straight to the point kind of man….I did not like how he viewed the students. His view, I feel was different from Mrs. Scott’s. Mrs. Scott viewed the students as incapable and slow. Mr. Skeffington did not view them as slow but viewed them as lower than him. His little incident of using “milking the rat” as a technique of control was very disturbing. I do not think that you should ever hurt a child, especially the way he did….There were times when he would come right into Conrack’s home or classroom and take over….To me, Mr. Skeffington was very narrow-minded and unloving. (Amy’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

As Allison (Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004) considers the actions of Mrs. Scott and Mr. Skeffington, she states: “I felt as if the students were not thought of as humans. They were just bodies that had to be dealt with and disciplined every day. This was such a hard thing to see and hear. They are children who have goals,
hopes, and dreams.” To this comment Allison adds a description of the effects that she feels that this treatment has on the students:

I feel that the students looked down on themselves so much because they never had anyone in their lives that believed in them. If you look at the principal and the superintendent, they provide little or no motivation for the students. If students don’t have a positive atmosphere and people who think that they can be better than what they are and help them to accomplish their goals, then why would they want to try to become someone other than what they have been told that they are….Conroy shows respect for the students. He does not treat them as if they were nothing. He treats them like they are humans who have been put in this world for a reason. (Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

Heather also remarks about the ill treatment of the children by the principal and the superintendent. Because of the way these two individuals dealt with children, they were unsure of Conroy’s expectations and intentions. She states:

The students fought Conroy every step of the way, as if they didn’t want to learn anything or as if they could get away with anything that they wanted. When they found out that he was not going to beat them or put them down as Mrs. Scott did, them pushed even more until they found out that he did have boundaries. He just didn’t set them the same way Mrs. Scott did. It is probably a good thing that Conroy didn’t deal with the students like Mrs. Scott did, because, as far as I am concerned, the only reason the students obeyed Mrs. Scott was because they were afraid of her. When learning was made fun and relevant to the students, they were

Rebecca, also, responded to the disrespect of the children by the administrators. Again, Rebecca views these interactions from a broader perspective than just the movie itself. She describes personal connections from her home town as well as those related to her field placement experiences.

In the movie, Conrack, the students are viewed as stupid, slow, and useless. People constantly make assumptions about people because of where they are from or who their family members are. I made many connections to the movie and my hometown. I am from a small town called Eastman. It is not as small as the island, but children do not get the experiences that most other children do. Eastman has three red lights, a Wal-mart, two grocery stores, and some local shops downtown. Everybody knows everybody….It is a constant joke about being from Eastman….Just like in the movie, people in Eastman are viewed as slower and not as competent as others in large cities. We sometimes talk slower and have a Southern drawl that tends to put us in a stereotypical situation. (Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

Rebecca (Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004) states that her personal experiences, those she has had in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program have helped her to see that “people are very diverse, we, as teachers, need to be sensitive to everyone’s needs.” In addition they have made her sensitive to the stereotyping and labeling of individuals. She points to the actions of Mrs. Scott to convey her beliefs.
Mrs. Scott described the children as slow, lazy, tough, and just plain stupid. When a principal has no feelings of worth for the children for whom she is responsible, how can a school succeed?...Labeling and grouping should not be done because it creates the self-fulfilling prophecy in which people become the product of the expectations of others. (Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

Rebecca continues by comparing this response to her field placement experience. She states:

Children receive feedback from their teachers and parents, but oftentimes they do not understand it. Just like the children on the island, they receive feedback, but it is incredibly negative. They, too, need to see that someone has faith in them so that they can succeed in the classroom. Every child is gifted at something. Teachers need to strive to bring attention to that area of strength to encourage the child’s success across the curriculum. (Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

*The responses which have been presented above offer support for the need to respect children as individuals and to value their differences. Through their written reactions to the movie, all participants have expressed their beliefs that it is the responsibility of teachers to get to know and understand their students, to support them in their differences, and to resist the dehumanization of students. The participants, also, stress that the demonstration of respect or the lack of can greatly affect the success students.*
The second theme that emerged in the participants’ responses is closely linked to the first. All participants recognized the significance of family and community support in the education of children. Rebecca summarizes this concept in the following statement. “For a school to succeed, it must combine as one with parents, administrators, teachers, and students.” Overall, the responses reflect that the participants believe that relationships among teachers, children, families, and communities require much effort and energy to establish. A sense of mutual respect among all concerned is necessary.

Heather (Heather’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004) states that “community acceptance was a big issue in the movie. Conroy was not accepted into the island community at first….The only person who accepted Conroy from the beginning was the old woman who was the island midwife.” Heather continues as she tries to understand the parents’ noncommittal attitude.

The parents of Conroy’s students were probably just trying to do what they thought was best for their children, even though they saw that Conroy was helping their children to learn. They may have been afraid of what could happen because they had never had a teacher on the island that challenged their children or them as Conroy did. (Heather’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

In addition, Heather (Heather’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004) recognizes that Conroy needed to earn the respect of the parents. She comments: “At first the parents did not agree with Conroy’s teaching style, but as they saw that their children were learning and enjoying school, they warmed up to him.”
Rebecca, too, acknowledges the need for Conroy to earn the respect and acceptance of the parents and community.

The community and its leaders had become discouraged with the school and felt there was not hope. When Conroy arrived and the people witnessed his enthusiasm, they believed that he as a fake. They felt that once he met the children he would change his mind. The people were not accepting of Conroy until they observed the changes he had made in the children’s lives. (*Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

Allison and Amy both point out the fact that Conroy himself knew the value of parental support. When Conroy planned a field trip for the students which required that they cross the river, Conroy was met with unified objections. Because the islanders were not swimmers, they feared the river. It represented a constant threat of death for them and their children. Allison recalls that in order to get permission for the students to attend the field trip. “Conroy went to visit a parent that he knew was greatly respected in the community. He knew that if she agreed, then the other parents would agree also. Conroy knew who was a strong person in the community and used this to an advantage” (*Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004) Amy adds: “I love how he asked the respected mother’s permission and assistance for the children to go on the field trip. He made her feel important by seeking out her wisdom and respecting her thoughts” (*Amy’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004).

Ultimately, when Conroy is fired, the support and respect for him by the islanders becomes truly evident. Allison states:
When all of the townspeople tried to fight for Conroy’s job by refusing to let their children go to school unless Conroy was the teacher, you could see how many of the attitudes had changed from when Conroy first arrived on the island. Many more people were accepting of him and what he was trying to do for the children. 

*(Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)*

The focus on developing the support and respect of families and the community are a direct link to both the readings by Greene (1995) and Paley(2002). The participants recognize the importance of this support if a teacher is to succeed. They also recognize that gaining the respect and support takes time and effort. There is a strong element of trust involved as well.

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**Theme 3: A Child-Centered Experiential Curriculum**

The third theme found within the responses of the participants is the value of an experiential curriculum that is focused on the needs and abilities of the students. All participants recognized the importance of planning and implementing a curriculum that draws on the prior knowledge and experiences of the students; responds appropriately to the developmental and cognitive levels of individuals; and actively engages students in the learning process.

Amy describes the way that Conroy approached the curriculum in order to plan appropriately for the students for whom he was responsible.

He came into the classroom and asked the students questions just to see how much knowledge they had. He quickly discovered that they knew very little, actually they really could not answer any of his questions. Instead of yelling at them or looking down on them, he became even more determined to teach them
about the world around them. He did not limit their learning to reading, writing, and math…. When Conroy saw that the children were not familiar with things like hygiene, he did not act as if he was better than them; he just taught them. The scene that sticks with me is the one when he teaches them to brush their teeth. He did not just tell them how to brush their teeth or show them, he involved them in the process. Another meaningful scene was when the child’s body was found in the river. He was very upset when he learned of this. I automatically thought that he would just discuss the dangers with the students, but instead he did more than that. He took the students to the river and taught them to swim…. His respect for these people and their culture went beyond the color of their skin or the location of their homes. He genuinely cared and, in a sense, was fighting for their lives. He immediately took action once he knew that the students were in danger. (Amy’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

Like Amy, Allison describes Conroy’s teaching methods. She states that “Conroy was not the kind of teacher that followed any particular curriculum” (Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004). She continues to explain how Conroy determined the needs of his students as well as how he used the information to plan for and teach the students.

Once he evaluated his students, he began to plan for the kinds of things that were necessary for them to know…. He developed the curriculum based on what was important for the students. He made sure that when he taught them that it was interesting. He found ways to get them actively involved in that learning…. Conroy wanted the students to actively explore the things that they were being
taught. Therefore, he took them to the experience rather than bringing the experience into the classroom. He let the students live the experience, instead of talking about it. (*Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

In her response, Rebecca also comments on the way that Conroy viewed the curriculum and the strategies he used to accommodate for the levels of the students in his classroom. She states:

Conrack began a new curriculum with the students. They had not had expectations for success placed on them in so long that they were rebellious at first. He introduced material in a whole new way and used different techniques to help the children learn. He vocalized high expectations, and the children began to demonstrate high quality attempts to learn. Conroy introduced ideas such as Newton’s laws, the human body, and flowers. He taught the children about topics they were interested in….Conroy expected the most and began to receive it….The children began to feel self-confidence and self-worth. (*Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

In her response, Heather agrees with the reactions of other participants as they describe the curriculum and strategies implemented by Conroy. In addition, however, she questions the overall purpose of the field trip where the students traveled with Conroy to Beaufort, South Carolina. She states:

Conroy’s curriculum was very relevant to the students and after a while it made a big impact on them. Once Conroy found out that the students didn’t know much about the world, he didn’t begin by teaching them about it. He began where the students were. Conroy took the students around the island that they lived on and
taught them about the plants that grow there and the animals that live there. In this way the students came to understand their island better, while learning scientific ideas at the same time. Not only did the students learn the academics, but they also learned about a different culture by going to Beaufort for Halloween. This was the first time any of the children had been off the island. They had never heard of Halloween much less participated in the celebration. Conroy took this opportunity to teach the students about things that go on outside of their small island. Honestly, when Conroy took the students trick-or-treating for Halloween he was imposing his values and culture on the students. (Heather’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)

Of the participants, Heather is the only one who openly questioned this imposition of values. Amy only hinted at the idea that Conroy did not consider the relevance that trick-or-treating held for the students or that participation in Halloween was his culture not theirs. She (Amy’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004) writes: “He knew that they had heard about Beaufort and dreamed about it, and he wanted them to experience trick-or-treating.” Both Allison and Rebecca, however, commented about the other advantages of the field trip which involved exposure to a life outside that of the island but did not question the overall motive for the trip. These are suggested in Allison’s statement:

This allowed the children to get outside of the world that they had been living in for so long and see the other side of the river. This trip gave them a chance to see the library, go out to dinner, and have milkshakes. Where they came from there were not places like this….It gave them of a taste of something they had never known. (Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack, Warren, 2004)
As I read these responses, I could see connections to the assigned readings for the study. Connections specific to Paley’s (2002) work were seen in passages that stressed the importance of getting to know the students whom you teach and the development of relationships with not only them but their families. Also, a direct link to Greene’s emphasis on imagination is found in the recognition of Conrack’s desire to help his students to imagine possibilities, to see past the island and what had always been. There is, however, a concern for the lack of recognition of the focus on a Eurocentric curriculum and values.

Theme 4: The Need to Persevere

The fourth theme that is evident in the writings of all participants is the need to persevere in order to effect change. Each participant refers to the importance of knowing and understanding personal beliefs, the strength and courage required for risk-taking, and the need for perseverance if change is to occur. For the participants, Conroy demonstrated these necessary and vital qualities. This is evident in their written responses.

Amy documents these qualities in Conroy’s character as she describes his desire to work with a group of children and his willingness to challenge the system in order to help them to succeed:

The character of Conroy was such a loving and warm man that was persistent and determined. He simply came into a different culture and community and made himself at home. He took the students under his wing, expanded their curriculum, challenged them, and did not back down from anyone….I am encouraged that he did fight for what he believed in. In doing so he demonstrated his love for the
students….He gave those students all that he had and challenged them in every way. He never gave up on them and taught them the most important lesson anyone could teach: what it means to care. (*Amy’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

Allison’s description of Conroy also depicts a man of conviction. This is seen in the following statements about his work:

Conroy encountered many power struggles at many different levels. He had the challenge with acceptance in the community. He struggled with the students and the poor attitudes they had about themselves, life, school, and him. He struggled with the curriculum and the objections of the superintendent and the principal….Through all of these, Conroy never gave up on what he believed and the goals and dreams that he had for his students on the island. He always made the best of every situation….He took a big risk, however, in challenging the system. It cost him his job….I believe that it is so important that teachers remember that no matter the struggles and challenges, we need to keep moving forward to make the best situation for students. (*Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

As do Amy and Allison, Rebecca recognizes Conroy’s strength and ability to remain firm in his beliefs. She describes him as an “architect of change,” based upon the conceptual framework for the John H. Lounsbury School of Education. Rebecca states: He valued his teaching and believed that the students could succeed, contrary to the beliefs of others. He went against the superintendent and the principal to offer opportunities for the students to succeed. He did not back down from his
expectations and followed through with his goals. He stood up for what he believed. (*Rebecca’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004)

Finally, Heather expresses her admiration for Conroy and explains how his actions provide a sense of inspiration for her as a teacher in a system full of obstacles.

I admire Conroy for the way that he was able to step in and take charge even when his students weren’t motivated to learn….Something else I admire about Conroy is that he stood up to Mrs. Scott and Mr. Skeffington even though he knew he could lose his job. He was not willing to compromise his values. It also gives me hope that there really are teachers out there, like Conroy, who are willing to be architects of change no matter the personal consequences.


Woven throughout the responses of the participants is the concept of perseverance. There is the recognition that without determination to succeed and the desire to continue against all odds change may never occur. Without this quality, all of the imagination and empathy in the world may be of little value.

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Within this section, the discussion is focused on the recognition of White power and privilege. The reason for emphasizing these concepts is that these were themes that were not overtly presented within the writings of the participants; instead, they were ones that were obviously absent. As I read the critical response papers to the movie, Conrack, it became apparent to me that not one of the four participants had recognized the impact that the concept of White power and privilege had within the context of the movie itself. As I watched the movie, I, too, reflected upon the first four themes that were evident in
Heather’s, Amy’s, Allison’s, and Rebecca’s writings: the importance of respecting and valuing students, the significance of family and community support, the value of an experiential curriculum that is focused on the needs and abilities of the students, and the need to persevere in order to effect change. Without these, providing a safe environment where children are free to take risks and implementing a curriculum that is culturally responsive is impossible. In addition, I saw strong demonstrations of how the imposition of White power and privilege affects others as well as examples that were concealed within the motivations of characters. It is the lack of recognition of this on the part of the participants that disturbs me.

Mr. Skeffington, the school superintendent, received poor reviews by all participants. He was described as stern, power crazy, narrow-minded, and unloving. They were frustrated by his acts of disrespect for the children and attempts to prevent Conroy from challenging the students; however, they failed to question his motives.

One of the most obvious demonstrations of the exertion of White power is found in the actions of the superintendent, Mr. Skeffington. Three distinct scenes serve to illustrate this. The first is when Mr. Skeffington visits Conroy’s classroom to observe. As fate would have it, a fight breaks out between two students. Mr. Skeffington steps in, raps a yard stick across a table, and shouts at the students. The following lecture and demonstration was given to the class.

Shut your yaps and listen to me! There are going to be no more fights in Yamacrow Elementary school. I’m going to tell you why. ‘Cause I have got a method that can render Samson hairless and Goliath helpless. I am going to demonstrate. (He grabs a students hand and twists. The student is in obvious
pain.) This is called “milking the rat.” You press the fingernail of your opponent with your thumb; your index finger squeezes the back of the top joint of his finger; your thumb mashes his fingernail causing considerable consternation. “Milking the rat,” guaranteed to break up fights and mutinies in any class. (Ritt, 1985)

The second scene in which Mr. Skeffington is seen wielding his White power is a follow up to the one previously described. Following a visit to the local grocery for a beer, Conroy escorts Mr. Skeffington to the boat dock to meet the shuttle back to the mainland. Mr. Skeffington explains his motivations to Conroy: “I suppose I sounded a bit overheated back there. Well, it’s just that I love this country. I love the glory of Fort Sumter, Bull Run. I never in my heart accepted Appomattox. Damn it, Pat, aren’t the important things order, control, and obedience?” (Ritt, 1985).

The third and very powerful scene takes place in Mr. Skeffington’s office. Conroy has gone into Beaufort to inform Mr. Skeffington that the children from Yamacrow Island would be coming to Beaufort to celebrate Halloween. Mr. Skeffington’s response is immediate and pointed. “A trip like that is not worth a pound of cow dung. These kids don’t need trips. They need fundamentals. The need drill and more drill” (Ritt, 1985). Conrack counters with this argument: “That is what you think they need. That’s not what I think they need” (Ritt, 1985). This angers Mr. Skeffington. He responds:

Listen here, last Christmas I sent two big turkeys out of my freezer over to those children on Yamacrow, and I am willing to send 10 pounds of penny candy for Halloween, but I don’t want them shoving and pushing and running wild in Beaufort. Is that clear to you? (Ritt, 1985)
Conroy again counters, saying: “Those children are my responsibility, and it is up to me to decide how to best educate them” (Ritt, 1985). At this point, his anger evident, Mr. Skeffington rises from his desk and approaches Conroy pointing a finger close to his face. He almost shouts: “Now look, boy, this is my cotton patch, and you are my hired hand. You stay on the other side of that river or, by God, you’re going to see a side of me you have never seen before” (Ritt, 1985). In the end, Conroy did indeed bring the children to Beaufort and, as a result, was fired by Mr. Skeffington.

As I watched, Mr. Skeffington’s motives were clear to me. He needed to maintain control; he needed to hold on to life as he knew it. The only way to do this was to keep “those people,” people who were considered inferior, in their place, to control them, to teach them to be obedient, to limit their knowledge of the world. Teaching the children in a way that offers hope and possibilities did not align with this goal to control. It disrupted his plan by exposing children to experiences and opportunities that would give the children hope and allow them to see a world of possibilities. Throughout the movie, Mr. Skeffington, the superintendent, is represented as the personification of White power. He is in control and intends to remain there whatever the cost.

A second character that disturbed all participants, including me, was Mrs. Scott, the principal of Yamacrow Island Elementary School. From the initial meeting with Conroy, she degraded the students. In the following quote she advises Conroy: “Treat your babies stern. Step on them. Step on them every day when they get out of line. Put your foot and them and keep it there. I know colored people better than you do” (Ritt, 1985). As the students enter the classroom, she continues by greeting them with humiliating and embarrassing comments. The students sit quietly as she lectures: “Good
morning, babies. Most of you are slow. All of us know that. You don’t think good. That’s because you are lazy, and lazy people can’t get ahead in life, but you can learn if you work, work, work, work, work, work” (Ritt, 1985) In addition, Mrs. Scott objected to and undermined Conroy’s efforts to give the students hope for a different life. Her goal seemed to be to destroy any sense of self worth or aspirations that the students may have had.

As I considered her motivations, I found that I had to look past the obvious. Yes, her comments and actions were detrimental to the students. The question, however, was not about what she did but why she did them. Did she really find the students so objectionable that she did not want them to have knowledge of anything more than the world within the boundaries of the island? After considering the context and the underlying power struggles, I do not believe this to be so.

There were two particular scenes in the movie which influenced my beliefs related to the purpose behind Mrs. Scott’s actions. The first of these depicted what seemed to be “last straw” for Conroy. During a summer school class, he had chosen to expose the children to motion pictures, using some old equipment that had been stashed in a storage room. The students and Conroy are watching a movie and eating popcorn when Mrs. Scott interrupted only to criticize Conroy and embarrass the students.

I don’t hold with machine education. You are wasting valuable time. Your job is to see that these children learn their lessons and do their duty....The smell in here would drive a preacher out of church. Smelling bad in school will not be tolerated. I am tired of people stinking in this school. (Ritt, 1985)
This encounter leads to a follow up scene where Conroy, in his frustration, confronts Mrs. Scott with her actions. To do so, he visits her home. Over a cup of coffee, he questions her actions by telling her what a lousy thing she had done. She responds:

“I’m making them tough, Mr. Pat Roy, because it is tough” (Ritt, 1985). He counters her, saying, “You’re tromping on them” (Ritt, 1985). Her answer to this is quite telling of her motivations:

What do you know about it? They are going out into a world where they are going to go by the Man, have to please the Man and see him smile. You’re young, and you’re cocky, and you’ve got that thin White skin. Well, that’s just fine for you. I don’t have your advantages. I have always known I was colored. When I was a Negro, I knew I was colored, and now that I am Black, I know what color that is. So, I just try to please the man and everything rolls along just fine. (Ritt, 1985)

After considering the exchange within these two scenes, I believe that Mrs. Scott viewed her actions, as harsh as they were, as a means of protecting the students from the outside world of discrimination and prejudice. As a Black woman, she had had experiences that had taught her the restrictions of a system that is controlled by a White world. I believe that she viewed her actions as a way of preparing the students to deal with a racist society. She did not want to intentionally give them a sense of hope or feelings of power only to have them snatched away by a White man’s world. As a Black woman, Mrs. Scott, understood White privilege and knew that she was not in a position nor did she possess the power to effect change. She did her best to protect the students in the only way she could. She forced them into subservient obedience.
Reflecting upon Mrs. Scott’s actions led me to think more about the role of Conroy. He was one White man on an island. The river seemed to be both a symbolic and a physical boundary that served to separate the islanders from the rest of the world. Conroy’s goal was to educate the students not only about their own world but also about the world of the mainland. Through his teaching, Conroy tried to provide the students with basic academic skills that would be needed to succeed, to support them as they learned to embrace and enjoy their lives on the island, and to encourage them to question and seek possibilities. Was he too good to be true? Did he represent the White savior for a group of Black children, their families, and their community? As with Mrs. Scott and Mr. Skeffington, the participants did not question how Conroy’s actions could be viewed by another audience, how Conroy could be seen as someone from the White world that has been sent to save a group of lost souls. They seemed not only to accept but also admire his savior-like actions without questions as to how a Black audience might see Conroy.

