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Preservice Teachers' Developing Understandings About Culturally Responsive Teaching in a Field- Based Writing Methods Course

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Preservice Teachers' Developing Understandings About Culturally Responsive Teaching
in a Field-Based Writing Methods Course

by

Susan V. Bennett

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Childhood Education and Literacy Studies
College of Education
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teacher interaction

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom, Faye Sawyer Bennett. From the time I was little, I remember you telling me I could do or be anything I wanted. You always provided me with support and encouragement in order to pursue my goals in life. You instilled in me the importance of education and inspired me to take risks and follow my dreams. You gave me the strength to face challenges and obstacles that came my way. Whether I needed a hug or laugh, you have always been there. I appreciate everything you have sacrificed for our family and me. You have been with me throughout this journey, and I want you to know I consider this dissertation your accomplishment just as much as mine. Thank you for being you. I love you.

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Abstract

I investigated eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy as they participated in a writing methods course in which they tutored children from different ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in an afterschool program at a local community center. I also investigated how these preservice teachers demonstrated culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum.

I recognized the need for research relevant to my own personal beliefs and how to strive for more equitable schools. I want to contribute further to the understandings and insights related to culturally responsive pedagogy. According to the literature, it appears teachers remain unprepared to teach children from diverse populations many of whom continue to fall behind academically. Insufficient information exists in the literature regarding attitudes and understandings of preservice teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy.

I utilized a qualitative design, in particular an embedded case study to gain an understanding of a smaller part of the larger case. The larger case was the entire community center, preservice teachers, course instructor, and the elementary students. Data included individual and focus group interviews, course documents, reflections, field notes, and a reflexive journal. I chose constant comparison analysis to find themes within all of the data. I then used within-case analysis to more deeply examine the themes found

in the data. In order to gain understanding of these discoveries being relevant to other cases, I employed a cross-case analysis.

After multiple readings of the data, carefully analyzing the data through coding and categorizing themes, the following five themes emerged: 1) cultural awareness and integration, 2) student-teacher interaction, 3) influence of the field experience, 4) questions and conversations, and 5) best practices for teaching writing. I also recommend effective aspects of the field experience, which facilitated preservice teachers' development of deeper understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy as they confronted their conscious and unconscious beliefs. The effective facets in the field experience included one-on-one student teacher interaction, scaffolding critical reflection, and use of best practices in culturally responsive writing instruction.

Chapter One: Introduction

The United States continues to change demographically; as the minority populations increase, teachers need to be prepared to address these changes. Many researchers agree preservice teachers have limited experiences with diverse student populations (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee 2003; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lazar, 2007; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). Most public school teachers are middle class, Caucasian, English-speaking women, which has the potential to contribute to their insufficient understanding of diverse populations (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Castro, 2010; Olmedo, 1997; Sleeter, 2008; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Scholars propose teachers lack preparation necessary to meet needs of students from socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds different from their own (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Richards & Bennett, In Progress; Santamaria, 2009). The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) might be another reason diverse students' needs are not being met because this decree has produced an environment concerned with high stakes testing and accountability that often results in a limited, prescriptive curriculum (Au, 2009; Kaplan, 2004). Therefore, an academic achievement gap between these populations and white middle class students lingers and possibly could be widening (Richards, 2006; Sanchez, 2005).

There is considerable research on how culture impacts learning (Delpit, 1995; Wake & Modla, 2008). Students' culture plays an essential role in their learning, and the

culture of teachers also influences teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Teachers' unconscious understandings, for instance biases and prejudices that relate to diverse students' backgrounds impact teachers' beliefs and teaching practices (Berlak, 2008). Howard (2006) and McFalls and Cobb-Roberts (2001) contend teachers must experience cognitive dissonance, a friction between prior and new knowledge, about cultural understandings, and through their reflections and writing come to recognize the self in order to understand and teach others. In this process, teachers may develop self-awareness and then possess the necessary means to connect students' learning with the students' culture. Other researchers suggest teachers with cultural knowledge, information, and awareness lack understanding to transfer it into classroom practice or demonstrate limited use of cultural knowledge to integrate into the curriculum (Morton & Bennett, 2010; Wake & Modla, 2008). Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2001) purports teachers who develop cultural competency in knowledge, awareness, and understanding experience success as teachers and facilitate low-income and minority students' success. Research regarding culturally responsive pedagogy continues to evolve, but it is still limited with respect to preservice teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and understandings about students' culture and their writing abilities (Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). Research in teachers' evolving engagement with students can illuminate teachers' attitudes toward students' culture and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.

To advance knowledge of the dynamics of becoming culturally competent teachers, I conducted an embedded case study (Stake, 2005) of preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy. I chose an embedded case study because I could not observe and write about the entire case (the community center,

elementary students, 35 preservice teachers) and wanted to examine a smaller part of the whole case. I explored eight preservice teachers' experiences through their reflections, course documents, interviews, and observations as they tutored elementary students at a university area community center. I describe through my own reflections how my experiences shaped my beliefs, attitudes, and understandings about culturally responsive teaching. First I review my background to help explain my interest in culturally responsive teaching.