As I watched the movie and read the responses of the participants, I could easily see how Conroy was depicted as a White savior. Quite a few of Conroy’s characteristics as well as his actions point toward this. First, Conroy is sent to save a group of children who have failed to succeed under the guidance of other teachers. Second, he is successful at whatever he attempts. Third, he maintains his calm demeanor and continues to turn the other cheek, throughout the movie as he acts always in a thoughtful manner rather than in anger. Fourth, through the demonstration of his love and support for his students, Conroy had gained the respect and support of all of the islanders. Fifth, he made the ultimate sacrifice by choosing the good of the students over his own job. Sixth, he was
persecuted by those who were threatened by the consequences that his actions might produce.

Even though I could see the very obvious indicators which pointed to Conroy as a savior of these children, I needed to look further into what it was about Conroy that made his presence on the island unique. I found my answer in an inconspicuous scene which featured a very short conversation between Conroy and a Black man who had lived on the island his entire life. In this short scene, the man asked Conroy why he was on the island. He sought an answer that would explain why Conroy would choose to be on an island where he was the only White man other than the store owner. Conroy answers:

I used to chunk watermelons at Black kids, call them nigger heads. Then I did a 180 degree turn, and if a Black man handed me a bucket of cow piss and told me to drink it, to rid my soul of the stench of racism, I would only ask him for a straw. Now, I’m just teaching school. (Ritt, 1985)

This short and easily overlooked statement tells quite a bit about who Conroy is and where he is in his own development of White identity. The description of his actions directly relate to “White Identity Orientations” as they are described by Gary Howard (1999, p.100).

Conroy’s answer, in short, states that he had progressed through the stages of White identity development. Howard (1999) defines these stages as fundamentalist, integrationist, and transformationist. Conroy’s overt acts of racism are exemplary of the fundamentalist. At this stage, the actions of the individual are representative of anger, defensiveness, hostility, monoculturalism, and Eurocentrism. Conroy’s 180 degree turn places him in the integrationist stage. At this point, actions are characterized by feelings
of dissonance, shame, guilt, confusion, and a missionary zeal. As Conroy settles on teaching as his goal, he has moved to the stage of transformationist. Here a person demonstrates appreciation and respect of others, is empathetic, accepts responsibility without guilt, and works to challenge the Eurocentric perspective.

I believe that it is important to note this aspect of Conroy’s character. He did not represent the fundamentalist White man who came to mold the students around the expectations of a monocultural society. He was the transformationist who was there to effect change. He was respectful as well as empathetic toward those who were different from himself. Finally, he was willing to accept his responsibility to challenge White dominance.

A final example of White power is seen in the firing of Conroy. He defied Mr. Skeffington by taking the children on a field trip to Beaufort, and for this, he paid the price of his job. Even with the support of the parents and community members, Conroy had, in a sense, lost this battle. Amy, Heather, Allison, and Heather objected to Mr. Skeffington’s unfairness and cruelty toward Conroy. They recognized that, in the end, Mrs. Scott supported Conroy, urging him to fight for his position. They admired the parents and community members as they demonstrated their support for Conroy by threatening to keep their children out of school until Conroy was returned as their teacher. What they did not see, however, was the big picture. The citizens of Yamacrow Island were powerless against the White system. As Conroy told them, if they continued to protest, eventually the sheriff would come over and force them to comply with the law. Conroy, as a White man, was the only one among them with any power at all. Ultimately, Conroy did not regain his job on the island. In a sense, he had lost the battle against Mr.
Skeffington and his representation of White power. However, he continued to fight the war. Having been denied reinstatement to his teaching position, Conroy began his protest by driving a van equipped with microphone and loud speakers through neighborhoods of Beaufort. A segment of his speech follows:

Ladies and gentlemen, I don’t mean to take you away from your daily routine. I know you’ve got stores to open, clothes to wash, marketing to do, and other chores. But, I just lost my job, and I want to talk. My name is Pat Conroy. I was paid $510.00 a month to teach kids on a little island off this coast to read and write. I also tried to teach them to embrace life openly – to reflect upon its mysteries and to reject its cruelties. The school board of this fair city thinks that if they root out troublemakers like me, the system will hold up and perpetuate itself. They think as long as the Black and Whites are kept apart, with the Whites getting scholarships and the Blacks getting jobs picking cotton and tomatoes, with the Whites going to college and the Blacks eating moonpies and drinking Coca Cola, they can weather any storm and survive any threat. Well, they’re wrong. Their day is ending. (Ritt, 1985)

The fact of the matter, however, is that Conroy is one among many. He has the power to speak out, to protest against a system that he sees as unfit. To effect change more voices must be heard. Therefore, his is an effort of informing in order to change minds.

Having closely read these responses, it is obvious that the participants are making connections between the readings and the video as well as to learning theories which have been addressed in course work. My continued concern, however, is in finding effective ways to assist preservice teachers in examining the presence of White
dominance and privilege. If these are not recognized or acknowledged, how can they be countered?

Completing this portion of the research study had two distinct implications for me as my role as researcher continued to evolve throughout the process. First, as the researcher, the information that was gathered through the program profiles and autobiographical profiles helped me to develop a deeper understanding of the identities of the participants. As a result, I gained critical knowledge related to the personal, cultural, and racial beliefs which were held by these young women at the beginning of the study. In addition, analyses of data gathered from assigned written responses offered me insight into ways in which the requirements of the study were affecting these beliefs. Second, as a participant, I found myself continuing to refine my own beliefs as well as examining my own practice. As I reviewed assigned reading, listened to discussions, and read and analyzed written responses, I constantly reflected on ways in which I could improve my teaching, to become more culturally responsive to my own students. I came to realize that not only was the study affecting the four women who agreed to participate, but it was also directly affecting me as an educator.
CHAPTER V

INTERVIEWS WITH THE PARTICIPANTS

After the participants of the study completed self exploration, prescribed readings, and critical response papers, I interviewed each participant individually. Five questions were asked to ascertain whether or not the experiences of the study influenced change in the personal, cultural, and/or racial attitudes and beliefs of the participants that will lead toward more culturally responsive teaching; to identify any evidence of culturally responsive practice that may have occurred in field work as a result of the study; and to determine which of the experiences were viewed as most effective in challenging racism, oppression, and stereotypes.

In this chapter, I have presented the participants’ responses to these interview questions as well as interpretations and personal reflections on the evidence of White identity development for the participants and for myself. Before beginning the presentation of this material, however, I believe that it is necessary for me to point out the differences in progress for each of the participants. In reading this it is important to keep in mind that each of the participants, because of life experiences that they have encountered, began the study in very different phases of understanding and developing their personal, racial and cultural beliefs. As I interviewed the participants, I asked each one follow up questions that I hoped would allow them to more completely respond by explaining their experiences and describing their current beliefs.
**Question 1:** In what ways have the experiences of this study affected your personal, cultural, and/or racial beliefs?

The purpose of the first interview question was to determine whether or not the participants believed that the experiences included in the study had affected their personal, cultural, and/or racial beliefs. The experiences that I asked them to consider were the autobiographical paper; the completion of the cultural collage activity; the required readings including *White Teacher,* by Vivian Paley (2002), and “Imagination, Community, and the School,” from *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change,* by Maxine Greene (1995); the viewing of the movie, *Conrack* (Ritt, 1985); the writing of critical response papers; and class discussions. In this section, I have included critical parts of each of the participants’ interviews which explain the influences that involvement in the experiences of the study have had on the four participants as individuals.

**Interview with Amy** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall (Researcher): In what ways have the experiences of this study affected your personal, cultural, and/or racial beliefs?

Amy: I think most importantly it has just educated me as to what culture is. I think I had the opinion that a culture or cultural beliefs was race, a person’s race. So, now I know that it is more than that. It can involve religion. It is so much more than that. So, I think that it has educated me on that aspect. It has opened my eyes to the children in my classroom and their learning abilities, how well they learn, the different ways that I can accommodate them, and the different ways that I relate to my children. For example, I don’t feel like I am racist in any way, but I think throughout last semester, during the children’s literature study, my eyes were just opened to the way that I may treat children and the ideas I have in my head about them like stereotypes.

Lyndall: Can you think of an example?

Amy: Not believing in a certain student because I see that they are not capable of doing something. It could be because of a learning disability or something else.
I reacted by thinking that this is going to be interesting and just having a negative attitude about it instead of just tackling it, having a positive attitude about it, and thinking that this could be a cultural barrier or something that I can work through.

Lyndall: So, because of the label you’re making assumptions. Is that what you are saying?

Amy: Yes, I think so. Maybe not really acting on it, but having it in my mind. Do you know what I am saying? I don’t think that I really acted on it, but I remember something that I wrote in my paper, the autobiography that we did. I was talking about how I had been at the park, and I had heard people being loud, and I thought, “Oh, Black people are just so loud.” It was like my mother’s voice that I could hear in my head. I had just grown up with that. But, I don’t believe that. So, it is just things like that that I learned about myself, things that I really didn’t know that I had within me.

Lyndall: So, it increased your awareness?

Amy: Definitely increased my awareness, especially when I teach.

Lyndall: Can you think of some examples of when you were teaching that this has been true?

Amy: I can’t think of a specific example. I think it’s increased my awareness of the importance of recognizing different cultures and just not overlooking it. I think that I just overlooked it because it is such a controversial topic. I wasn’t comfortable with addressing it, and at this point I haven’t really been in a situation where I could address it more, but I feel like I have an awareness of it now that if a situation occurred, I would react differently. Like with the family literacy project, I was able to understand people’s different cultures and families when my students shared. I was able to respect each one of their individual traditions that they had. That was my topic. I had them to write about a tradition that their families had to help make the class aware and show the class the importance of different cultures and traditions within families. That was just one thing that I did with my kids.

Lyndall: So, did the children write these with their families or did they write them on their own?

Amy: They had been learning the format of a letter. I sent home a letter to the parents and the students. It asked that the family, all together, write a letter back to the class about a tradition or something they did over the weekend. If they did not have a tradition, just something they did as a family. The child would present in class. It was very interesting to hear the different traditions that they had, especially around Christmastime because a lot of them were talking about
Christmas. It is really neat that one little boy is exploring his grandfather’s Jewish religion. He was so excited about it. Even though he didn’t grow up around that, it was something that was new to him, and he was telling the class all about it. I have never seen anyone get more excited before. It was just so encouraging to see a child up in front of the class talking about something that was a part of their grandfather’s life, and you respect it. The other students were really intrigued and were asking a lot questions about it. There was one child that was a different religion, and he was asking him questions about it. It was so neat to see them sharing.

Lyndall: The child wasn’t Jewish, but the grandfather was?

Amy: Right. And the grandfather wanted him to explore the religion and to come to events and things. I am really not sure what all he had gone to. He was talking about how he was going to have a Bar mitzvah when he turned 12 or 13. He was just excited about different things.

Lyndall: Was the child raised within another religion?

Amy: He really didn’t talk about any other religion. I don’t think the family really went to church or were involved. It was something new to him, and he was excited about it.

Lyndall: When the traditions were shared, did just the child share or did the family come as well?

Amy: The families were not able to share. That is why I had them to write along with the children. We just didn’t have enough time.

Lyndall: OK

Amy: We actually had a social, I can’t remember what holiday it was, a Halloween party or something, and the parents were there. One of the parents stayed. Most of the kids had gone home early. Oh, it was the Thanksgiving Day feast. All of the kids had gone home early except for six or seven. One of the parents stayed and sat in while the other six presented their projects. The parent didn’t share. She just watched her daughter share. It was really sweet. She was smiling.

Amy grew up in Lawrenceville as a member of a very religious family. She describes her father, the minister of music of a small church, as open and accepting of others regardless of difference; however, her mother is quite the opposite. It is her mother’s racist comments that Amy finds herself fighting against. By reading Amy’s
response to the first question, it is evident that she believes that the experiences of the study have caused her to more closely examine her own reactions to differences, have increased her awareness of diversity, and have affected the ways in which she approaches planning and implementing experiences.

*Interview with Rebecca* (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: In what ways have the experiences of the study affected your personal, cultural or racial beliefs?

Rebecca: Coming into the program, I really did not have much experience with other races or cultures. In Eastman there are African Americans, and there are White people. There are not many other races or cultures. I worked in several places, and before I came here, it was mostly Black students and White students. So, I really never had to think about racial views and cultural background. Coming into the cohort, I really had to think about myself and where I was from in dealing with students who were not exactly like me. I felt like while I was in Eastman that everyone was the same. I didn’t see the differences, but now that I have read certain books like *White Teacher* and things like that, I feel more comfortable dealing with issues of Black and White and other races. I know more about how to handle talking to these people, and realize that they are different, that we are not all the same, and that we do not all come from the same background.

I’ve always been around Black people. My dad had Black friends, and I was always around them as a child. I have an African American friend right now that is my best friend. So, I have never really seen the difference between Black and White. It has never really been a color issue for me, but there are a lot of cultural things that I didn’t know. Being close to my friend has taught me a lot about her race, her culture, and things that they do that are different than what I do. So, the experiences that I have had have made me look at myself, and now I am more objective. I realize that there is a difference, and it is not as big a deal as it used to be, but I am more accepting, and I want to bring the children’s culture into the classroom. I want to let them know that it is OK to be unique, that it is OK to come from different religions and different backgrounds, that we all are accepted, and that we are all unique.

Writing my autobiography was hard. I had to go back and look at myself and think about the things that I have experienced. My grandfather, he would make racial slurs, and now I know that it is wrong, and I should have corrected him at that point. I would never laugh whenever he would say things like that, but now I am more aware. I listen more to people. Whenever they say things like this, it really bothers me. Now more than ever, I say something about it if I hear racial slurs or if I hear something about another culture or religion. I will say something
along the lines of, “We don’t need to be judgmental. It is not what we believe, but they have a right to believe in what they believe.”

Lyndall: You are more willing now to take action rather than just think about it?

Rebecca: Right, right, because before I would just sit back in a corner, listen, and go along with it, but now I am more aware. I hear it more than what I used to. It is more apparent now.

Lyndall: Do you think that is just because a heightened awareness to it?

Rebecca: I do because before I never thought it was an issue, but now when I am actually listening to it, I can see that some people do believe that there is a difference, and I still don’t believe that.

Lyndall: When you were talking, you said that you first believed that there wasn’t a difference; now you see that there is a difference, and it does matter. What kinds of differences matter and how do they matter?

Rebecca: Well, in Eastman, and I am sure that it is like this everywhere, they have mean comments like, “Black people are poor,” or “Black people don’t have a job; they have fifteen kids.” That is not true in every case.

Lyndall: The stereotypes?

Rebecca: The stereotypes are not true. I mean White people, Mexicans, Latinos, anybody could have that situation if the job is not there. So, it is not a Black and White thing. I think as educators, we need to be careful of what we are teaching. As far as cultures, like in holidays that are celebrated, I know that Christmas is a big time, but not all children celebrate Christmas. There is Hanukah, there is Kwanzaa. We need to bring in Christmas from around the world if we are going to talk about Christmas at all. I know that in our curriculum class we learned about different ways to celebrate during the holidays. That has opened my eyes to the fact that there is not just one set way. We should talk about winter as a theme and not just a holiday because children do celebrate different things, and not everyone has the same views.

Lyndall: And with Jehovah’s Witness there are no celebrations.

Rebecca: I have never encountered that, not in the school system. I have not had a Jehovah’s Witness in my classroom. That is one thing that I would like to learn about. What do you do with those children who are Jehovah’s Witnesses when there are birthdays or celebrations in the classroom? That is something that I would like to experience because it is different.
Lyndall: There were several of your colleagues who, last semester and this semester, have had children who are Jehovah’s Witnesses in their classrooms. They were dealing with, not really dealing with, but struggling with what to do and how to include everyone.

Rebecca: Just yesterday in our technology class, we were looking on the internet. We had to come up with an article, and we, Jennifer and I, found an article that explained how you can write notes on the computer and it changes it into Spanish for Spanish speaking parents. The child in the classroom could speak English, but what if the mother doesn’t? This is a way to include that I really haven’t thought about. I always think about translators – that I’ll just have someone to come into the classroom. But, it would be important to me so that I could communicate with the mother that doesn’t speak English. Now I have that tool that I can use, and I can communicate. I am sure that it would mean a lot to her. And, that is another thing, language barriers go along with culture. If I can’t communicate, then I can’t reach that child in the same way that I could reach an English speaking child.

Lyndall: So, the experiences have helped to raise your awareness, not only about just Black/White racial issues but also in looking at religion and language differences, and recognizing stereotypes?

Rebecca: And seeing that stereotypes are not always true. It can be anybody, and it burns me when people are saying things like, “Well, look at that Black guy standing on the street.” I just can’t stand it, and now I will say something that I wouldn’t have said before I was in the cohort because now I feel more comfortable. The book, *White Teacher*, when I read it, it upset me with a lot of things that she did. But, I also learned a lot from it because I learned that you could handle uncomfortable situations in a tactful way. You can deal with the differences. You don’t have to say African American students all the time. You can call them Black children, and they don’t get offended. I have eleven Black children in my classroom now and five White. And so, when I first walked in I felt a little uncomfortable because I didn’t know what to expect. It was the same way: I felt like Vivian Paley, the author of *White Teacher*, because I didn’t know how the parents were going to look at me being as young as I am and being White. They didn’t know if I could connect with their children, but I have built so many relationships with the Black parents. They come and talk to me in the same way as they would my host teacher, and they feel comfortable with me in the classroom.

Lyndall: What do you think has led to the building of those relationships?

Rebecca: (pauses)

Lyndall: Do they come into the classroom? Have you been at school functions? What led to you to develop these relationships?
Rebecca: I think that the first thing that helped to build the relationships is that I was there during open house. I saw the parents when they met Ms. Robinson, my host teacher. It was us together. We have a Black parapro, and so we, as teachers, have differences. We all get along great. They saw our relationships with the parapro. They know that we are comfortable. I think me being there at the beginning helped the situation. They knew that they could trust me because I was in charge of interacting with the children while they met with the teacher. After they saw that I could interact with their children and that we were talking about different things that they liked to do, I think that this helped them to see that I could relate to their kids and that I could work with not only the White kids, because I’m White, but the Black kids, too.

Lyndall: This allowed them to become comfortable with you. They could stand on the sidelines and see how you were going to work with their children, how you were going to treat their children.

Rebecca: Yes. Is she going to ignore my child or is she going to hop right in? I don’t want to say that I was quicker to start up conversations with the Black children, but I really was because I wanted to make the statement that I was able to communicate and that I was not going to leave their children behind, because that is not who I am. I don’t see the difference between culture and color.

Lyndall: Does it make a difference – I am trying to think how to say this, because when you say you don’t see a difference as far as color – then do you treat them all as if they were White children? What does that mean as far as how you treat children?

Rebecca: I don’t know. I don’t treat them as if they are White. I don’t know. (Pauses)

Lyndall: Does color make a difference in who we are?

Rebecca: Definitely.

Lyndall: OK. In what ways?

Rebecca: Their personalities. The Black children and White children have two different personalities, in my experiences and from what I have seen. The Black children are wittier, quicker to tell you pretty much what they think and how it is. I guess it comes from how they are raised. They have had to stand up for themselves, and they have to. If a Black child is accused of something, they are quick to come back and say, “I didn’t do that because…” They feel like they have to defend themselves. I think that has a lot to do with their parents and grandparents being an influence on them, teaching them that they have to defend themselves.

Lyndall: Do you think that this teaching is legitimate coming from parents? From Black parents who teach their children to stand up for themselves?
Rebecca: I think every child should stand up for themselves.

Lyndall: It sounds like you are saying that the Black children are quicker to do this and that the Black parents may have spent more time or modeling. Do you think there is a reason?

Rebecca: Maybe their personal experiences, where they are from. I know that it is so different between Milledgeville and Eastman. There is a lot more that I have had to learn, but I know that Milledgeville is a bigger city than where I am from, and I am sure that there are a lot more racial things. I know there is a Black side of town, and there is a White side of town. There is a Black neighborhood here and a White neighborhood there.

Lyndall: Is that true at all in Eastman?

Rebecca: Somewhat. But most of the places are more rural, and it is more spread out. We have “hoods.” I guess you could say that we have two “hoods” in Eastman, but they are not big at all. They are just small communities. Most places I know in Eastman are integrated with Black and White people in the neighborhoods. Everything seems like it is all Black and White, and that bothers me to an extent because there are Spanish speaking Latino people, Asian people, and all different kinds of people. So it is not all Black and White, but the majority is because that is what we have to deal with for the most part.

Lyndall: Still in Georgia, especially rural Georgia, Black and White issues are still what we are dealing with. Even in more urban areas, race becomes very much a Black/White issue, and it carries over into other cultures and races, but still it is very much a Black White issue.

Rebecca: It is, and I guess a lot of me has erased that. I say to myself, “Well, that was back with Martin Luther King, the 1950’s and 60’s,” and I don’t see it so much as Black and White because I haven’t been there. But the children’s parents have been there, and they have seen Rosa Parks not being able to sit on the front of the bus because of her color. I know that has affected people a lot.

Lyndall: I want you to think about this. You are White. You grew up White. Your parents are White. How has that privileged you? What privileges do you have because you are White that someone who is Black may not have?

Rebecca: (long pause) Privileges? (another pause) I guess I don’t have to go through the day by day stereotypes. I am a majority in most areas.

Lyndall: As far as the dominant culture, you are.
Rebecca: Right. Most people believe that it is the White middle class man that can succeed. It is the White boys that go farther and have to do math and things like that. As a girl there are also stereotypes and…(pause)

Lyndall: Disadvantages?

Rebecca: Right, to being female. (pause) Privileges of being a White person?

Lyndall: As simple as things like could you as a part of a White family have lived in a White neighborhood?

Rebecca: Definitely.

Lyndall: You would have had a choice to live anywhere you wanted and in any neighborhood that you wanted?

Rebecca: Right, right and to go anywhere I wanted to and feel welcome more often than not.

Lyndall: Could you spend the rest of your life around White people if you chose?

Rebecca: I don’t think so.

Lyndall: I mean if you chose to. If that were your choice, could you, without much trouble, spend the rest of your life around White people?

Rebecca: You know, I don’t think so.

Lyndall: Could you not go to a private school that was all White?

Rebecca: I could, but I would hate it.

Lyndall: I am not asking if you would like it or not, but …

Rebecca: I know, I could be with all White people.

Lyndall: If you were Black, could you do that?

Rebecca: No, because there is always going to be a White supervisor, there is always going to be a White teacher.

Lyndall: This is just something to help you further your thinking: What privileges have you been handed, whether you did anything to deserve them or not? What privileges do you have just because you are White?
Rebecca: People expect more out of White people. I have that higher expectation. More often than not, Black people don’t have that privilege of having high expectations placed upon them.

Lyndall: If they do, how are they addressed?

Rebecca: It is treated as if they were not expected to do well.

Lyndall: They are treated as if they are a credit to their race.

Rebecca: Right.

Lyndall: Just something to think about. Some of the things that you were saying led me to believe that you are struggling with some of these issues.

Rebecca: I do. I do struggle… I just don’t know. I would never want to work with just White kids or White people in general. I think that Black people have so much to offer, like Black children who have so much to offer. I have learned so much just this year from my Black children, just the things that they say, the way that they look at you differently whenever you say things to them.

Lyndall: Can you think of an example?

Rebecca: I don’t know, in my classroom, it just seems like that there is always a Black child hugging me, and a Black child needing that attention that I can give them more so than the White kids. Whenever I hug one of my students, she is a little Black girl, it just lights up her world. She smiles for almost 15 minutes afterwards. If I do the same thing with a White girl, she just blows it off and that’s that. It means more to me to be able to touch a Black child’s life, to be there for her, and to show her that someone is counting on her to do something and to be the best that she can be.

Lyndall: I wonder about this child’s home. Is value placed on physical ways of showing affection and care as opposed to being more reserved?

Rebecca: Right, that is true. I am not really sure. I have not seen her mother yet at school.

Until she was nine years old, Rebecca lived a very sheltered life in Marietta. At this time, she moved to the small town of Eastman. She explains that because of this her experiences with diversity were very limited until she came to Georgia College & State University. It was not until she entered the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program that she began to seriously explore her own beliefs about diversity. Rebecca’s response to
the first interview question provides evidence that the experiences of the study also
influenced the development of her personal, racial, and cultural beliefs. In her response,
she describes her continuing progress in exploring and developing her own beliefs. Her
comments show that she continues to struggle with some very difficult issues as she works
toward clarifying her views. Her open-mindedness, however, is evident throughout this
portion of the interview.

**Interview with Heather** (Warren, 2004)

**Lyndall:** In what ways do you feel like the experiences of the study have affected your
personal, racial, or cultural beliefs?

**Heather:** I really don’t feel like it has changed my beliefs, but I kind of felt like it
broadened my awareness of what happens to minority groups, how they feel, and what they might experience. These are experiences that they have and that I have never really been a part of.

**Lyndall:** Can you think of any examples of something that you are aware of now or that
you tend to notice more that you did not pay attention to before?

**Heather:** Well, when we read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, I had never really thought
about the fact that after Black people got their civil rights and everything, how
it was still – they still were not created equal. There were still problems with
the way that things were being done. That book really opened my eyes to the
things that African Americans went through.

**Lyndall:** Do you think that things like that still happen today?

**Heather:** I’m sure they do. That is really what I am going to be looking for in the
classroom, things like that that happen. Those are the kinds of things that I
want to try to fix or that at least I want to try to open other people’s minds to
the facts that differences are just differences. They are not bad. They are not
good. They are just differences.

**Lyndall:** *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* really focused in on the equality of schools for
one thing. I wonder in some areas of Georgia and also other areas of the
country if we are not still dealing with minority groups or non-White groups
having more substandard education, the hand-me-down books, inferior
technology, such things as that. Where there are more affluent families there
are better schools.
Heather: (no comment, but an affirmative nod)

*Heather’s response to the first interview question of the interview revealed an increased awareness of racial inequalities. Heather lived a large part of her childhood in Minnesota, a state she describes as “one of the least diverse states in the United States.” Lacking exposure to diversity as a young child greatly limited Heather’s interactions with other cultures or races. Later, however, in her childhood she moved to Georgia. Living in Marietta offered challenges that Heather had not expected. These, however, were focused on religious beliefs and sexual preferences. Therefore, she still had had very little experience in negotiating racial differences.*

**Interview with Allison** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: In what ways do you think the experiences of the study have affected your personal, cultural, and racial beliefs?

Allison: It has made me more aware of how we do pick out certain things about people. Like in the collage we made in class, it was geared more toward good looking people, and you didn’t see as many different ethnic or racial backgrounds like Spanish Americans or African Americans, or different types of cultures. You saw mostly White people being portrayed in magazines and on TV.

Lyndall: Has this affected the things that you believe personally?

Allison: Umm (pauses)

Lyndall: Looking back at the experience of completing the cultural collage, has it affected or changed what you believe at all?

Allison: No, I don’t think so. I just think of everybody as the same. I don’t look at anybody for the color they are or their ethnic background. They are the same to me. They don’t come into my classroom as a color. They come into my classroom as students with names. This is who they are, and I would treat them just as I would treat anybody else.

Lyndall: OK, let me ask you this. Is race a part of who they are, and how do you see that?
Allison: (thinking) It is a part of who they are, and I think we should talk about that. I wouldn’t want to be sitting somewhere, and others not talk about who I am or where I come from. I think we should talk about who they are, where they come from but shouldn’t make like a big deal.

Lyndall: It should not be a basis for judgment? Is that what you are trying to say?

Allison: Right, right, right. It shouldn’t be something that I look at and say, “Oh well, he’s African American, and I have to deal with him in a different pace or a different way than the rest of the children in my classroom,” because he is the same, just the color of his skin is just different.

Allison grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta area as the only daughter of parents that she described as supportive but very controlling. Many of her relationships have been ones of control. As a result, she possesses a strong need to be accepted by others. At this point, Allison seems to have accepted the values of her parents. In her response to question one, Allison showed little evidence of change or increase of awareness as a result of exposure to the experiences of the study. The only development that is revealed at this point in the interview is that her thoughts on the cultural collage were more inclusive. In her initial response, she wrote only of the façade of beauty, glamour, and happiness. Here, Allison is willing to consider the Whiteness of the collage that was created in class. She, however, retains her almost defensive view that everyone is alike regardless of race.

**Question 2:** Which activities (completing the cultural collage, the autobiography, critical writings, reading multicultural books, group discussions, etc.) were most challenging for your personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values? For the activities selected, explain how the activity required you to confront these issues.
The purpose of the second interview question was to determine which activities (completing the cultural collage, exploring their autobiographical roots, completing assigned readings, writing critical responses, participating in group discussions, etc.) were considered by the participants to be most effective in challenging their personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values. The participants were asked to identify the experiences as well as to explain how these required them to confront issues of difference. In this section, I have provided the responses of each participant.

**Interview with Amy** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Which activities (completing the cultural collage, the autobiography, critical writings, reading multicultural books, group discussions, etc.) were most challenging for your personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values? For the activities selected, explain how the activity required you to confront these issues.

Amy: I think reading *White Teacher* was pretty challenging. I had a hard time with that book. I would find myself getting very angry with her, just because of the way that she was with the children. It went against my beliefs as to the way you should deal with children, letting a child curse in the classroom and things like that; but it was good for me. I think it caused me to grow because it allowed me to respect her beliefs and see how her methods work for her. It was just a challenge to get through the book altogether. Also, the collage, that was another thing that caused a lot of anger to come out in me. I remember looking at that and thinking that this is not representative of our world. It is just a façade. It was just beauty and glamour and glitz. This is not us. This doesn’t represent me. It made me angry that I was not represented up there. Those are two things that I think were challenging to deal with and look at.

Lyndall: Even though White America was represented there, you didn’t feel represented?

Amy: No, it is kind of neat to think that I would be offended because, in the pictures, I was represented but not really. It was not the way that I think the world should be represented.

Lyndall: Going back to *White Teacher*, other than getting through the book, and it being different, how did it cause you to confront your beliefs? How did it challenge you, other than your personal beliefs?

Amy: Good question. Can you give me an example?
Lyndall: You mentioned your philosophy for teaching children and what you believe about how children should be treated. Were there other things? For example: There were some situations in the book where Paley really did have to confront race. The situation where the parents felt like their daughter was being bullied. She had to confront that situation within herself as well. Vivian Paley had to ask herself if she was being fair to this child. Would I be treating this child the same if they were Black or White? Would I be talking to the parents the same way? Did these kinds of situations challenge you in any way as far as in the classroom, in the things that you deal with? Did they speak to you in any way?

Amy: I think the only thing that I thought a lot about is that in my classroom I have a little girl that is really quiet. She is African American. I would think back a lot of times to the Paley book and how she talked about how she had commented to one girl about how the color of her skin looked pretty with the color of her shirt. That was just something that I was thinking about in class a lot when I saw this little girl. It is like I wanted to reach out and connect to her even though she is so quiet, and I want her to know that I value her and enjoy having her in the classroom. It had crossed my mind, but I was thinking, I wonder if I said something like that how the child would respond or would react? One day I almost said something to her along those lines, but I just didn’t because I didn’t feel like it was right. That is just not me or something that I would do. I don’t necessarily think that it is the wrong thing to do. I think it is a good thing to say if it helps that child, makes that child feel loved and appreciated, and allows her to value the color of her skin and who she is. I just don’t think it is something that I would do. I guess maybe out fear that somebody would turn it around.

Lyndall: Take it the wrong way?

Amy: Umm (nods affirmatively, pauses)

*Amy identified the reading of White Teacher, by Vivian Paley (2002), and the cultural collage activity as being the two most challenging experiences for her as she participated in the study. During my interview with Amy, she describes the emotions that were evoked as a result of the experiences as well as the effects that they had upon her thinking. Amy’s constant battle against the prejudices of her mother helps to explain the strong feelings that surfaced during these two activities.*
Interview with Rebecca (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Which activities (completing the cultural collage, the autobiography, critical writings, reading multicultural books, group discussions, etc.) were most challenging for your personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values? For the activities selected, explain how the activity required you to confront these issues.

Rebecca: I think the thing that most affected me was writing the autobiography and figuring out who I am. I mean as a teenager, as a child even, you just always follow what your parents do. You believe in what they believe in. Coming to the point of making my own decisions and coming to the realizations of what I believe are right and wrong was tough. Writing that paper was really, really hard for me because you don’t want to sound like you are racist, but then you don’t want to sound like everything is equal, because it is not. I mean, I personally try not to see the difference even though there is a visible difference. I can see that this child is Black and that child is White and this child is Spanish or whatever. I can see that, but I try not to make it a difference in my classroom, to a maximum extent. I would like to teach about cultural traditions and things like that, but that paper really challenged my thinking about who I am as an individual, not who my mom is, or who my dad is, or how I was raised, but who I am today and what I believe is right and wrong when it deals with different cultures and races. It has changed the person that I am. I am more up front and willing to say that it is wrong to make racial jokes or slurs or things about religion. I used to just sit back.

Lyndall: How did you feel when you were sitting back and listening?

Rebecca: I was always offended by it, but I just didn’t want to say anything because I didn’t want to start an argument that I didn’t know anything about. I am not Black. I can’t stand up for someone who is because I am not, but, at the same time, it really hurt my feeling that people were shallow and narrow minded enough to think that the stereotypes were true.

Lyndall: What is the difference now? You are still not Black.

Rebecca: Right.

Lyndall: But now you say you are willing to step up at times?

Rebecca: I feel more educated and have experienced more. Another thing, in Eastman, I worked in a daycare. They were all White children. I never had an opportunity to work with Black children or any other kind. So, I came into the cohort very sheltered from Black people. I mean that I had my Black friend, but it wasn’t like working with a Black child. So, I think that even though I am not Black, but I am better able to defend someone and feel like I am educated enough to
say something. I am almost graduating from college. I am somebody in the world. I am my own person, and I can say, “Hey, I don’t think this is right, because…” I can point out stereotypes. I can make points like, “I have seen ‘so and so’ that is Spanish who does the same thing that you are making this racial joke about against Black people.” I have even heard Black people make comments against White people. It is the same thing. I can defend my own color and race.

Lyndall: So, the difference is awareness, confidence, experience, knowledge…

Rebecca: Yes, experience of just being out there. Also, living by myself is different. You learn so much, and it is so complex. There are Black people and White people. We have Chinese people…

Lyndall: You live at Bobcat Village. (a university housing community)

Rebecca: Right. We have our little group things that we do every now and again. They’ll have cookouts. I sit around and talk to everybody. I am not going to say, “Oh, you are Chinese, I can’t talk to you.” So, I think that from the classes I have become more aware. I feel like I have more to experience. Prior to the cohort, I didn’t feel like I had enough experience to say anything.

Lyndall: That is a good point. You moved from an environment to one that is very different, especially being at this particular university where international students are a focus. The public schools are primarily Black and White, on the college campus you are dealing with a very international population.

_In her response to question two, Rebecca identifies the autobiographical paper as the experience that was most challenging for her. This was the first time that she had examined her personal beliefs. Prior to this time, living in a small town, Rebecca had accepted the views of those around her. In the following interview excerpt, she describes her development as she explored her beliefs and worked toward differentiating these from those of her family. From her response, it is evident to me that she is still in the process of defining her beliefs as they relate to differences in race and culture._

**Interview with Heather** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Which activities (completing the cultural collage, the autobiography, critical writings, reading multicultural books, group discussions, etc.) were most challenging for your personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values? For the
activities selected, explain how the activity required you to confront these issues.

Heather: Like I said, the multicultural books really opened my eyes, and also I think the discussions really challenged me to figure out what my beliefs are and some of the things that I am seeing in the classroom that are not necessarily racial inequalities but other inequalities as well. For example the way special education kids are treated and other things like that.

Lyndall: Prejudices are not only against race. It can be gender. It can be religion. It can be many different things. Are you in an inclusion classroom?

Heather: We do have special education students. We have two, well actually only one now. One of them left. He moved away. So, we only have one now. We do have that.

Lyndall: Is that difference obvious in your classroom? Is that child discriminated against because of that difference?

Heather: The kids really accept him for who he is, but I have heard my teacher and other teachers make comments about it. So, that is something that I want to think about as I am going in to teach, and thinking about that, the special education kids, they just need more help. It is not that they are stupid or something. They just need more attention and more focus, a different kind of teaching.

Lyndall: I have heard some people say that that writing the autobiography was a difficult task but yet beneficial. How did you feel as you were writing your autobiography, putting down what you believe and why on paper?

Heather: I really enjoyed writing the autobiography. It wasn’t really that hard for me because, really, I am strong in my beliefs, and I know what I believe. That just kind of helped me to explore why I believe those things and what shaped those beliefs. I really thought that it was a good project.

*Heather, having grown up with few experiences with racial diversity, identified the reading of multicultural books and classroom discussions as the experiences which she felt most challenging to her personal, cultural, and racial beliefs. In her response, Heather explains that these two activities not only helped her to further define her beliefs as they relate to differences of race and culture but also broadened her perspectives of how differences are treated in the classroom environment. When asked specifically about*
the autobiographical paper, Heather acknowledges that it did not challenge her beliefs but did cause her to seek out the reasons for them.

**Interview with Allison** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Which activities (completing the cultural collage, the autobiography, critical writings, reading multicultural books, group discussions, etc.) were most challenging for your personal, cultural, or racial beliefs and/or values? For the activities selected, explain how the activity required you to confront these issues.

Allison: Probably reading *White Teacher*. That was challenging. It was just hard to actually realize that that is really how it is. That is how we view the world sometimes like, “Oh well, I’m a White teacher, I can’t teach those Black children,” or other people looking at you like, “Gosh, why are you trying to even help him because you know this is who he is.” Others come to your classroom and tell you about who the children are and tell you what you need to know about them. When children come into your class, you should start with a fresh slate and get to know them for who they are, not from their past experiences.

Lyndall: From someone else’s perception.

Allison: Right, not what someone else thinks about them.

Lyndall: Can you think of specific examples in *White Teacher* that point out to you that this is way it is?

Allison: When she went and taught in a school that had quite a few Black children. Just like that, they were looking at her questioning why she was there trying to help these students like she was weird or different because she was trying to help African American students. They were asking why would you want to do that because you are a White teacher? I guess they might not have respect for her because she is not like them or vice versa if there is a White teacher and Black student or Black teacher and White student.

Lyndall: Were there incidences when she did not have their respect?

Allison: Sometimes with the parents, I think. I’m trying to remember.

Lyndall: There was a part when a child called her a White…

Allison: Right, right.

Lyndall: The child called her White.
Allison: Right, so that had to come from somewhere. He knew that from somewhere, his family or his parents. But, she dealt with it very well. She didn’t look at him and say, “I can’t believe you said that to me.” She dealt with in a very good manner. As any teacher with normal students who didn’t look at race as something to stop her from teaching her students and getting them to where they need to be in achieving the goals that they need.

Lyndall: Outwardly she dealt with it effectively with the children. What about inwardly?

Allison: Oh, I am sure that it hurt. I’m sure she wanted to blow up, but she knew what her responsibilities were, and she dealt with it in a professional manner. But I am sure she was hurt, because any teacher would be hurt by something like that.

_Allison stated that the reading of White Teacher, by Vivian Paley (2002), was the experience that most challenged her personal, cultural, and racial beliefs. Her response lacked clarity. Her statements seemed to ramble without giving a definitive answer as to how the reading actually challenged her in her beliefs. After listening to and then reading Allison’s response to question two, I sensed a desire for acceptance and approval from me. I also recognized evidence of defensiveness in her comments. She seems to want to appear free of racism and prejudice; however, she continues to refer to Black children in ways that separate them from “normal” children._

**Question 3:** How has the participation in the study influenced your overall practice (classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of lessons, working with parents, etc.) during your current field placement?

My goal for question three was to determine how participation in the experiences of the study was influencing the overall practice (classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of lessons, working with parents, etc.) of the participants
during their current field placements. The experiences took place over several weeks at
the beginning of a semester. After completing all experiences, the participants were in
full time field placements for the next four weeks. My hope was that, during this time, the
participants would closely examine their teaching practices, their interactions with the
students, and their relationships with parents. The responses for the four participants
follow.

*Interview with Amy* (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How has the participation in the study influenced your overall practice
(classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of
lessons, working with parents, etc.) during your current field placement?

Amy: I feel that for lessons like the family literacy project [explained fully in
question one], it helped me when I was trying to plan it. I wanted to do
something that would represent everyone’s culture and traditions. I wanted to
be respectful of that. It helped to open my eyes to the importance of that. When
I plan things now, I am more cautious. I think about those things. I am more
aware of it. As far as my teacher work sample goes, I really don’t think that I
took that into consideration as much. I took into consideration the children’s
learning abilities. I have several gifted students in my classroom. I had to
challenge them a lot. I don’t know if that would really be considered or not.

Lyndall: Well, it is a difference, a difference in needs, a difference in who that child is.

Amy: OK. I think it is a challenge to plan overall when you do have those differences
in students. You want to meet the needs for all the students, and it is a big
challenge to plan a lesson to meet the needs of everyone. It is hard to do.

Lyndall: I think with your teacher work sample and just planning for individuals by
considering how they learn, the multiple intelligences, and things like that, you
are considering the individual. It may not be pulling in racial and cultural
differences. I know your topic was simple machines. On a day to day basis as
you consider your expectations of children, do you think these experiences
have influenced you at all?

Amy: I think that it has allowed me to have high expectations for every child and not
be biased and think that a child is going to learn better than another child just
because that child has a certain color of skin, is similar to me, or I feel more
comfortable with this child. It opened my eyes to the fact that every child can
learn. Every child is different, and it is good to recognize the differences. I’m
different as a teacher. I am different from my host teacher. We have different teaching styles, and that is really a good combination when we are teaching. It is good for the children to see differences in their teachers and to see them in their fellow classmates. It has been good to bring that out and recognize that. For example: I know that I may be teaching, and a child may say something that they got out of it that nobody else got out of it. But, I have been able to realize that and bring that out by saying something like, “Oh, yes, that is a really good idea” or “that is a good point that you made there, did everyone hear what ‘so and so’ said.” So, I really do think that from those classes, the experiences, and being around other teachers that I’m learning the importance of recognizing difference. It’s like things that I have never really thought about before. Before I got into the cohort, I never really thought about how important it was to bring out a child’s differences. You think you want to have everyone the same, but you don’t. If everyone was the same, then we wouldn’t have different professions in our world. It would be just awful.

Lyndall: What is it about your experiences prior to the cohort that made you feel like everyone had to be the same or that you would want everybody to be the same?

Amy: I guess just the way that I grew up, not really experiencing the differences. I don’t feel like that I had teachers that would point that out. Maybe they did, but it just did not make a big impact on me. I don’t remember back in high school or even in my early college years any teachers that were recognizing those differences. It is almost like a cookie cutter. You had to do this to get this grade. I felt like I was just viewed as a person that filled a seat. Like in the college classes, it was like they didn’t take the time to get to know me. In our cohort classes, all of you take the time to get to know us. So, I think it was because I didn’t see it modeled; I didn’t hear anything about it; we didn’t talk about it.

Lyndall: Did you feel the “cookie cutter” thing in high school or elementary school or was it just as you entered college?

Amy: It was more personable in high school. Obviously you have a smaller setting and have grown up with those people, and also the type of experiences like being on the dance team. I had African Americans on the team. I had Hispanics on the team with me. That was good for me. But, you don’t really think about this with the dance team. You all have to look the same. We had our individual differences that were recognized, especially when we got together and hung out as friends. But then, most of my good friends were your typical White Americans, upper class or upper middle class. It was just the way I grew up.

In her response to question three, Amy, who had a limited understanding of culture at beginning of the study, reflects her increased awareness of cultural differences.
She explains the importance of the recognition of these as well as the value that they have. In the preceding interview excerpt, she provides clear examples of how participation in the experiences of the study has influenced her classroom practice on a daily basis. Her increased awareness and respect for diversity has made a difference not only in the expectations that she sets for her students but also in the planning and implementation of more culturally responsive lessons.

*Interview with Rebecca* (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How has the participation in the study influenced your overall practice (classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of lessons, working with parents, etc.) during your current field placement?

Rebecca: The first three weeks of my placement, there was a Black teacher right next door to us, and she said, “We understand that you haven’t had much experience with Black children.” I was having frustrations with being able to deal with the children as far as classroom management issues. It was hard the first three weeks getting to know all about the kindergarten placement. But she was explaining to me that these children come from somewhere completely different than where I was from, and they don’t have the same experiences as the children in my home town. These kids come from different places. Their parents work in different places. Most of the businesses in Eastman close at 9:00, so more of the parents are home at night with their children. If they work in Eastman, which is the majority of the people, more often than not, they get to eat dinner with the kids and do things like that. And, here we have places that are open all night. There are factories where these people work. So, these children don’t even see their parents when they get home from school until the next morning when they wake up. That has a big impact on the kids. So, I have learned to be more empathetic to the children, and I try to show that I am here for them to support them, if they ever need to talk to anyone, Black, White, whatever, I will talk to them after school, during school, whatever. I want them to know that they have somebody that is there to support them.

I also think that my expectations are high for every child, but I do adjust my lesson plans to certain students. But, I feel like the lesson plans that I adjust to the students don’t have anything to do with the race. It is the ability level. Just because they are Black doesn’t mean that the ability level is low. I have one child who has a really hard time sitting still, and he has a hard time focusing. I sit him at the front of the room, not because he is Black, but because he has a hard time focusing. So, I think that I do change lessons. I know that if I was teaching during Christmastime I would want to talk about Kwanzaa, I would
want to talk about Hanukah. I wasn’t there during that time, so I didn’t have that opportunity to integrate my lesson plans, but I would want to. It has just made me more aware of bringing different things to the classroom and that my traditional Thanksgiving Day dinner and Christmas and other things that are traditional for me in a Baptist setting are not necessarily the traditions of others. I would want to bring much more to that.

As for classroom management, the two children that we had problems with at the beginning of the year were both Black students. We had severe problems, behavior problems. So, it made me look at myself. I don’t feel like it was just a Black thing. It was not just because they were Black, but you know it made me look at how Black children’s behaviors are different from the White children. We only have one White child who will get her name on the board most days, but then we have three or four Black children that get their names up for something every single day. I have been trying to figure out why that is. So, that is something that is still in progress. It has made me think about the need to become more aware of differences in behaviors. Watching the two Black boys who had such severe problems, I think it did alter my perception.

Lyndall: The two children who had such severe behavior problems, were there diagnosable reasons?

Rebecca: Yes, one was psychologically challenged, I really don’t know how to say it. He had had a really bad home life. The other child is ADHD. He had had no prior experience in school, which had a lot to do with it. The other child who had the emotional problems, he had been beaten as a child, and he was living with his grandmother which is a move that had just taken place over the summer, and she was still trying to get custody. He was going through a lot. He had nothing stable in his life. He was pretty much on the streets by himself. He had repeated kindergarten. I mean, he went to kindergarten for maybe a month the year before, and then they pulled him back out. So, he had been in the school setting but then was almost immediately removed from that stability.

Lyndall: What I was trying to establish is that there were reasons for more severe behaviors, not just the normal active kindergartens.

Rebecca: Definitely, they were both on medication. One child was moved from our classroom to a self-contained classroom. But it made me ask if they were White would they do the same thing. Why aren’t my White children acting just the same way? But, it is more than that.

Lyndall: That reminds me of the Vivian Paley book. Do you remember the part in the book where she had the same kinds of questions for herself. There was the child in her room that was such a bully, so disruptive, and the parents had some questions, and she defended the child. But then she was questioning herself about this child.
Rebecca: And that is one thing. Even today, the one little boy who is ADHD and on medication, I have been hearing wonderful things about him. Ever since I have been out of placement, he has changed so much. He has calmed down. He can sit down. He can focus. Today I was teaching the reading lesson. I was so proud of him. We were doing the “an” and “at” family words, and he gave me two letters and made a word with each. Before I left, he could not do that at all. But then he started showing out. I told him how proud I was of him, and right after that, it was like immediate, he started showing out, throwing pencils and kicking children. It was immediate, and I am thinking, “Is it me?” Is he having a problem with me because I am young, because I am White? Is he having problems dealing with me being White because our parapro who is Black can handle him very quickly? She can look at him. She can talk to him. She can sit with him by herself, and he will change his ways. But then, in the past, if I would have done that, he would pitch a fit and cry. I mean a real temper tantrum.

Lyndall: If you used the same technique that she did?

Rebecca: The same exact technique, just sitting down, asking what is going on, what’s wrong, why are you acting this way – the same thing that she does – but he wouldn’t react to me in the same way that he reacted to her. So because of that, I felt like it was a race thing. I know that with me being out of the placement over the break, our parapro has been teaching a lot due to testing. With me being back today, I was wondering if it was because he has just been used to dealing with her and now I am back, and I’m White, and maybe he is having a problem with how I do things.

Lyndall: How does he respond to your host teacher who is White?

Rebecca: Pretty much the same way he responds to me. She has a lot more control over him than I do because she is the teacher. But like right before I left she said, “If I see you throw those crayons again, your consequence will be that I will take your book away.” I was over there with him at the time. She turned her head, and he threw the crayons again. Just to see how far he could go. So I have seen him do the same things to her that he does to me.

Lyndall: So, there is a power struggle.

Rebecca: I think that has a lot to do with his mother. I have seen her and how she reacts to certain situations. I feel like she is very uncomfortable with us being White teachers. I feel like she would be more comfortable if he were in the classroom with the two African American teachers, the Black teachers. This is because on the first day she got an attitude with me and my host teacher. This was a “sign in” day, and they were doing worksheets and things like that with the kids. She was sitting down with a baby that was hers, and another woman got up in front
of her. This was a White parent. She asked me immediately, “Why does this woman get to go before me?” I didn’t know how to react to that because it wasn’t because she was White that she got to go next. She just was not standing up and being aggressive in line. I knew immediately that his mother was going to have an effect on his personality. I can see a lot of the same characteristics between the mother and the child. I mean, that is where he got the attitude from. He got it honestly.

Lyndall: Taking what you know now, if this were your classroom and you were the teacher, are there things that you might do with that parent or things that you might do differently to help that child?

Rebecca: I think from the start, when I saw on the first day how she reacted in the situation, I would have tried to build that relationship. The first day, it was a bad situation. He just didn’t know. He had never been to pre-k, never been in a school setting. So, I would want to call that parent that afternoon and say, “Well, you know, he did ‘such and such’ well, or he has this as a strength, but we need to work on his behavior. Can we talk about a plan that includes what you do at home and what I do here, and let’s make something consistent? I mean, I can’t spank him. I am not going to send him to the principal’s office every day. Let’s come up with something that I can do.” I would have done that from day one. Instead, my host teacher waited until September or October before the communication started really, and the woman would send really nasty notes from getting all the bad reports. You have to tell the parents what the child is doing, but we need to make sure that we are saying some of the things that he does well, some of his strengths, something he does well – for example, his artistic ability. He loves to draw. So, I think that I would let her know that I was there for her, whatever she wanted me to do. I really had rather have that relationship instead of “I am the one in charge, I am doing it my way, and what you do at home is your business.” That is what I would do differently. I would start this from the beginning. I think that she was offended from day one and felt that there was some kind of difference.

Lyndall: Is there a relationship building now or are they still at odds?

Rebecca: I think on my host teacher’s end, she is trying really hard to get the parent to come up and have meetings. The child was suspended for two weeks, and the mother never would come. That is why he was suspended: because the mother wouldn’t come and have the meeting. So, I think on my host teacher’s part she is trying very hard to see what we can do, but the mother is not willing to put forth the effort that she needs to. So I guess you could say that they are still at odds.

Having had very little experience working with Black children prior to entering the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program, Rebecca describes several ways that
participation in the study has affected her thinking as well as her practice when working with children diverse groups of children. First, she describes her heightened awareness of differences and how this has led her to be more empathetic towards her students.

Second, she discusses how being more aware of differences in race and culture has influenced the planning of experiences that are designed to meet the needs and interests of all students. Third, Rebecca explains how the experiences have caused her to reflect upon and question her beliefs and understandings about children’s behavior. Fourth, involvement in these experiences has caused her to more closely examine relationships and interactions with parents.

**Interview with Heather** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How has the participation in the study influenced your overall practice (classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of lessons, working with parents, etc.) during your current field placement?

Heather: I think that mostly it has affected me in how I interact with the students and the parents. I think more about what kind of circumstances the kids have and the parents have. A lot of the teachers are inclined to say that the parents don’t come to school because they are not supportive of their children and what their children are doing, but I think a lot of the time it is just that they really can’t make it. They may have two or three jobs to hold down so that they can support their children or they may be single mothers. My heart goes out to them. That has got to be hard, having a child or two or three in school, holding down a job, and doing everything.

Lyndall: What kinds of things have you done that have helped you to get to know the parents and the background of their children so that you can be more empathetic?

Heather: I have sat in on a lot of parent teacher conferences, and if I see something with the child, I ask my teacher about it. Of course, she is usually able to share with me because I have been a part of the classroom for the whole year, so she feels comfortable sharing that with me and is confident that I am not going to share it with people who are not privy to the information. That has really helped.
Lyndall: Have you had opportunities to work with parents, to have conversations or conferences, or more informal times to meet with parents so that you could get to know them better?

Heather: During the P.T.A. meetings, afterwards, there is time to talk with the parents and everything, but not all of the parents show up for those. So, I am just able to talk with the parents that come. Then during the parent/teacher conferences, my teacher asks me for my input, “What do you think about this child and how they are doing?” So, I am able to have input there. I do get to interact with the parents.

Lyndall: Sometimes at the beginning of the year, with open house, more of the parents come.

Heather: Yes, yes. We did have about half of our class’s parents, but at that point I was just getting in there.

As Heather explains the effects that participation in the experiences of the study have had, her belief in being open-minded is clear. She states that involvement in the study helped her to be more empathetic toward the children in her classroom and their families. She states that she, now, understands how life situations offer much insight into the actions of parents and children. Heather is cautious and resists drawing unfounded conclusions. In addition, Heather’s open-mindedness is evident as she offers alternative solutions for connecting with the parents of the children in her classroom.

Interview with Allison (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How has the participation in the study influenced your overall practice (classroom management, expectations, planning and implementation of lessons, working with parents, etc.) during your current field placement?

Allison: It has made me want to explore my children even more. For example, in Literacy II, we did a family literacy project. This gave me a chance to get to know my students even more and get to know their parents. I wanted them to know that they were special in the classroom; that I was there; and that I wanted to learn about their children no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they have. I wanted to know the children like the parents know them. I wanted to get to know them on that personal level. I wanted more than “oh, she’s the teacher.”
Lyndall: So you feel a deeper need to get to know who the child is in the classroom as well as his or her role in the family.

Allison: Yes, right, on a personal level and the parents too. In my book, it talks about from birth to the first day of school. So, I really got to see some things from the parents’ points of view: their memories, the things that were most precious to them.

Lyndall: In your book? Tell me…

Allison: Oh, it was a memory book. It was my family literacy project.

Lyndall: OK, so tell me about your family literacy project.

Allison: The purpose of the family literacy project was to get to know the families and to be creative in the way that you did it. What I did was to make these scrapbooks for the kids. They were made up of about six different pages. They started from birth, then a special birthday, the first day of school, and the first time away from home. The parents and children wrote in the books. It just tells me a lot of different things. They would include a picture and then write in the book about things like the first time away from home, what made them sad, and different things like that. So, I got to really know that individual child, from birth. They would describe when they were born and why that was memorable to them. I had one little girl, she was an African American student, and her mom said that just being born was the greatest gift she could have ever had. So, just getting to know that helped me to see how parents really do care, and they are willing to help you if you are willing to get to know them. They don’t feel like I am just the teacher that is teaching for a year and doesn’t care about the students.

Lyndall: Did that surprise you, the level of care that parents show for their children?

Allison: Some of them, because sometimes some of the students in my classroom do not turn all of their homework in or don’t do certain things. For this project I wrote them a special note saying that this was very important and that it was going to be a memory book that they could keep and cherish for years to come. It was just surprising that a lot of the kids that don’t ever do their homework brought their information back to me with the pictures and the writings. I have even had parents to come in and speak to me on a personal level. It wasn’t just sending something in, they would actually come into the classroom. I had three or four parents come in and talk to me. So, it makes me feel a lot better. I can feel more comfortable talking to them on a personal level.

Lyndall: What benefit do you believe that will have for you as a classroom teacher to have that personal connection?
Allison: (pauses, thinking) I don’t know. Just being able to get to know the students better so that the parents will know that I am not just another teacher and that I’m there for their children and to help them in any way I can, no matter what it is. And, if they have a personal problem, they can come to me, and I can try to help them in any way that I can.

Lyndall: But, when increasing that comfort level, I think of it as working in both directions, of us approaching parents but also them approaching us…

Allison: Right, right…an example of that is that one of the moms came to an activity, she doesn’t drive. And when she came in she just hugged me and told me that she loved what I was doing, that it was a great idea. Her doing that just made me feel good because it was a warm and welcoming thing for her even though we had never met each other.

Lyndall: And if you had to talk to this parent about a problem…

Allison: I would feel very comfortable.

In response to question three, Allison referred to the design and implementation of the family literacy project that was completed as an assignment for another course, Literacy II. In the preceding interview excerpt, she states that her participation in the study influenced her by increasing her desire to learn more about the children in her classroom and their families. Getting to know the children and parents on a more personal level seemed to help Allison to work through some stereotypes that she has about parents and the different ways that they demonstrate their love and care for their children. However, Allison’s comments make it evident to me that she has a deep desire to help the children and families, but she does not recognize what the parents and children have to offer her. Even when asked directly about approaching parents, she only stated that she would be comfortable with this but did not elaborate.

Question 4: In what way does your practice in this placement differ from that in placements completed prior to the study?
Question four is similar to question three in that it asks participants to consider their teaching practices. Even though the two questions are closely related, the purpose of the fourth question was to encourage the participants to make deliberate comparisons between their practices in current placements and previous placements and to identify changes as a result of participation in the study. My major focus here was to determine if the participants could pinpoint these changes as well as make specific connection to the experiences of the study.

_Interview with Amy_ (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: In what ways do your practices in this placement differ from those in placements completed prior to the study? Think back to your first placements.

Amy: I think at first, entering the cohort, I had no idea what culture was. I had no idea how to address the situation. I felt like I was open to different ways of doing things, like I said in high school. I don’t feel like I opened myself up enough inside about people. I felt like I respected people, but after going through these classes and activities, I realize how important it is to recognize difference. I have realized a lot about myself internally. Writing the autobiography was tough. Like I said, I just grew up hearing my mother’s voice just making comments toward Black people, and even though I fought against that my whole life, you hear that voice in your head. I hate that. I hate that, and I hope that I never come to be a person that would say things like that. I don’t think I will, especially because of the classes and how aware I have become of things. These are people we’re talking about. They are not just stick figures. They are people. They have feelings. They can learn, and it is important to interact with them and learn from them in return. That is what life is about. I just think that internally I have become more aware of things, and it is important how I act in the classroom and the decisions I make. My whole thought process has changed, just the way I think. Even from the time when I first entered my host teacher’s classroom to now. I am with the same students, and I know them so much better. I value them so much better. I value them so much more.

Lyndall: Let’s explain that. These are the same students that you had last year in second grade when you were in your current host teacher’s class. She looped to third grade with them, so you have them again this year as third graders.

Amy: I think more of them now. I think a lot more about them even when I am pairing students up into groups. I think about who they don’t get along very well with or if there is some kind of barrier, whether it is personality, racial, or
whatever. I am going to pair them up and see if they can work through this conflict together, and if they start to bicker, I am going to go over to them, and I am going to mediate and see what can happen. I am going to try to open their eyes to differences and how important it is to accept one another because I want them to be successful in life. I want them to learn now what I wasn’t taught when I was in school. I want them to see and understand differences.

Lyndall: As far as placing the students together, how is that reaction different than what it would have been the first time you were placed in this classroom? You would place them together now. Is that different than you would have done in the beginning?

Amy: Yes, definitely. I think in the beginning I really didn’t have the freedom to place the students into groups, but I think I would have been more cautious with things. I know I would have been more cautious. I just would not have been willing to risk it; I would have been scared that it wouldn’t work, so I would have just put the best friends together and decided that they would be fine working together. But now it is different. I realize that this is not good for them all the time. If they want to be with their friends, then they can be with their friends at recess. It seems like they are always together outside of school as well as having a lot of best friends in that class. It is important to pair them up with other people that they do not normally work with. I think that a lot of times it helps them to understand things better. As I said earlier, I have a lot of gifted kids in my class. I have eleven out of twenty-one in the class. We lost one. So, it would be ten because the one we lost was gifted. That is a lot. It is insane. I try to pair up a child that may go to a gifted class with a regular ed. child that is just as smart and works just as hard. They have a good time together. It tends to be good. I know that is one thing that my host teacher does. All the gifted students get pulled out all day on Thursdays for a gifted class. When the gifted students come back in on that Friday, she lets the students that were there on Thursday teach the gifted students whatever she taught them on the previous Thursday. So, it is a good way for them to review and a good way for them to bond with that child that was out.

Lyndall: And to raise their self esteem.

Amy: Definitely. Especially with so many of the kids getting pulled out, I think that is really hard for them. I have noticed that a lot. It has been a big challenge for them. It was fun while I was teaching the lessons for my teacher work sample because we would do fun experiments on the days the kids were out. They were really excited to go back and teach the gifted students about the experiments.

In this portion of her interview, Amy gives a very clear and powerful example of how her participation in the study has affected her practices in the classroom. She admits
that in previous placements she did not understand the importance of recognizing
differences nor did she realize the necessity of helping children to develop an
understanding and respect for differences. The early experiences reflect the “cookie
cutter” mentality that she says characterized many of her past experiences. Amy refers
specifically to how she has changed her method of grouping children in the classroom.

Her current strategies reflect her respect for differences and her desire for the children in
her classroom to learn to value the differences of others.

Interview with Rebecca (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: In what ways do your practices in this placement differ from those in
placements completed prior to the study? Think back to your first placements.

Rebecca: Oh, I was very naïve. Like in my junior year, I didn’t know to accept
differences. I couldn’t see the differences. My lessons were not planned toward
children with differences. As much as I wanted to say that they were, they
really weren’t. Like my center activity that I did for science during my first
semester, I planned it toward one set of children. I could say that I was not
aware then in my junior year of anything that I did that related to race or
bringing culture in. I think this was because it just wasn’t on the forefront of
my mind like it is now. Now, I think about how certain children will react if I
talk about specific topics. I cannot think of a specific example because most of
my children are average, the norm. Whatever the norm is of culture. Like I said
earlier, I really wish I would have had that experience to go to placement
during Christmas. How would my White children feel if I talked about
Kwanzaa? Would they have had a clue to what that even means? How would
my Black children feel if I talked about Kwanzaa?

Lyndall: Or will they even know what it means?

Rebecca: Right. Will they know? Does anybody in our classroom celebrate it? That kind
of thing.

Lyndall: That is a stereotypical thing too.

Rebecca: Right. That Black people celebrate Kwanzaa. And, like Hanukah. I don’t have
any Jewish children in my classroom. How will the Black and White children
feel if I talked about Hanukah? So, it is more in my mind, and I think about
things that I say more when I am talking to Black parents because I don’t want
to offend them. I don’t want them to think that I’m insensitive. We have this
little, Black girl. I have become really close to her parents. We talk a lot. They’ll come to me sometimes before they will come to my host teacher especially if she is busy. We’ll talk about what she has been doing in the classroom and stuff like that. I noticed that at first I was really, really nervous to talk to them. I guess that is my uneasiness because I have not had the experience. But now, I am just as open as I would be about any child. At first, you do have parents that you are kind of scared to talk to, but then you get more comfortable. I enjoyed talking to her parents. They talked to me. We talked about what we do in class. So, I have had that experience, and I am willing to talk to them about racial things. For example: “Oh, she said something about y’all going to the parade down in ‘so and so,’” and that she saw her uncle and her aunt, her auntie,” using words like that that the little girl uses in school.

I am just more aware. I think about things more than I did last year, about how it is going to affect the children if I say certain things, or if I say certain things to their parents, how it is going to affect them. I guess I kind of ‘tippy-toe’ around to make sure that I am meeting everyone’s needs and expectations.

Lyndall: Now that you are aware you are more cautious?

Rebecca: Right, I am. Even though I don’t see it as Black and White issue, who knows how they see it. I am afraid if I say one word out of place, they are going to say, “Well, what does she know?” But, I think a lot of that has to do with me being young. I don’t have the experience of having children. I don’t have experience of teaching my own class.

Lyndall: How do you feel about being that open and honest with parents like saying I don’t have children of my own so help me to understand?

Rebecca: I am very willing to do that.

Lyndall: Sometimes it is hard to admit our weaknesses, but sometimes that is the best way to open ourselves up to other people and what they have to offer.

Rebecca: I know that I need their help. I need to understand. I can’t remember what it was exactly, but we were talking about something the other day. I was talking to a parent, and she’s said something like, “Well, I’m a parent, so I understand this and know that you don’t.” So, I asked her to explain it to me. Oh, I know what it was. It was about a daycare and about the teacher calling the parent at home to ask if the child was sick. The child didn’t come into school. She had been at school for a long period of time and had not missed a day. The teacher called to see if the child was sick or what was going on with the child. The parent was saying that this means the world to me that she knows that my child wasn’t there and that she was really genuinely concerned. I want to do that in my classroom — Black, White, whatever. I want to build that relationship to
let them know that I do miss their children when they are not there and that it is important to me that they are there or why they are not. I know that my host teacher does that regularly. We had a little girl who had surgery, and she called to see what was going on and went to the hospital to let the parents know that she cares. We are the teachers, but we are a lot more than that.

Lyndall: That it is a much deeper relationship?

Rebecca: Right. Exactly.

_In her response to question four, Rebecca continues to describe her desire to increase her understanding of Black children and families. Rebecca talks of how her increased awareness of racial differences has made her more thoughtful about her interactions and relationships with the children in her classroom as well as their parents._

_She is now more cautious about what she teaches and how she teaches it as well as what she says and how she says it. Her sensitivity to the feelings and reactions of others is evident. In addition, Rebecca has developed the confidence to admit openly to parents that she needs their help in understanding different perspectives. She recognizes, however, that she still has a long way to go to be comfortable in confronting difficult issues. She admits that she has the tendency to “tippy-toe” around topics in fear of offending others._

**Interview with Heather** (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: In what ways do your practices in this placement differ from those in placements completed prior to the study? Think back to your first placements.

Heather: Well, I feel like I really have gotten to know my kids better. That is partially because we are able to spend the whole year with them, but I think that it is also connected to the class. Now, I look at the kids and try to figure them out. I talk to the parents about what their children are going through and everything like that. That is partially because of this class that I have learned to be in tune with what my kids are feeling, what their situations are.
Lyndall: Does that make a difference in your planning in any way? Does it come across in the classroom or is it just more in the personal relationships?

Heather: I think that it is more in the personal relationships with the children. In the planning, I really try to think about the different learning styles, the different personality types, and everything like that, but there is just so much to think about. I do try to make sure that I am not focusing on one certain group. You know, they say that teachers tend to focus on boys to answer math questions. I try to pay attention to things like that. I try not to focus on one certain group, and in that way it affects my teaching, but it is more in the personal relationships.

Lyndall: What role do you feel that the personal relationships play in teaching?

Heather: I feel like you have to know the kids. If you don’t make them feel like you care about them, they won’t feel safe, and they won’t feel like they are in a healthy environment. So, I think that creating a safe environment is what it is all about.

Lyndall: Does that improve learning?

Heather: I do think that it improves learning.

Growing up, Heather learned several very difficult lessons about discrimination and prejudice. Heather explains that participation in the experiences of the study has further encouraged her to learn more about the children in her classroom and their families. This portion of her interview reflects the importance that she places on the development of personal relationships. In addition, Heather describes how her consideration of children as individuals with unique strengths affects the lesson plans that she prepares for the students in her classroom. She admits that the task of meeting the needs for all children is not an easy one, but one that requires much thought.

Interview with Allison (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: In what ways do your practices in this placement differ from those in placements completed prior to the study? Think back to your first placements.

Allison: I have gotten more personable with my host teachers. My teacher and I get along well. I have gotten more personable with the students. They are like my family. Being able to teach more has given me the opportunity to get to know
them better and to participate in more activities with them like the Renaissance Festival that they have. It is just a little arts and crafts festival. I have been able to be a part of their PTA program and things like that which really helped me to get more involved and allowed for more interaction with them.

*Allison’s response to this question follows the pattern of previous ones. Comments that communicate her competence in the classroom continue to be dominant. Here,*

*Allison points out only one specific change that she recognizes in her teaching practice over the past year. She acknowledges that she is more involved with the students in her classroom and her interactions are more personable.*

**Question 5:** How do you see these experiences affecting you as a beginning teacher?

The fifth question of the interview asked the participants to consider how they believe that the experiences in which they had participated as a part of this study will affect their practices as beginning teachers. My goal when asking this question was to remove the participant from the constraints of their host teachers and their classroom routines. I did this primarily because many times preservice teachers find themselves at odds with the philosophies and teaching practices demonstrated by the classroom teachers to whom they are assigned. Oftentimes, as a guest in this particular classroom setting, the teacher candidate is required to maintain the structure and practice established by the host teacher. This situation can greatly limit the candidate’s implementation of strategies that are consistent with her own philosophy and beliefs about children and families. The responses of the four participants are presented in this section.
Interview with Amy (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How do you see these experiences affecting you as a beginning teacher as you go into your own classroom and are responsible for working with parents and students and building those relationships on your own?

Amy: I think it will be challenging. I think as far as the parents go, I am still learning how to interact with them. I haven’t had a lot of experience. I haven’t had a lot of professional experience sitting down with them in conferences where I am responsible for saying, you know, this is what I see in your child, this is the potential your child has. But I have had a lot of practice observing it with my host teacher. I am excited about getting the chance to do it myself. I think next semester during my student teaching, I will have a lot more experience with this. I have had a lot of experience interacting with them on a regular basis. I have learned how to communicate with them about their everyday lives, about their children, about just normal day-to-day things. A lot of parents lately have come up to me and just said, “I hear about you all the time at home.” That means a lot to me. I just want them to know that their children are enjoying my class, that I am enjoying having them and teaching them, and they are a blessing. Every one of them has been so encouraging to me in different ways. So, it has been great to see how I can share that with their parents. I don’t know if that is exactly what you were looking for.

Lyndall: Thinking about your relationships with parents, what importance do you feel that this has?

Amy: I think it is huge. I think that as a teacher if you don’t have the parents alongside with you, then not a lot is going to be accomplished because I think that a lot of learning goes on in the classroom, but a lot of it goes on at home, too.

Lyndall: So how do you build that relationship?

Amy: By communicating that to the parents. I mean, if you feel the need, directly saying it to the parents, that they are important in the education of their children. I would have conferences to get to know them and about their lives. In general, getting to know about who they are, valuing them. I know by being with my host teacher and being in a small community like Gray, she knows all the families. She goes to the children’s ball games and different things like that. I think that is important. That is one thing that I want to take advantage of as I go back to Gwinnett County. I am not going to know anybody, but I would like to go to ball games and do things like that to let them know that I am just as interested in their lives outside of school and to let them know that I am interested in the parents’ lives as well. I guess, like I said, the ways you can do that are through phone calls, through conferencing, through having socials at school, inviting them to come into the classroom to help, inviting them to
come to read, and inviting them to come in to share things like with the family literacy project. I think anything you do to get the parents in the classroom and involved is really important. It is just a huge aspect of education to me. I think it is very vital. It is so evident when something is going on at home. This affects the child and the way they learn in the classroom. I have seen that. We have a little boy whose parents are getting divorced, and he’s not been all there. It’s been really hard to get him to do things. He is a very smart boy, but he just doesn’t care anymore. Things at home are hard, and he doesn’t understand why. He’s angry. So, it’s been a challenge to get through those things. I know there is not much that I can do in that situation, but with my host teacher, she’s been right there with those parents, she’s good friends with them, supporting them through their decision with things that are going on, and loving their child in the process. So, I think it is huge to have parent involvement.

Lyndall: As teachers, we can’t just limit our involvement to what goes on in the classroom because outside things are not left at the door when children come in.

Amy: Definitely not.

In response to this question, Amy draws on much of the experience that she has had with her host teacher over the past semester. Amy and her host teacher seem to share very similar views related to the importance of building and maintaining relationships with parents. Therefore, Amy been has provided with a role model that has helped her to further define and shape her beliefs about the importance of families in education.

Because Amy has been able both to refine and affirm her beliefs in such a positive environment with such a strong role model, I believe that as she enters her own classroom as a beginning teacher, she will strive to establish an environment where children and families are valued and respected.

Interview with Rebecca (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How do you see these experiences affecting you as a beginning teacher as you go into your own classroom and are responsible for working with parents and students and building those relationships on your own?
Rebecca: I think it is going to help me a lot. Because like I said, last year I wasn’t aware of cultural differences, of race, of how things I would say could affect other people. I think that being conscious of what I am doing is going to help a lot. I believe that it will also help just having the experience and confidence in myself to know that I can talk to people and that if I have a question about something, I can go to a Black person and ask them to fill me in or have guests come into the classroom and have them to explain to me, to educate me on something that I don’t know about. Because I know that there is a lot that I don’t know about, about the Black culture, about Black art, and about Black music. I think that I will be more willing and able to let them know of my weaknesses of not knowing and feel comfortable with that and knowing that I can talk to somebody about it. I think that I am just more aware than I have ever been before. I am more opinionated. I stand up for what I believe. I try to educate people about their narrow-mindedness about stereotypes. I am aware that there is a Black and a White world. I think that I am more aware and conscious of it. I think that it is going to help me in the long run to be a better teacher and to build relationships more easily with people of other races.

In Rebecca’s response to question five, she continues to focus on her increased awareness of racial differences. She explains that because of this as she enters her own classroom she will be more open to learning about the differences represented by the children and families in her classroom. In addition, Rebecca recognizes that because of her sheltered childhood in Marietta and Eastman, she lacks experience with and knowledge of different races and cultures. She states that for this reason she will depend on parents and others who are more knowledgeable than she is to help her learn what she needs to know in order to provide the best environment for the children in her classroom.

Interview with Heather (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How do you see your participation in these activities affecting you as you go out to your classroom to set up your own teaching environment? Now you are in the confines of a classroom setting and relationships based on what your host teacher has set up

Heather: I really just think that I am going to have a more open mind and be more aware of the kids’ situations and the parents’ situations. I am going to try and plan activities based on that. Especially at the beginning of the year, I am definitely
going to do some “getting to know you” activities and make sure that everyone feels welcome.

Lyndall: Activities with the children or with the families? What do you mean?

Heather: Mostly with the children, but I will also try to send things home to the parents, and definitely have the parents involved in some way in the “getting to know you” activities, whether it is through family stories or something like that.

Lyndall: How do you see the parents being involved in your classroom?

Heather: I want parents to come into the classroom when they can. Of course, I will do the standard parent/teacher conferences whether we have them in the classroom or somewhere else that is more convenient to the parent because, like I said earlier, sometimes parents can’t make it to a classroom. So really, I just want to make sure that parents feel as comfortable as the kids. If they have suggestions for me of ways that I can better help them or their children, I am going to ask them about that and be open to what they want.

As Heather responds to this question, she focuses on creating an environment that is comfortable for both the children and the families. In order to accomplish this, she outlines four goals: first, she will be open-minded to the situations of the children and their families; second, she will involve both the children and their families in activities that will help everyone to get to know each other better; third, she will involve parents in the classroom whenever possible; and fourth, she will solicit necessary information from the children’s families that will help her to better serve the students.

Interview with Allison (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: How do you see these experiences affecting you as a beginning teacher as you go into your own classroom and are responsible for working with parents and students and building those relationships on your own?

Allison: I think it is just the way that I have grown up. I was raised to view everybody with an open mind and not to ever shut somebody out because of where they come from. I think it should help me to become not only a stronger teacher but also a stronger person inside because I am able to look past all that and actually get to know that person on a more personal and/or professional level. I am able to look at them and not think, “Well, she’s African American or she’s Hispanic, I can’t talk to her.” It just helps me the get to know them better.
through all these experiences, the readings like *White Teacher*. I don’t want my classroom to be something that someone looks at and says, “She’s a White teacher and these are African American students. I don’t think she’s going to be able to deal with that” or “She has she has one or two African American students or a Hispanic child in her class. I don’t think she is going to be able to handle this.” For instance, right now I have a Hispanic child in my class. I took three years of Spanish in high school. I always try to speak Spanish to him. I just feel like with him coming into the classroom not being able to speak very much English that me trying to speak Spanish to him is helping him to be more comfortable. I am trying to meet him half way, and he is trying to meet me half way.

Lyndall: To me, that seems like a way of showing respect.

Allison: Right.

Lyndall: For his language, for who he is…like you said meeting him half way instead of having him make all of the changes.

Allison: Exactly. It is funny because sometimes I don’t always say the right words, but he understands, and his mom does too. I have spoken with his mom too, and she’ll say, “he comes home and talks about you all the time.” So I just feel like whatever I can do to make them feel comfortable in my classroom that is what I want to do.

In her response to question five, Allison’s need for the acceptance and approval are apparent. In this excerpt as well as throughout the interview, she, as the teacher, is the focus of her responses rather than the children and their families. She speaks of her strengths but is unwilling to recognize weaknesses. She avoids giving specific examples for how participation in the experiences of the study will affect her as a beginning teacher.

**Closing Comments:** Following the fifth question of the interview, each participant was given the opportunity to provide any additional information that they felt was important or relevant to our discussion.
Interview with Amy (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you would like to add?

Amy: I really liked the Conrack movie. I really did. I feel like I learned a lot through that. He came into a community where he was very different from those people. It wasn’t somewhere where he was used to living. He just came in, and he kept his beliefs. He didn’t look at those children as different. He valued them as people that could learn, and he challenged them with the curriculum and other things. He also stood up against the people that didn’t agree with what he was doing, like the principal and the superintendent. But, I think the thing that impressed me the most was the very end of the movie when he was quizzing them before he got on the boat. That was just cool to me. That was all he cared about, that they were learning and that they were growing. I believe that is what teaching is about. That no matter the circumstances or what people think, the kids are who are most important. Family is important, like what we were saying about parents, their knowledge and expectations.

Lyndall: How did he adjust his teaching to meet these children? He still had high expectations, but he didn’t expect them to learn in the same way that he would have if he had been teaching in an all White community in Beaufort.

Amy: I think that he started with the basics. He talked to them about hygiene, how to brush their teeth, how to swim, and things that they had never been taught. He still challenged them with it though. These were the things they were fearful of. These were things they were not aware of. In the beginning he was asking them things like what 8 times 8 is, like the multiplication tables. And, they had no idea. So, he just went back to the basics. He adjusted to them but still challenged them. He used the land around them by going outside and having lessons, using the river to swim in, and things like that.

Lyndall: I remember the teaching of gravity by dropping the apples.

Amy: I had forgotten about that one, him sitting up in the tree. I think he just used everyday life to have them to do experiments, hands-on things that they would remember. I think this is one great way to teach people. That is just how I am. I really believe in doing experiments and hands-on teaching.

When asked if she wanted to share additional comments, Amy spoke excitedly about the movie, Conrack (Ritt, 1985). She described how Conroy as a teacher who was different from his students impressed her. The characteristics that had the greatest impact on Amy were that Conroy respected his students and valued them; that he had...
high expectations for his students and adjusted the curriculum to for them; that he used teaching strategies that actively engaged the students in their own learning; and most importantly, that he stood up for what he believed.

Interview with Rebecca (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Rebecca: I just feel enlightened. The Vivian Paley book, reading that really helped me to start understanding things that go on in the classroom. For example, the cursing scene, the child who used curse words in the classroom and she used those words. In rural Georgia, you just don’t do that in the classroom. You would never say those words back to a child like she did. I realize that it was the setting, but then I realized what if I do teach in a different area? I know that it is not acceptable here, but what if I hear another teacher do it? What am I going to think? So, it has made me more aware of what can go on. Like the children’s literature that we read. I feel like it is important to introduce that into the classroom, literature by African American authors. I just think that it has broadened my views and has made me a better, whole-hearted person, well-rounded.

In response to the request for additional comments, Rebecca focused on her feeling of increased awareness to differences and how the experiences have helped to increase her understanding not only of others but also of their different reactions to situations. She points to how the reading of White Teacher (Paley, 2002) caused her to look at situations from other perspectives. In addition, Rebecca acknowledges the importance of introducing children to multicultural literature.

Interview with Heather (Warren, 2004)

Lyndall: Are there other things that have impressed you or other things that you would like to add that we have not addressed in these questions?

Heather: Just that I really think that it was a good class. It helped me to look at the fact that diversity is not only cultural and racial. It is so much more. You have to look at the differences in learning levels and styles. There are just so many differences between people. I think that these experiences are going to help me to be aware of all of the differences when I get into my own
classroom. I will try to find what is unique in each of my students and each of the parents.

*When asked if she wanted to share any other information related to the study,*

*Heather spoke of how she believed that the experiences that she had encountered as a part of the study would help her as a classroom teacher. She states that she now has a deeper understanding of diversity and in the importance of differences. She believes that it is this knowledge that will lead her to seek out the uniqueness of both the children and their families.*

*Interview with Allison (Warren, 2004)*

Lyndall: Is there anything else that you would like to add, something that might have been meaningful to you?

Allison: I really liked the independent study class because it opened my eyes to a lot of different things that I would not have recognized before, such as reading the book, *White Teacher* and watching the movie, *Conrack*. It opened my eyes to a lot that I wouldn’t have seen otherwise. Not that I necessarily had blinders on, but you wouldn’t necessarily see them unless somebody pointed it out to you. For example, in the video, *Conrack*, he was a White teacher coming into this society of African Americans, and he expected a lot from them because he felt that they were just like he was, just like the students he had taught before, and so he expected a lot from them. Other people didn’t, but he changed their minds by the way he felt about them. I don’t want my students to be like me or their parents to be like me. I want them to know I am there, there to teach their children, there to make it better for them, to make them feel more comfortable with me and our relationships together in our classroom.

Lyndall: One other question, you mentioned relationships with parents, what do feel that parents have to offer you?

Allison: (pauses) The opportunity for me to be a part of their family and their lives, getting to know who they are, getting to know their children, and helping them any way that I can.

Lyndall: You know that the parent knows that child better than…

Allison: Right

Lyndall: They are very much a….
Allison: and if I have a problem, I want to feel as if I could go to them, and they could explain to me what’s wrong instead of me feeling like I couldn’t talk about that with them because it’s a personal thing, but if they felt open with me, I would want them to be able to talk about it.

Lyndall: Right now, how do you feel about talking to parents of different cultures and talking about some of those hard issues?

Allison: I am pretty comfortable with it because I am a people person. I can bring things out in a joking manner and at the same time get what needs to be said out there in a nice way. I am pretty comfortable with it. It doesn’t make me nervous or anything.

Lyndall: I know that we are not always sure what parents are going to bring to our doors and what issues we may have to deal with. For example, their child is being discriminated against for one reason or another. Sometimes it is not, like you said, that we have blinders on, but sometimes we do things without realizing that we were offensive…

Allison: Right, right.

Lyndall: There are some odd situations that come up sometimes that cause you to have to deal with some difficult issues whether it is dealing with a different race, different cultures, different languages, discrimination, and prejudice.

Allison: My mom is a teacher too, and I think that the experiences that she has had have helped me. I mean children come into her classroom, and the parents are saying things like “I hate this school.” They are racist, and da, da, da, da, da, da. After they leave my mom’s classroom, they love it. They are saying things like, “Oh, we love school. We love this classroom.” I just think that through the experiences that Mom’s gone through and her telling me how she handles certain situations has helped me a lot to become who I am and be able to deal with issues such as racial issues in my classroom, and so, I just think that in the way that she handles it helps me. She talks to me about things and that helps a lot too.

In response to the request for additional information, Allison began by saying that the experiences, particularly reading White Teacher and viewing Conrack, had opened her eyes to many things that she would not have otherwise noticed and how they had helped her to define her role in the classroom. As a part of this conversation, she referred to relationships with parents. Because I wanted to verify my previous impression of
Allison’s perspective on this topic, I took the opportunity to ask further questions that would provide her with the opportunity to clarify her views. As she spoke, Allison confirmed my thinking. To me, her statements indicate that she believes that she has much to give parents, but parents have little to offer her. The only example she provided is one in which she would communicate problems or difficulties with a child to the parents. She continued to speak of her confidence in dealing with difficult issues, but she did not demonstrate any recognition that because of differences in race or culture, the ways in which she chose to deal with these might unintentionally offend parents. Finally, as in other responses throughout the interview, Allison seemed to have a need to make a good impression about her abilities to accept differences and to negotiate difficult situations.

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Throughout this study I have assumed multiple roles. Always, I was the researcher; at times, I became a participant; but more often, I was an observer. As the researcher, I had to be sure to follow the appropriate protocol to ensure proper implementation of the study; I needed to attend to the guidelines for completion of the study as they are designated in the methodology; and I had to remain as objective as possible as I introduced the experiences and interacted with the participants. As a participant, I became involved in the same experiences which were provided for the teacher candidates. I completed all of the readings. I viewed the video. I continued to learn about myself, to refine my beliefs, and to reflect upon my practice as a teacher educator. However, as I reflected upon and discussed each of the participants, her personal and cultural identity, her experiences, and her responses, I focused on my roles
as observer and facilitator. As an observer and facilitator, I listened, watched, and reflected. I tried to put all of the pieces together and to make sense of the experiences and how they affected the young women who agreed to participate in the study. Finally, as I examined myself and reflected upon my practice throughout the study, I concentrated on my role as participant. In doing so I addressed the impact that my own participation in this research process has had on me personally and as an educator.

**Reflections on Allison**

I will start my reflections with Allison strictly because she is the participant that intrigued me the most throughout the study. I remember from the very beginning, as I read her autobiographical paper, thinking how much this young woman had experienced in her short life. There were two situations which made a lasting impression on me. First was the level of control her parents seemed to have on her even as a young adult. The second was a three year relationship that Allison had with a young man. This, too, was a relationship based on control: one of physical and emotional abuse. The experiences that Allison described in her autobiography all seemed to be ones in which she was trying to break away from the control of others and find her strength as an individual.

When I would find myself getting frustrated with Allison, whether it was from the lack of clarity in her responses, the over confident defensiveness in her voice, her overwhelming need for acceptance, or the lack of recognition of her own weaknesses, I seemed to always come back to the information she gave to me in her autobiographical paper. This is how I knew who Allison really is and what she struggles with on a daily basis. By going back and considering this, I could see why Allison’s answers were unclear and, at times, contradictory. I could begin to understand why she feels that she
must be accepted and loved by the children and parents with whom she works. Through her writing, she offered me a way to understand her actions, her emotions, and her motivations. As I read, I could see that Allison is still searching for ways to define herself as a unique individual. She is still defining her personal beliefs. She has a strong need to feel accepted by others. She does not yet have the confidence and strength to break away from the control of her parents.

As I considered where Allison is at this point in her life, I became less discouraged by and judgmental of her responses and began to look for ways that the experiences of the study had actually affected her. Taking a new perspective, I could see that reading White Teacher and watching Conrack had indeed made her think about many things that she had just accepted in the past. She commented several times that she was taught by her parents to always accept others for whom they are and not to judge based on outside appearances. This was the expectation of her parents. Allison has a strong desire to please her parents and seeks their approval through her actions. She accepted their expectations without question. At this time, Allison seems to be questioning and redefining her personal beliefs as a result of her new experiences. Looking more closely at Allison as an individual helped me to better understand the nature of her responses.

As I think back now upon this process – the way that I dealt with my frustration and confusion over Allison’s responses – I can see that I am doing for my students exactly what I wish for them to do with their own. I am trying to understand the actions and motivations of my students based upon who they are as individuals not on preset guidelines that apply to everyone equally. Allison did not demonstrate the degree of
growth that I had initially expected; however, I needed to look at the context. For Allison, she is taking the steps that are appropriate for her at this time. Developing personal beliefs is a process. It takes time and experience. It does not happen overnight or over the period of a semester. It is a life-long journey. Allison seems to be at the beginning.

Having completed my final interview with Allison and looking back at the “White Identity Orientations” (p.100) as they are described by Gary Howard (1999), I believe that Allison still possesses many of the characteristics of the fundamentalist. Throughout our conversation, she ignored or avoided the recognition of Whiteness and demonstrated confusion as to what this means. Through her responses she seemed to be trying to rationalize her superiority as a White teacher. In addition, Allison presented a strong tendency toward “colorblindness.” Regardless of color, she believed everyone to be the same. Finally, Allison’s insistence on helping those who are different or who she considers less fortunate communicated her desire to assimilate everyone into the guidelines of what she considers right or appropriate. She failed to acknowledge the value of other races or cultures.

I do believe, however, that participation in the study affected Allison. Her movement forward in her development of White identity to the integrationist stage is limited but present. I see two particular characteristics that place her within this stage. First, the lack of clarity found in Allison’s responses overall and her tendency to contradict herself provides me with evidence that Allison has reached a state of dissonance and is beginning to question her own beliefs. Second, Allison is willing to work with children of other races and cultures and wants them and their families to be comfortable with her and at ease in her classroom.
I believe that with time and more experiences that further challenge her, Allison will continue the exploration of her personal beliefs. Because of her overwhelming need to do what is right in the eyes of her parents and her strong desire to be accepted and appreciated by others, Allison may find breaking away to establish her own ideals more difficult. The experiences that she encountered as a part of this study have only allowed her to take a small first step toward defining who she is as a White teacher.

Reflections on Rebecca

Next, I will present my reflections as they relate to Rebecca who, I believe, demonstrated the most progress in developing and understanding her identity as a White teacher. Participation in the study provided Rebecca with experiences that encouraged her to examine herself as an individual, separate from her family and to define her personal beliefs about culture, race, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Prior to this involvement, she had never been openly challenged to explore what she believed and why.

At the beginning of the study, when I read Rebecca’s autobiographical paper, it was her honesty that impressed me the most. Within this paper, she was willing to admit to her lack of experience with other cultures and races and also to her limited knowledge. She openly acknowledged the fear she felt walking into a classroom that was represented almost completely by Black children. She recognized that even though her best friend from Eastman was Black, she was not prepared for this initial experience. It was evident to me that she took the assignment seriously and looked at it as a learning experience that would her help to understand her beliefs and values.
My thoughts about Rebecca’s dedication to examining her beliefs were confirmed during the interview process. When asked to identify the experiences that most challenged her, Rebecca identified the autobiographical paper as the one that forced her to confront her beliefs as an individual. She expressed the difficulty that she had looking honestly and critically at herself and her family.

As I read Rebecca’s writings and listened to her contributions to class discussions throughout the study, I found myself thinking about the changes that were occurring and how these related to Howard’s (1999) explanation of White identity development. Rebecca’s autobiography gave me a good idea of where she was in her development of White identity at the start of the study, and the interview process which occurred at the end of the study allowed me to focus on the progress of her development as a result of participation in the study.

At the beginning, Rebecca’s descriptions of herself, her actions and her beliefs, placed her between Howard’s (1999) fundamentalist and integrationist stages. There were several characteristics that positioned her as a fundamentalist. The first of these was Rebecca’s adherence to colorblindness, the idea that color does not determine who a person is. The second was her belief that all children should be treated equally and in the same manner regardless of their racial or cultural backgrounds. The third characteristic is linked closely to the first two. Because she believed that everyone should be treated alike and that color did not matter, she demonstrated an assimilationist perspective, one in which everyone would meet the same guidelines, standards, and expectations.

Even from the beginning, however, Rebecca was not firmly positioned as a fundamentalist. She also exhibited characteristics of the integrationist. There were three
characteristics that seemed most significant in this area. First was Rebecca’s desire to learn about other cultures. This was seen in her interactions with her best friend from Eastman who was Black. Second was the evidence of confusion over White dominance. This was demonstrated in her encounter with the all White daycare in Eastman. Rebecca was puzzled over the fact that the director of the daycare refused to hire her Black friend who had a degree in early childhood education. Even though Rebecca feared for her own job, she confronted the situation openly with the director. Second was her feeling of guilt or shame. Rebecca expressed this as a result of the confrontation with the daycare director and also in her experiences with the children at Baldwin County Child and Development Center. At first, Rebecca felt frightened to work with this class of children who were mostly Black, but later, she felt bad that she had been prejudged in this situation. The third characteristic was simply that she was beginning to question herself about her beliefs and what she felt was right.

By the end of the study, I could see evidence that Rebecca had made considerable progress in defining her beliefs and her identity as a White teacher. The interview provided evidence that she had moved from the fundamentalist stage to a point between the integrationist and transformationist stages. According to Howard (1999) there are several distinct characteristics which Rebecca has demonstrated that indicate her movement into the transformationist stage. These include her ability to reflectively critique her personal beliefs, her interactions with others, and her classroom practices. Rebecca openly admits in the interview that she now recognizes that during early placements her practice was limited to serving one culture. At this point she strives to understand her children and their families and actively plan in a way that serves the
needs and builds on the strengths of all children. Another characteristic is Rebecca’s recognition that teaching the children in her classroom needs to be a collaborative effort between her and the families of the children. Teaching for her is now viewed as a shared responsibility. In addition, Rebecca is empathetic toward the children and families with whom she works and is now actively seeking information from others to help her understand racial and cultural differences. She is open to these different perspectives and sees her connection to others as a way of enhancing her own life. Finally, Rebecca has moved from acceptance of the way things are to actively trying to make a difference. One example of this that she gave in the interview is that she now confronts her family and friends about racial prejudices. She states that she is willing to take a stand rather than walk away.

Even with these changes, in some regards Rebecca remains within the integrationist stage. She still harbors some feeling of shame or guilt as she continues to examine White dominance at a personal rather than institutional or societal level. In addition, still seeks acceptance from others. She is overly cautious not to offend others in what she says or does. She states that at times this fear causes her to “tippy-toe” around difficult topics.

Overall, I believe that as a result of participation in experiences that openly challenged her to explore her beliefs, relationships, and practices, Rebecca has gained a much deeper understanding of herself as an individual. Continuing to actively practice self reflection will allow Rebecca to further refine her beliefs about diversity and her role and responsibility as teacher of diverse groups of children. Rebecca, however, seems to be well on her way to becoming a culturally responsive teacher.
Reflections on Amy

My reflections on Amy begin with one of my first encounters with her as she entered the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program. During an orientation session, I noticed that Amy was working on her math homework rather than paying attention to the speaker. I clearly remember jumping to the conclusion that this young woman was going to be a problem for the next two years. As her cohort leader, I could not allow this type of unprofessional behavior to go unnoticed. So, during the next break, I approached Amy and very firmly informed her that this behavior was unacceptable. It was not this confrontation that impressed me most but rather what happened later in the day when Amy found me in my office. She had come to apologize and to explain. The truth was that she was mortified by my reprimand and truly sorry for her actions in the sessions. She knew she had made a bad impression, but her fear of math was so great that she felt she needed every possible minute to stay ahead. Failing math would mean that she could not remain in the program. I learned much about Amy that day. The young woman that I thought was arrogant and unprofessional was actually quite humble and honest.

This early experience with Amy taught me to stay open to possibilities. As I got to know Amy over the first few months, I continued to be surprised by her. She always seemed to amaze me. My interpretations of her based on outward appearances always seemed to be off target. Among the cohort of twenty-four, Amy appeared to be one of the most confident and self-assured. Her demeanor in the classroom along with her interactions with students lent support to this assumption. Getting to know her, however, told me that this was a façade. Inwardly, she was quite uncertain of her position and abilities. Her self-esteem was low, and she doubted herself as a teacher.
These observations increased my interest in watching Amy grow and mature throughout the two years in the program. I was unaware at this time, however, that she would be one of the participants in this study. As a matter of fact, I had not even designed the study. Her eventual participation gave me the opportunity to continue my reflection on her development on a deeper level both personally and professionally.

Reading Amy’s autobiographical paper at the beginning of the study allowed me to understand her personal, racial, and cultural beliefs and what had influenced their development. Through her writing, I began to see her as a person with very strong convictions. She describes three different experiences that support this assumption. First is the description of her mother’s racial comments and how she still struggles against this influence. Second is the story of how she came to be on the dance team. Amy stated that she did not make the cheerleading squad, but since the dance routines were the part she really enjoyed, she decided to try out for the dance team. When she reported for tryouts, she was shocked by the following.

As I looked around the room and observed African Americans, Bosnians, those of Spanish descent, and a few Caucasians, I realized we were the leftovers. I was not good enough to make the cheerleading squad, but these girls did not even have a chance. The only girls that made the cheerleading squad were White, and this began to disturb me. (Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004)

The third experience is one that also occurred during her high school years. As a part of a class that examined careers in education, Amy found herself working with a small group of students whose first language was Spanish. It was this experience that led Amy to the following conclusion: “I am fully aware of the fact that there are people and,
sadly, teachers out there that do discriminate and think derogatory comments about people due to the color of their skin” (Amy’s Autobiographical Paper, Warren, 2004). She is determined that for her the prejudices will not win out over what she believes is right. She perceives her role as a teacher as providing a quality education for all children regardless of race, culture, or religion.

Even from the beginning of the study, Amy had very firm convictions about what she believed to be right. Considering these, I would place Amy in Howard’s (1999) integrationist stage. She acknowledges diverse perspectives, has begun to question concepts of White dominance, is interested in learning about other cultures, and links elements of her self-esteem to helping others. I was interested to see how Amy would internalize and apply the experiences gained as a participant in the study.

It was during my interview with Amy at the end of the study that I was able to see how Amy had incorporated what she had learned from the various experiences into her practice and how she had continued to develop in defining herself as a White teacher. Amy’s dialogue was filled with examples that told me that she was definitely moving from Howard’s (1999) integrationist stage to that of transformationist. First, Amy’s description of involving parents in the education through the family literacy project gave a strong example of perceiving education as a collaborative responsibility. It also shows that she is actively seeking ways to get to know the children in her classroom and their families. Second, Amy’s explanation of her difficulty in reading White Teacher provided evidence that she is open to and accepting of new and difference perspectives. Third, Amy’s dedication to helping the students in her classroom learn to value and respect difference provides an example of how she has begun to challenge White dominance.
As I listened to Amy, I was encouraged by the impact that participating in the study had upon her. From the beginning, she seemed well established in her belief system, but as a result of experiences that challenged her, she was able to refine these and begin to incorporate her beliefs into her classroom practice. I believe that Amy will continue to reflect upon herself, her values, and her practices. At this point, I see Amy well on her way to becoming a teacher who is culturally responsive.

Reflections on Heather

Finally, I will describe my reflections about Heather. As I think back on my initial impressions of Heather, I clearly remember thinking that this very quiet, shy young woman was very naïve in her views of life. However, after I listened to Heather’s contributions in class, I began to see her in a much different light. Yes, Heather was quiet but attentive, and when she said something, it was profound. Through her insight into situations Heather demonstrated a deep level of reflection. It was not until I read her autobiographical paper, however, that I truly began to understand who this young woman was.

By sharing her autobiography, Heather helped me to appreciate how a child from Minnesota, who grew up with very few opportunities to interact with adults or children who were racially or culturally different, had come to establish such a strong sense of herself and her beliefs. As she described the experiences in her life that had contributed to the establishment of a firm set of beliefs, I began to understand. As Heather made her way through elementary, middle, and high school, she established the foundation for her beliefs as they relate to prejudice and discrimination. Her friendship with a young Muslim girl showed her the overt types of discrimination that can occur based upon
religious beliefs. Being publicly accused by peers of being homosexual began her understanding of the kind of prejudice suffered as a result of sexual preference. During high school Heather became active in her church, which she describes as open and accepting of others regardless of differences. Through these interactions within her church, Heather continued to define her personal beliefs.

Knowing this information about Heather, I wondered from the beginning how participation in the study would challenge her. She seemed to have come so far in her young life. Throughout the study, I continued to puzzle over this. Each of her written responses was insightful. It was not until I interviewed Heather did the answer to this question become apparent to me. Through her comments during the interview, Heather helped me to understand the ways that the experiences of the study had indeed encouraged her to grow in her own identity development. When asked how participation in the study had affected her personal, racial, and cultural beliefs, she acknowledged that she really did not feel like it had changed her beliefs, but that it had broadened her awareness of what happens to minority groups, how they feel, and what they might experience. In addition, when Heather was asked about the experience that challenged her most, she identified the class discussions and the reading of multicultural books. When she said this, it made perfect sense to me since prior to this time she had had very little experience negotiating racial differences. Finally, during the interview, Heather stated that writing the autobiographical paper did not challenge her beliefs and that she actually enjoyed the assignments. She recognized that even though completing this did not help her to define her beliefs, it did cause her to seek out the reasons for them. Even with the solid belief system that Heather had formed as a result of her life experiences, it
was now clear that participation in the experiences that were designed as a part of this study had had an impact and had affected her in a positive manner.

It was not as easy for me to place Heather within the descriptive guidelines of Howard’s (1999) “White Identity Orientations” (p.100). Heather came into the study demonstrating open-mindedness, acceptance, and appreciation for difference. She understood the importance of empathy for others. She recognized the value of differences and how these served to enhance her life. For the most part, Heather fell into the transformationist stage from the very beginning. There seemed to be only one exception. She had not quite incorporated all of this into her classroom practice. I could tell by talking to Heather that this is something that she, too, was considering. I believe that Heather has become more conscious of the importance of getting to know the students in her classroom and their parents. Because of this and her open-mindedness, I believe that as Heather enters her own classroom, she will seek out culturally responsive teaching practices.

Reflections on Me as a Participant

During the interview process, I found myself primarily in the role of facilitator. However, as I asked the participants the designated questions, I considered my own responses. How had my participation in this study affected me as a teacher educator, as an individual? I believe that, in part, I have already discussed this, at least from the point of view of the individual experiences. I have shared my responses to the collage, to the readings, and to the interviews. Here, I want to look more closely at what I gained from the overall experience. In order to do this, I must return to my own beliefs about children.
On June 6, 2000, I returned from a ten day study tour of the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Even though I arrived home with more questions than answers, I felt reaffirmed and committed to my beliefs about young children and how they learn. Lori Malaguzzi, one of the founders of the schools of Reggio Emilia (1993a) states that “what we do know is that to work with children is to work one-third with certainty and two-thirds with uncertainty and the new. The one-third that is certain makes us understand and want to understand” (p. 86). The not knowing, the uncertainty, is what makes us continue to search. “In this regard we are in the same situation with the children” (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p. 86). This being true, the responsibility of educators of young children becomes one in which they “reinvent and reeducate themselves along with the children” (Rinaldi, 1993, p. 111).

Believing this, I propose that it is a time for educators in Georgia to participate in serious conversations about young children and how they learn. It is time to heed the advise of Malaguzzi (1993a): “Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water” (p. 79). Loris Malaguzzi and a group of dedicated Italian educators had a chance to be a part of something extraordinary when they rose to the challenges and accepted the risks of creating schools that were different from the norm. I believe that Georgia educators also have the opportunity to become a part of something extraordinary if only they are willing to accept the challenge. To do so they must be willing to depart from the familiar and venture into the uncertain. They must learn to listen to the voices of children, give these voices value and respect, and trust that children are competent, strong, and capable of constructing their own knowledge.
How could this proposal be realized? Traveling to Reggio Emilia had generated more questions for me than it answered. I returned from Italy searching for ways to implement such a child-centered philosophy in Georgia’s schools. The Reggio Approach to educating young children cannot be transplanted into the schools of Georgia. It is based on the historical and cultural roots of the Italian people. Designing and conducting this study, however, has allowed me to see other possibilities. I can now see that even though it is not possible at this time to implement the Reggio Approach in its entirety, the philosophy itself which is based on respect for children and families can be encouraged by supporting more culturally responsive teaching practices.

In all honesty, I can say that completing this study has provided a means by which I can follow through with my goal to prepare classroom teachers who will honor children, seek out their strengths, respect them as individuals, and value their differences. By defining and implementing programmatic changes which will challenge preservice teachers to explore their own cultural roots; define their personal, cultural, and racial beliefs; and examine the effects of White dominance and privilege, I believe that teacher educators will be better able to prepare culturally responsive teachers who work collaboratively with all families to educate their children.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, I present the eight findings that resulted from this research study. In addition, I include a discussion of the implications that these findings hold for teacher education in increasing the cultural responsiveness of teachers at all levels. These are eight findings: (1) Critically examining one’s autobiographical roots, reflecting upon one’s background, and examining one’s values and beliefs help develop empathy and compassion toward others who are different. (2) Acknowledging and confronting Whiteness, White privilege, and White dominance are complicated processes that involve risk taking and openness and also lead to vulnerability. (3) Multicultural literature helps create a safe environment for preservice teachers to generate difficult conversations related to racism, prejudice, and oppression. (4) Narrative imagination allows one to think, to question, to search for meaning, to look beyond the habitual and the mundane, and to see possibilities. (5) Developing empathy and compassion towards others takes time and differs for each individual. (6) Cultivating empathy and compassion fosters the development of culturally responsive pedagogy. (7) Preparing teachers to become culturally responsive in their practices is challenging, time consuming, and requires much dedication, energy, patience, and strategic planning. (8) Using multicultural literature to develop empathy and compassion in preservice teachers towards others is the first, perhaps the most appropriate step, to prepare culturally responsive teachers in predominant White and rural areas in the United States.
This study, with its focus on preparing teachers who demonstrate empathy and compassion for their students and their families through culturally responsive pedagogy, grew from my own struggles both in my personal and professional lives. Growing up, my life experiences taught me to value differences, to respect others, to take a stand for what I believed, and to question stereotypes and prejudices. In my professional life as an educator, I learned that to teach effectively I must value differences in myself and in my students, respect my students and their families, create a risk free environment, build on my students’ strengths, encourage a sense of curiosity in my students, and question the status quo. These were the life lessons that led me to examine the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU and to seek strategies that could assist preservice teachers in becoming more respectful of children as individuals; more accepting of their families and their cultural differences; more willing to listen openly to children, to their questions, theories, stories, ideas, and concerns; and more culturally responsive in their teaching practice.

With over seventeen years of experience as a teacher educator in Early Childhood Education at GC&SU, I had encountered on a daily basis the increased Whiteness in teacher education along with the increased diversity the public school student population. I could easily relate to the reports by Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Danne Davis, and Kim Fries (2004) which state that, depending upon the institution and location, 80-93% of the students enrolled in collegiate education programs are now White. During this time, I had also become quite frustrated with the obvious ways in which both preservice and inservice teachers demonstrated their lack of respect and value for the diverse qualities
and characteristics of the children in their classrooms. I could directly relate to recent research which reports that there has been an increase in diversity within the public school student population. Across the nation the student population is becoming more and more diverse, Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) report that in 2000, 40% of the student population in public schools was represented by students of color. In addition, they predict that children of color will constitute the statistical majority of the student population by 2035 and increase annually to an estimated 57% in 2050 (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). Conversely, there is an overwhelming presence of Whiteness in teacher education as well as White teachers who are ill-prepared to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Marx & Pennington, 2003; LeCompte & McCray, 2002; Kailin, 1999; Reed, 1998; McIntyre, 1997). As I considered my experiences along with these reports, I decided to include preservice teachers who were currently enrolled in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU in the design of my dissertation inquiry.

The more I read, and the more I observed, the more passionate I became about my dissertation inquiry. As I searched for the theoretical framework for my dissertation work, I continued to come back to the works of Geneva Gay (2000), Maxine Greene (1978), and Martha Nussbaum (1997). In her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Geneva Gay (2000) explains that “teaching is a contextual and situational process. As such, it is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students are included in its implementation” (p. 21). By encouraging students to find their own voices, to explore multiple perspectives, to engage in many
ways of thinking and learning, and to become active participants in shaping their own
learning, culturally responsive teaching is empowering, emancipatory, and transformative
(Gay, 2000). I felt as if finally I had found what I had been searching for: support for my
own beliefs as they relate to valuing and respecting children, their backgrounds, their
cultures, their families, their ideas, their inquiries, and their experiences.

Meanwhile I was also searching for ways to prepare preservice teachers to
become culturally responsive teachers. As I gradually realized that developing empathy
and compassion towards others who are different is the starting point, I began to turn to
Martha Nussbaum’s (1997) theory of narrative imagination and Maxine Greene’s (1978)
notion of the literary imagination. Nussbaum (1997) defines narrative imagination as “the
ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself,
to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and
wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (pp. 10-11). The imagination,
with its power to “create order, to provoke authentic vision, and to surprise” (Greene,
2001, p. 83), enables the perception of possibilities. “But the role of imagination is not to
resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily
unseen, unheard, and unexpected” (Greene, 1995, p. 28). Employing the concepts of
narrative imagination and literary imagination along with selected forms of literature
could provide a means by which preservice teachers could move from personal
understanding to the understanding of others and develop the ability to listen without
defensiveness or guilt, to improve judgment and enhance sensitivity.

Arriving at this theoretical framework based upon the theories of Gay (2000),
Nussbaum (1997), and Greene (1978, 1995) was not an easy task for me. However, it
represented a means by which I, as a teacher educator, could explore programmatic changes that have the potential to prepare preservice teachers to become culturally responsive in their teaching practices.

Following the primary purpose of my study to examine the existing Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at GC&SU, I chose four white, middle class females who entered the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program in the fall of 2003 as the participants for the study. As one of the two mentor leaders who headed the cohort of students who began at this time, I worked very closely with each participant, serving as an advisor, a field placement supervisor, and instructor. Because of the nature of the program, my relationship with the students is quite unique. Unlike most professors at GC&SU, as a mentor leader for a cohort of students, I spend two years with the same group of students. At the beginning of the program, I participate with the students in teambuilding experiences, orientation activities, counseling sessions, and social events. In addition, I teach part of the required course work each semester, arrange and confirm field placements, conduct field placement supervision, and provide advisement. The very design of the program lends itself to the creation of an environment of trust and interdependence. The cohort members become a cohesive group which provides a space where risks can be taken.

Having spent a year with the participants, I began data collection for the study in the fall semester of 2004. At this time all participants had taken part in orientation events and counseling sessions, had fulfilled the course work requirements for the first two semesters of the program, and had completed four seven week placements in a range of classrooms within two school systems. In addition, during the time that data were
collected each participant was enrolled in EDEC 4960 Special Topics. This was a course that I had specifically designed for the purpose of increasing awareness and understanding of the role of imagination in the development of culturally responsive pedagogy. I arranged opportunities that allowed the participants to explore their own Whiteness, examine Greene’s (1995) concepts of imagination, and engage in narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 1997) through multicultural literature. In the following section, I will present how I arrived at the eight findings as I developed my dissertation research activities.

The first research activity that I developed with the participants was one which required them to engage in a critical exploration of their autobiographical roots. After searching for their cultural roots, reflecting upon their backgrounds, and examining their cultural values and beliefs, each participant composed an autobiographical paper. This type of self examination of one’s identity and beliefs is strongly supported in the writings of Nussbaum (1997), Greene (1978), Delpit (1995), Howard (1999), LeCompte and McCray (2002), McIntyre (1997), Landsman (2001), and Nieto (2000). Having read and studied these works, I believed that I understood the importance of exploring and sharing personal histories in the development of empathy and compassion for others and the role that this examination plays in encouraging teaching practices that are culturally responsive. I fully expected the confirmation of this claim, but I was not, however, prepared for the comprehensiveness and richness of the results.

As part of the activity, I shared my autobiography with the participants. I did this for two reasons. The first was to help them to understand more fully the nature of the assignment. The second was to build a greater sense of trust between me and the
participants. As I shared my story with the class, I noticed that what the faces of the students communicated was quite unexpected. I saw the concerns in their eyes and heard the resonance of my experience in their comments. For this group of students I had become more than a mentor leader, more than a field placement supervisor, more than the professor for the course. I had become “real.” I was real in the sense that they could relate to my experiences. I was a person who had experienced hardships and triumphs. By sharing my story, I had become someone that this group of students could connect with and begin to understand.

When the time came for the participants to share their stories, I reminded them that they were not required to share anything that would make them uncomfortable. They could convey as much or as little information as they chose. As I expected, the sharing began slowly. However, after a short time, the monologue of sharing became a conversation. They listened and responded empathetically to one another. Their connections were evident. They began to comment openly about commonalities that even after a year together in the cohort they had never realized. I listened while acting primarily as facilitator to the discussion by asking clarifying or guiding questions. As I listened, I learned. I thought that I knew these students. I was wrong. It was only by listening to their stories that I began to understand these young women. Unconsciously and unintentionally, I had prejudged these women. I had made assumptions about their experiences or the lack thereof. Having heard their personal stories, I could now see them in a much different way. This experience was a demonstration of the type of connections that are needed in classrooms where a culturally responsive pedagogy could be developed. We had begun to develop empathy and compassion for one another.
As I became more connected with my participants, I realized that people “are more likely to ask their own questions and seek their own transcendence when they feel themselves to be grounded in their personal histories, their lived lives” (Greene, 1978, p.2). I realized that critically examining one’s autobiographical roots, reflecting upon one’s background, and examining one’s values and beliefs help develop empathy and compassion toward others who are different (Finding 1). I also realized that one’s life experiences greatly influence the formation of one’s personal, racial, and cultural beliefs, which in turn influence one’s attitudes, motivations, and actions. It is through the process of reflecting upon and examining these experiences that one could begin to develop empathetic understanding towards others. As my participants began to understand more about one another, they began to see one another as individuals who could be understood, respected, and valued. This beginning process, however, was different for each one. For instance, Heather, one of my participants, who tended to hold onto a strong, well-developed belief system, was able to recognize the origins of her personal, cultural, and racial beliefs through her autobiography. “I am strong in my beliefs, and I know what I believe. That [her autobiography] just kind of helped me to explore why I believe those things and what shaped those beliefs” (Interview with Heather Warren, 2004). For Amy, another participant of mine, completing the autobiographical paper helped her to uncover hidden prejudices.

I had been at the park, and I had heard people being loud, and I thought, “Oh, Black people are just so loud.” It was like my mother’s voice that I could hear in my head. I had just grown up with that. But, I don’t believe that. So, it is just
things like that that I learned about myself, things that I really didn’t know that I had within me. (Interview with Amy, Warren, 2004)

Realizing that these feelings of prejudice were a part of her life experiences gave Amy the opportunity to confront these and to begin the development of empathy and compassion for others.

Exploring her personal, cultural, and racial beliefs was a challenging experience for Rebecca as well. Unlike Heather and Amy, this activity helped her to define herself as an individual, to separate her personal beliefs and values from those of her family.

That paper really challenged my thinking about who I am as an individual, not who my mom is, or who my dad is, or how I was raised, but who I am today and what I believe is right and wrong when it deals with different cultures and races. (Interview with Rebecca, Warren, 2004,)

Though quite different for each, the progress made in developing empathy and compassion for others was encouraging. Confronting their beliefs about race, prejudice, and culture through the exploration of their cultural roots through autobiography was the first step for the participants as they move toward culturally responsive teaching.

Creating and responding to a cultural collage was the second research activity I developed with the participants. The purpose was to determine the participants’ awareness of group dominance, stereotypes, or social values that are communicated through media. Their participation required them to address their own Whiteness in terms of White dominance. As described earlier in Chapter IV, the cultural collage was assembled by the participants from pictures of people that were collected from popular magazines, sale papers, travel brochures, newspapers, etc. Afterwards, the participants
closely examined the collage as a whole to reflect upon the messages conveyed by the visual representation.

As I read the participants’ written response to the collage, I began to see a primary theme that was common to all. The theme that emerged from the responses was the concept that the media presents the standard to which many people try to conform. By examining the writing of the participants, I found that the acknowledgment of the representation of White dominance within the collage was almost completely absent. Where all the participants recognized the standard represented by the photographs, no one questioned how people of other races would respond to these. Only one participant, Heather, commented in her writing about the presence of White dominance, and even this comment was limited to recognition. “Most of the people are young, beautiful, skinny, White females or young, handsome, buff, White males. There are some African Americans thrown in there, but even the African Americans are young, beautiful, and skinny” (*Heather’s Response to Cultural Collage*, Warren, 2004).

After composing their individual responses to the cultural collage, the participants engaged in a discussion related to their interpretations and reflections. Throughout the discussions, I noticed that conversations always seemed to drift away from issues of race. I remember becoming inwardly frustrated that the participants continued to deny the monocultural nature of the collage. They were, however, sensitive to the absence of the elderly, the overweight, and the unattractive. These were all conditions to which each one could directly relate to in someway through personal experiences. When asked about the absence of other races, the group first argued that “they” were represented. I continued to question, to probe, playing the devil’s advocate. As I continue to ask about the absence of
different races or cultures, the atmosphere in the room became quite defensive in nature as if they knew that the lack of representation was legitimate, but they just could not voice the admission. “Frustrated by my continuous probing, one student finally asked, ‘Why does everyone have to focus on color? Why can’t all people just be treated the same?’” (Chapter IV, p. 118).

I found that these reactions and comments, though disturbing, are consistent with current research on White identity development. “Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal” (McIntosh, 1990). For this reason, it is quite difficult for those who have typically benefited from social position, race, or gender to examine the ways in which their own attitudes and practices are influenced by their backgrounds or their ignorance (Nieto, 2000). A study completed by Karon Nicol LeCompte and Audrey Davis McCray (2002) states that many prospective White teachers are unable to see themselves as a part of a race or as having a culture. In addition, Balaban (1995) states that “[f]acing our biases openly, recognizing the limits imposed by our embeddedness in our own culture and experience, acknowledging the values and beliefs we cherish, and accepting the influence of our emotions on our actions are extraordinary challenges” (p. 49).

When considering differences such as race, religion, gender, and social position, people tend to be placed in the role of either the victimized or the victimizer. Once these issues are confronted openly by individuals, they become vulnerable; by opening themselves up to others, they open themselves up to a multitude of feelings and emotions including guilt, blame, denial, and responsibility. For this reason, this type of critical reflection upon personal realities is something that many avoid (Greene, 1978). Because
of this tendency to avoid difficult issues, preservice teachers have had very little practice
confronting racial issues in meaningful and productive ways (Nieto, 2000). As they
examine their own Whiteness, individuals often find themselves struggling to find
something good about Whiteness, making excuses for the White race, or denying
responsibility for participating in a system that perpetuates oppression and privilege
based upon skin color (McIntyre, 2002). Acknowledging and confronting Whiteness,
White privilege, and White dominance are complicated processes that involve risk taking
and openness and also lead to vulnerability (Finding 2).

As I began to recognize the difficulty experienced by the confrontation of
Whiteness, White privilege, and White dominance, I began to search for a comfortable
way for these explorations and discussions to occur. Florio-Ruane (2001) explains that if
in-depth discussions and conversations related to difficult issues such as equity,
discrimination, prejudice, race, and racism are to occur, participants require the security
of a safe space that is open and respectful. Having studied the writings of Nussbaum
(1997) and Greene (1978), I realized that stories found within multicultural literature
could provide this risk-free place where conversations could be initiated. I began to use
multicultural literature as a vehicle for exploring the possibilities for cultivating narrative
imagination--developing empathy and compassion towards others, which is a starting
point for developing a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Literature “with its ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of
people of many different sorts, makes an especially rich contribution” (Nussbaum, 1997,
p. 86) for the development of “wide-awakeness” (Greene, 1978) and the powers of the
imagination, specifically the narrative imagination. The use of literary works to develop
the imagination is further justified by Greene (1976) by pointing out that experiencing these works allows individuals to enter an imaginary world of awareness and permits the author to lead them on a journey. Through the story, the author has the power to shock the reader, causing her to think, to notice, to question, to search for meaning, to realize possibilities (Nussbaum, 1997). For these reasons, the reading of multicultural literature which engages the narrative imagination helps develop within readers the emotions of empathy and compassion for those who, for whatever reason, are different from themselves.

For the participants of this study, reading and discussing Vivian Gussin Paley’s book, *White Teacher*, provided a safe space to discuss the hard topics of race, prejudice, and discrimination. The book is a White teacher’s personal account of how she dealt with the challenges of racial and cultural differences within her classroom. Paley’s practices and beliefs challenged the participants. By discussing the prejudices, motivations, and actions of Paley, these topics became less personal, allowing the participants to feel less vulnerable and more willing to open up to honest and critical discussions. It was through the stories in *White Teacher* that the participants came to know the characters, sought understanding for their actions, connected to their emotions, and found commonalities in experiences. Multicultural literature helps create a safe environment for preservice teachers to generate difficult conversations related to racism, prejudice, and oppression (Finding 3).

The participants’ responses helped me to realize that reading *White Teacher* (2002) had indeed provided an environment within which they were comfortable in examining their own beliefs and values. For example, Heather, one of my participants,
explains that “the discussions really challenged me to figure out what my beliefs are about some of the things that I am seeing in the classroom that are not necessarily racial inequalities but other inequalities as well” (Interview with Heather, Warren, 2004). She became more aware of the way that children with special needs are treated. Reading the book helped both Allison and Rebecca, two other participants, to make connections between their own experiences and those described by Paley (2002). They began to see that they were not alone in their struggles to negotiate differences within their classrooms. Paley’s story provided a place where differences could be confronted with less risk of vulnerability.

Even though Amy “had a hard time with that book,” over time she was able to develop a sense of respect for Paley’s beliefs and her practices. “I would find myself getting very angry with her, just because of the way that she was with the children. It went against my beliefs as to the way you should deal with children, letting a child curse in the classroom and things like that” (Interview with Amy, Warren, 2004). Reading about Paley’s experiences in the classroom offered Amy a setting where she became comfortable considering the ideas and motivations of others that are different from her own.

Through the participants’ experiences I realized that acknowledging and confronting Whiteness, White privilege, and White dominance were complicated processes that involved risk taking and openness and also led to vulnerability. I also found that multicultural literature could provide a risk free place where these issues could be addressed, I began to search for more channels through with my participants could confront these issues. The Water is Wide, by Pat Conroy (2002), is based on a true story
of a White, liberal teacher who is sent to fill-in at a poor, all Black school on an island off
the coast of South Carolina, the story describes how one teacher used whatever was
available to educate illiterate, impoverished children. This was a text would directly
challenge the participants while relating to them as teachers. Because of time constraints
and the course load of the participants, I opted to have the participants view and respond
to the movie, Conrack, which is based upon Conroy’s work.

Before the participants viewed the movie, Conrack (Ritt, 1985), I encouraged
them to concentrate on their understanding of narrative imagination as it related to the
movie. As they watched Conrack, I asked them to focus on the importance of
understanding and respecting the unique culture represented by a group of students in
addition to addressing the individual needs of students, the motivation and actions of the
Conrack, administrators, and the students, and the relationships between the text and
personal experience. As a result, four major themes emerged from the participant’s
written responses: the importance of respecting and valuing students, the significance of
family and community support, the value of an experiential curriculum that is focused on
the needs and abilities of the students, and the need to persevere in order to affect change.
The existence of White power and privilege was not acknowledged by the participants.
This lack of recognition presents a concern, for throughout the movie are demonstrations
of how the imposition of White power and privilege affects others as well as examples
that were concealed within the motivations of characters. This absence of
acknowledgment by the participants further confirmed that the confrontation of the issues
surrounding Whiteness is a complicated and difficult process.
I realized that through their reading of *White Teacher* (Paley, 2002) and their viewing of *Conrack* (Ritt, 1985), the participants were challenged to view issues and situations from the point of view of others. This provided an opportunity for the participants to engage in the process of developing the narrative imagination which allowed them to explore worlds that were quite different from their own. Being able to imagine one’s self in the place of others allows for the understanding of their condition, their motivations, and their actions. “Using your imagination can provide a window into someone else’s life and encourage a sense of empathy in the person who is doing the imagining” (*Heather’s Response to Greene’s Writing*, Warren, 2004). It is through the narrative imagination that concern for the characters is inspired and empathy and compassion for others can develop (Nussbaum, 1997). Through narrative imagination, the reader is able to recognize that the other person is qualitatively different yet worthy of respect.

Narrative imagination allows one to think, to question, to search for meaning, to look beyond the habitual and the mundane, and to see possibilities (**Finding 4**). During my dissertation inquiry, I found that narrative imagination provided the participants with a safe environment where they could further their development of empathy and compassion by exploring the world from another’s point of view, where they were better able to understand the context of the “other’s” history and social world as well as the meanings behind actions. As this capacity is developed, so does the ability to imagine possibilities and alternatives.

As the participants read *White Teacher* and viewed *Conrack*, they were engaged in the process of developing their narrative imagination. There was evidence of definite
connections between the development of the narrative imagination and the development of an understanding for characters’ actions and motivations, between the realization of the need for imagination and the development of empathy and compassion for others who are different from themselves, an awareness of relationships between the text and their personal experiences, and between the imagination and the realization of possibilities.

Engaging the narrative imagination helped Heather to understand the purpose of reflection. “Paley (2002) did a lot of reflecting on herself as a teacher, and I realize that this is what we are supposed to be doing as student teachers” (Heather’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004). Reflecting upon her background and the experiences with the children in her class allowed Paley (2002) to realize subconscious prejudices. Paley’s reflections, made it possible for Amy to recognize hidden prejudices within herself. “Our fears and expectations influence the way that we teach children and that this is often suppressed or hidden from ourselves. I felt threatened, but I thought maybe she had a point and instantly began evaluating the way I treat my children” (Amy’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004). As she examined her own practices, Amy began to see possibilities for change within herself.

Reading White Teacher opened Rebecca’s eyes to possibilities as well. Even though she was upset by some of Paley’s actions in the classroom, Rebecca connected with her. “I felt like Vivian Paley [did], the author of White Teacher, because I didn’t know how the parents were going to look at me being as young as I am and being White. They didn’t know if I could connect with their children” (Rebecca’s Response to Paley’s Writing, Warren, 2004). Rebecca began to see new possibilities of working with parents and children that are respectful of their beliefs, values, and cultures.
As in the responses to *White Teacher* (Paley, 2002), I found that narrative imagination proved to be a key for helping participants realize possibilities as they viewed and interpreted the text of the movie, *Conrack* (Ritt, 1985). Viewing the movie allowed Allison to see possibilities for her students, unfortunately, not for herself. “If you have a passion for teaching and believe that no matter what color skin or where your children come from, they can learn” (*Allison’s Response to Ritt’s Conrack*, Warren, 2004). *Conrack* (Ritt, 1985) challenged and affected Allison’s beliefs about children and their capabilities.

The narrative imagination allows one to look beyond the obvious, to imagine what could be, to explore other possibilities. Many times assumptions are made about the motivations of others based upon personal experiences or prejudices. Seeing beyond these predetermined notions allows the development of understanding for others, their actions and their reasoning. For instance, as Heather reflected upon the actions of the parents in *Conrack*, she began to realize other explanations. Instead of being prejudiced toward Conroy because he was a White teacher sent to teach their children, she explains:

> The parents were probably just trying to do what they thought was best for their children, even though they were told that Conroy was helping their children to learn. They may have been afraid of what could happen because they had never had a teacher on the island that challenged their children or them as Conroy did.


Even though engaging the narrative imagination is valuable in developing empathy and compassion and allowing for the realization of possibilities, it is only another step in this process. Reading and analyzing the participants’ written responses
showed me that the participants themselves saw the development of empathy and compassion for others as more than a simple process. Developing empathy and compassion towards others takes time and differs for each individual (Finding 5). From their writings, three essential steps emerged. The participants suggested that teachers must first recognize the prejudices within themselves. In addition, they must not only recognize the differences in children but also identify ways that they, as teachers of these children, are different while realizing that differences are not limited to ones of race or culture. A third step in the development of empathy and compassion involves getting to know the children and their families. Taking the time to learn about the personalities and cultures of the children and their families communicates a sense of caring and respect that can otherwise be lost.

Recognizing prejudices within oneself, the first step in developing empathy and compassion that was suggested by the participants, is consistent with research in exploring White identity (e.g., LeCompte & McCray, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Landsman, 2001; Nieto, 2000) which suggests that many teachers harbor prejudices and stereotypes about ethnic groups and classes different from their own that, through the conditioning of the larger society, have been blindly accepted. In order to overcome this tendency toward the stereotyping of others, educators at all levels need opportunities to challenge these stereotypes and to learn the value of the ideas and experiences of others (Nussbaum, 1997; Greene, 1978; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 1999; LeCompte & McCray, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Landsman, 2001; Nieto, 2000). This is supported as well by Lisa Delpit (1995) by her suggestion that classroom teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators explore their own autobiographical roots to gain understanding into not only who they are but
also how they are connected to and disconnected from those who are different from themselves.

The challenge for teachers is not only to recognize the differences in children but also to identify ways that they are different from these children is supported in the work of Nussbaum (1997). She explains that when a common ground has been discovered, the differences between individuals can actually serve to strengthen their shared ideas, deepening the relationships and interactions. This is the time when connections can happen, collaborations can begin, safe and equitable classrooms can be created to foster respect, tolerance, and appreciation for all. Those who are different are no longer viewed as forbidden, alien, or other, but as having commonalities, as sharing problems as well as possibilities (Nussbaum, 1997). “It is the recognition of our own differences that ultimately allows us to see the world through the eyes of the other” (Heather’s Response to Paley’s White Teacher, Warren, 2004).

Getting to know children and their families was presented by the participants as a third step in the development of empathy and compassion. Their belief that taking the time to learn about the personalities and cultures of the children and their families is critical in communicating a sense of caring and respect. This step is directly supported by the work of Geneva Gay (2000). Teachers who are cultural responsive in their practices acknowledge and legitimize the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups. In addition, they work to build meaningful connections between the home and school experiences (Gay, 2000).
Believing the importance of recognizing and learning about the different cultural backgrounds of their students and the importance of meaningful relationships, each of the participants worked toward these goals within her school placement. Amy and Allison incorporated these beliefs while planning and implementing family literacy projects with the children and families in their classrooms. Each, in her own way, found a strategy to involve the families of their students in a meaningful project that allowed the children to share their cultural traditions. Rebecca, also realizing the importance of developing relationships with the parents and children in her placement, sought out advice from others to help her in managing the classroom. So that she could be more empathetic and compassionate, she needed to understand how the children that she was teaching were different from herself.

As my participants continued to engage in critical examination and reflection upon their cultural values and beliefs; to acknowledge and to confront Whiteness, White privilege, and White dominance; to join in difficult conversations related to racism, prejudice, and oppression through multicultural cultural literature; to question the habitual and mundane; and to search for possibilities for change, I began to realize that they were becoming culturally responsive in their teaching practices.

During my interview with Amy, she described to me how participating in the experiences of the study influenced her as she planned and implemented a family literacy project, which was a requirement for EDRD 4211 Literacy II. The students in her class had been learning the format of a letter. She sent a letter to the parents and the students asking that they, as a family, write a letter addressed to the class about a tradition or
something they did as a family. Through this project she found a way to include families
and to be respectful of their cultures and traditions.

Like Amy, Allison used what she learned from participation in the experiences of
the study to guide the development of a family literacy project. The project helped her to
learn more about the children in her placement and their families. She encouraged the
students to make a scrapbook with individual pages that shared significant events in their
lives. The parents and children were asked to complete the books together. Planning and
implementing this project involved families in their children’s education while increasing
Allison’s empathy and compassion for her students and their families.

As I spoke with Rebecca I realized that she had used the knowledge and
understanding that she gained from her experiences in quite a different way from Amy
and Allison. During her placement in a kindergarten classroom, she was struggling to
manage the classroom effectively. As she continued to develop empathy and compassion
for the students in this classroom, she began to question classroom discipline practices.

We only have one White child who will get her name on the board most days, but
then we have three or four Black children that get their names up for something
every single day. I have been trying to figure out why that is. It has made me
think about the need to become more aware of differences in behaviors.

(Interview with Rebecca, Warren, 2004)

After analyzing the interviews of the participants, it became clear to me that the
participants’ teaching practices were positively affected by participation in the study. The
examples of their practices which were described are consistent with both Gay’s (2000)
definition of culturally responsive teaching and the essential characteristics of culturally
responsive teachers. Cultivating empathy and compassion fosters the development of the culturally responsive pedagogy (Finding 6).

Preparing teachers to become culturally responsive in their practices is challenging, time consuming, and requires much dedication, energy, patience, and strategic planning (Finding 7). As I worked with the participants, I realized that each one came into this study with unique life experiences that had defined her personal, cultural, and racial beliefs. Each, depending upon these beliefs, was challenged differently by the experiences which were completed as a part of the study. The participants approached and engaged in the experiences at different levels of development in regard to empathy and compassion for others who are different from themselves. Therefore, they moved at their own rates toward culturally responsive pedagogy. At the end of the study, each participant had changed and progressed toward cultural responsiveness in her practice; however, the change was unique to the individual.

The differences found in the levels of development are explained by Gary Howard’s (1999) theory of White identity development. Howard (1999) suggests that there are three stages of White identity development: fundamentalist, integrationist, and transformationist (Howard, 1999). The fundamentalist stage is defined as one in which the actions of the individual are representative of anger, defensiveness, hostility, monoculturalism, and Eurocentrism. The integrationist stage represents the point at which actions are characterized by feelings of dissonance, shame, guilt, confusion, and a missionary zeal. Lastly, the transformationist stage is exemplified by a person who demonstrates appreciation and respect of others, is empathetic, accepts responsibility with guilt, and works to challenge the Eurocentric perspective. The progression of these stages
suggests that as individuals develop a strong sense of empathy and compassion for others who are different from themselves, they move toward culturally responsive practices. For this reason, I considered the characteristics of these stages as I examined each participant and the changes that occurred over the duration of the study.

My reflections and interpretations as they relate to individual participants indicated that each participant progressed to some degree through various stages. For instance, Allison is the participant who both intrigued and frustrated me most throughout the study. I remember as I read her autobiography thinking about how relationships characterized by control had dominated her life. She was struggling to find herself but yet was overly dependent upon the acceptance of others. When I would find myself getting frustrated with Allison, whether it was from the lack of clarity in her responses, the overconfident defensiveness in her voice, her overwhelming need for acceptance, or the lack of recognition of her own weaknesses, I seemed to always come back to the information she gave to me in her autobiographical paper.

Allison began her participation in the study firmly placed in Howard’s (1999) fundamentalist stage of White identity development. Initially I believed that Allison had not progressed at all in her development of White identity; however, when I look at who she was as she began the study and who she is now, I can see changes. These are minimal, however, but significant when I considered her individual experiences and circumstances. Her movement forward in her development of white identity to the integrationist stage is limited but present. I see two particular characteristics that place her within this stage. First, the lack of clarity found in Allison’s responses overall and her tendency to contradict herself provides me with evidence that Allison has reached a state
of dissonance and is beginning to question her own beliefs. Second, Allison is willing to work with children of other races and cultures and wants them and their families to be comfortable with her and at ease in her classroom.

Rebecca is the participant who, I believe, demonstrated the most progress in developing and understanding her identity as a White teacher. Participation in the study provided Rebecca with experiences that encouraged her to examine herself as an individual separate from her family and to define her personal beliefs about culture, race, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Prior to this involvement, she had never been openly challenged to explore what she believed and why.

As I interviewed Rebecca, I found that she had moved from the fundamentalist stage to a point between the integrationist and transformationist stages. According to Howard (1999) there are several distinct characteristics which Rebecca has demonstrated that indicate her movement into the transformationist stage. These include her ability to reflectively critique her personal beliefs, her interactions with others, and her classroom practices. Rebecca openly admitted to me that she now recognizes that during early placements her practice was not culturally responsive. Now, she purposefully tries to understand her children and their families and actively plan in a way that serves the needs and builds on the strengths of all children. Another characteristic is Rebecca’s recognition that teaching is a shared responsibility, a collaborative effort between her and the families of the children. In addition, Rebecca is empathetic toward the children and families with whom she works and now actively seeks information from others to help her understand racial and cultural differences. She is open to different perspectives and
sees her connection to others as a way of enhancing her own life. Finally, Rebecca has moved from acceptance of the way things are to actively trying to make a difference.

Even with all these changes, I realized that in some regards Rebecca remains within the integrationist stage. She still harbors some feeling of shame or guilt as she continues to examine White dominance. In addition, she still seeks acceptance from others, being cautious not to offend others in what she says or does. Rebecca says that she still finds herself tempted to “tippy-toe” around difficult topics.

It was during my interview with Amy at the end of the study that I was able to see how she had incorporated what she had learned from the various experiences into her practice and how she had continued to develop in defining herself as a White teacher. As we talked, Amy’s dialogue was filled with examples that told me that she was definitely moving from Howard’s (1999) integrationist stage to that of transformationist. First, Amy perceives education as a collaborative responsibility between school and home. Second, Amy is open to and accepting of new and different perspectives. Third, Amy challenges White dominance by helping the students in her classroom learn to value and respect difference.

Heather came into the study demonstrating open-mindedness, acceptance, and appreciation for difference. She understood the importance of empathy for others. She recognized the value of differences and how these served to enhance her life. For the most part, Heather fell into the transformationist stage from the very beginning. I wondered what Heather had to gain from participation in this study. As I interviewed Heather, I realized that she had not quite incorporated all of this into her classroom practices. By talking to Heather I sensed that this is something that she, too, was
considering. I believe that Heather has become more conscious of the importance of getting to know the students in her classroom and their parents. Because of this and her open-mindedness, I believe that as Heather enters her own classroom, she will seek out culturally responsive teaching practices.

As Amy, Allison, Rebecca, and Heather continued to search for their cultural roots, they became more culturally responsive in their practices. Each, however, because of their unique life experiences and the beliefs that had been previously shaped by these, advanced at different rates and degrees. For this reason, the support that would be needed to assist in continued development would be different for each as well. Participation in this study, with activities specifically designed to increase the development of empathy and compassion for others, represented first steps for these participants. Even though change was demonstrated in each participant, the time and activities were not sufficient for developing all of the characteristics necessary for implementing culturally responsive practices on a consistent basis. Preparation of teachers who are culturally responsive in their practices is not easy. It is challenging and time consuming. It is a process that requires much dedication, energy, patience, and strategic planning on the part of teachers and teacher educators.

The growing national demographic disparity between the teaching force and the student population challenged me as a teacher educator to seek out ways to adequately prepare teachers to effectively teach students who are different from themselves. The John H. Lounsbury School of Education at Georgia College & State University represents but one program serving a small population. The dilemma that has developed as result of growing diversity in the student population paired with a teaching force that remains
primarily monocultural, however, has been recognized nationwide and is clearly represented in GC&SU teacher education programs and in middle Georgia public school populations. This study represents a first step in rethinking the existing teacher education programs both at the undergraduate and graduate levels to determine revisions that will provide teachers with the opportunities and experiences that will guide the development of empathy and compassion, leading to more culturally responsive teaching practices.

Competence and confidence are required if teachers are to implement culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (2001), and Darling-Hammond (2000a) contend that the cultivation of these characteristics should begin in teacher education programs. Ladson-Billings (2001), Delpit (1995), and Darling-Hammond (2000a) argue that it is time that teacher education be reconceptualized to address social justice issues of race, class, and gender. Teacher education must change if it is “to offer new teachers a fighting chance to both survive and thrive in schools and classrooms filled with students who are even more dependent on education to make the difference in their life circumstances” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 6). Teacher educators must work to find ways to design or reorganize programs for preservice teachers so that the voices of all students are heard and their opinions valued.

Using multicultural literature to develop empathy and compassion in preservice teachers towards others is the first, perhaps the most appropriate, step to prepare culturally responsive teachers in predominant White and rural areas in the United States (Finding 8). As I further reflect upon my dissertation inquiry, I have realized that the findings which emerged from the study have valuable implications for teacher educators and teacher preparation programs at all levels. Individuals, because of their cultural roots,
their backgrounds, and their values and beliefs will progress and develop at different levels and rates. Because of their differences, individuals need varying amounts of time and support to reflect and explore their personal, racial, and cultural beliefs and to examine how these beliefs affect their decisions, actions, and motivations. In addition, acknowledging and challenging Whiteness, White privilege, and White dominance involve risk taking and openness and lead to vulnerability. Considering this need for time and dedication to the processes of self-examination which leads to the development of empathy and compassion, the exploration of these concepts and theories surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy should begin gradually but early in a teacher education program within an environment that is safe, open, and respectful and consistent throughout the program.

Culturally responsive pedagogy defies the conventions of traditional educational practices specifically as they relate to racial, cultural, and ethnical differences. It assumes that teaching is a contextual and situational process, therefore challenging the Eurocentric framework which currently shapes our schools. In many ways it requires teaching against the grain by challenging cultural neutrality and the syndrome of homogeneity in teaching and learning (Gay, 2000). As a challenge to traditional methods, culturally responsive teaching, with all its possibilities, is not without obstacles. The findings of this study could be considered as challenges as well as possibilities. Each one has the potential to present a hurdle to be negotiated. The challenge lies in whether or not those of us in teacher education choose to realize the possibilities by tackling these or simply to maneuver around them thus perpetuating a system that is resistant to difference.
I sincerely hope that the challenge of preparing teachers who are culturally responsive is one to be accepted, for not only within the teacher preparation programs at GC&SU but also throughout the nation, there exists a population of White teachers that should not be ignored or discounted. The preparation of teachers who are culturally responsive in their practices, however, does not represent a quick and easy answer to the problem of addressing growing diversity; it is, instead, both a challenging and time-consuming process which requires much dedication and energy from both teachers and teacher educators. While the initial investment may seem great, ultimately, there is the possibility of preparing a population of teachers who “see each student as a growing, dynamic, developing, stretching being – a fellow human creature – with specific needs and demands and hopes and desires and potentials” (Ayers, 1995b, p.2); teachers who establish classroom environments that challenge and nurture diverse group of students; teachers who strive to create a classroom, a school, and a world for all children, a place characterized by peace and justice (Ayers, 1995b).

William Ayers (1998) describes education as “an arena of hope and struggle – hope for a better life, and struggle over how to understand and enact and achieve that better life” (p. xvi). He suggests that educators should enter this arena by teaching consciously for social justice and social change. Ayers (1998) defines teaching for social justice as “teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move against those obstacles” (p. xvi). Many times, this type of teaching requires that educators challenge the status quo and seek possibilities rather than accept what exists. It demands that teachers see the students and the world in which they live, focusing not only on the students’ identities,
skills and abilities, and aspirations, but also on context, including significant historical events, cultural influences, and the economic reality. When teachers teach in this way, they provide students with multiple entry points for learning and a wide range of pathways for success. Education becomes an avenue for opening doors, challenging minds, and offering possibilities. William Ayers (2004) summarizes the role of teachers as he describes the Chinese ideogram for person. He states:

The Chinese ideogram for “person” depicts a figure grounded in the earth and stretching toward heaven. What is she reaching for? What dream is she pursuing? Why so seemingly becalmed on one end, yet so relentlessly restless on the other? The character suggests the destiny of every human being: to be fated, but also to be free; to be both free and fated. Each of us is planted in the mud and the muck of daily existence, thrust into a world not of our choosing, and tethered then to hard-rock reality; each of us is endowed with a mind able to reflect on that reality, to choose who to be in light of the cold facts and the merely given. We each have a spirit capable of joining that mind and soaring overhead, poised to transgress boundaries, destroy obstacles, and transform ourselves and our world. (Ayers, 2004, p. xiv)

It is the time for teacher educators to undertake the task of transforming teacher education by confronting the difficult issues of culture, race, racism, and oppression as well as accepting the challenge to become “awakened” to the world around them, seeing the possibilities of what can be rather than focusing on what is. It is the time for teacher educators to critically analyze current teacher preparation programs and to initiate reforms that will better prepare teachers to more effectively deal with the issues of
diversity that they will inevitably face as they enter public school classrooms. As a teacher educator, I must accept my part of this responsibility by working toward changes within the teacher education programs at GC&SU. Part of my responsibilities is to prepare teachers to become comfortable and confident in acknowledging and confronting differences rather than to be silent in the face of racism, discrimination, social injustice. I need to encourage them to allow their students to speak out, to question, to take risks, and to reach their highest potential. These changes within individuals, the focus of this study, have to be reiterated and affirmed by the changes at the institutional level. The teacher education faculty have to work together to affect changes at both individual and institutional levels to create a community where diverse voices are heard, diverse ways of teaching, learning, and living are appreciated, diverse challenges are initiated and welcomed, and diverse social and educational changes occurred. These individual and institutional efforts are critical for preparing culturally responsive teachers to work towards social justice in an increasingly diversified world.
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