My Experiences as a Student and Teacher

"Indians scattered on dawn's highway bleeding, ghosts crowd the young child's fragile eggshell mind." Jim Morrison, (1978).

During my middle school years, I became infatuated with Jim Morrison, the lead singer of the Doors. As a child, Jim and his family were driving in New Mexico, and they came upon an overturned truck of Pueblo Indians (Hopkins & Sugerman, 1980). Jim became upset and cried, and his family told him it was just a dream. When Jim was an adult, he confided to friends that he saw one of the Indians die and his spirit floated up into the sky. This accident often appeared in Jim's song lyrics, as is demonstrated by the opening quote.

When I first began to immerse myself in Jim Morrison's music, I was intrigued by the imagery in his lyrics. Music has always been a significant aspect of my life. I listened to Elvis, the Beatles, the Monkees, and Frank Sinatra before the Doors. Most of this music was bouncy and happy songs. Jim Morrison and the Doors had a different sound, and their lyrics were not like any other I had heard. Jim wrote not only song lyrics but poetry that was dark, mysterious, and deep in meaning. Jim inspired me to write because his lyrics interested me. He often referenced Indians and their spirituality in his

songs and sometimes wore Native American clothing, such as a silver concho belt. Other people in this time period also dressed in fringed suede clothing associated with some of the Native American tribes. I became drawn to Native Americans ways. Consequently, Jim's music led me to other music of the 1960s, which led me to the civil rights movement, to a time of change, and a time for voices to be heard about peace, equality, and social justice. I became a hippie in my dress, thoughts, and beliefs.

Individuals construct meaning through experiences, interactions, and the world around them (Bourdieu, 1993; Richards, 2006). In order to be culturally responsive teachers, individuals must first know themselves (Howard, 2006). Other people and experiences shaped my beliefs, values, and attitudes. Therefore, I think it is important to explain how I reached this point as an educator. Through self-awareness, reflection, education, experiences, interactions, and writing, I developed into the person I am now.

My early childhood experiences. From kindergarten through part of second grade, I communicated non-verbally to everyone except my family. I was considered a select mute. I was never sure why I had this behavior. My mom thinks it had something to do with going to school. As I reflect as an adult and a doctoral candidate, I believe it was separation anxiety, which according to the Selective Mutism Foundation (2005) is a possible cause for select mutism.

According to the Selective Mutism Foundation (2005), "Select Mutism (SM) is a psychiatric disorder most commonly found in children, characterized by a persistent failure to speak in a select setting, which continues for more than 1 month" (<http://www.selectivemutismfoundation.org/whatis.shtml>). It is rare, only occurring in 1% of children and twice as often in girls as in boys (Segal, 2003). This percentage could

be higher because some cases are misdiagnosed, unreported, or undiagnosed (Selective Mutism Foundation, 2005). Selective Mutism primarily is associated with anxiety, shyness, withdrawal, and fear. With this condition, children speak in some environments or contexts, but not in others, choosing to communicate instead through non-verbal language, such as pointing and head nodding. These children function in normal developmental age-appropriate settings and are not considered to be learning disabled (Selective Mutism Foundation, 2005).

I mainly used non-verbal communication, but I occasionally talked on the phone to friends from school. I mainly made myself understood with a different kind of voice, a non-verbal one. Fortunately, some teachers allowed me to be myself and provided me with a safe and comfortable environment accepting my non-verbal interactions. However, some did not.

Teaching and empathy. Two of my teachers did not make me feel good about school, and I do not remember these teachers' names, although I remember my other teachers throughout high school. The only reason, I think I cannot remember certain teachers, is because they punished me for not talking. They made me sit in the hall and stay inside for recess. Consequently, my mom pulled me out of that school in the middle of first grade and placed me in a private school.

In my new, private school, teachers allowed me to be myself and express ideas through a non-verbal language. I believe the trust and empathy of some teachers helped me to finally talk. They let me communicate in alternative ways; I acted out my vocabulary words and wrote notes to go to the restroom. For example, I remember "slip" was a complicated word for me to express because it has more than one meaning. All I

could think of was the slip women wear under a skirt. I could not figure out how to get that across by acting it out, and the teacher had someone slip and fall. Then I remember feeling stupid and frustrated because I knew the word but could not let the students or teacher know I understood. Language barriers often cause miscommunication within the classroom. I wonder how many students feel this way in school.

I think the teachers who permitted me to communicate non-verbally practiced culturally responsive teaching. These teachers developed a relationship with me, treated me with respect, and by the end of second grade, I started to talk at school. Explanation of this experience leads me to culture. The term culture incorporates uniqueness of the whole child that includes “characteristic features of everyday existence” (Miriam-Webster Online, n.d.). My everyday existence included select mutism. These teachers modified the everyday curriculum to meet my cultural needs as a select mute. In this way, they included my unique way of communicating. I believe teachers should demonstrate sensitivity to the culture of the individual student not just based on the confines racial, socioeconomic, linguistic, gender, or religious characteristics.

Each student comes to school with individual experiences that are socially, culturally, economically, physically, and linguistically unique. I recognize my experiences as a select mute heightened my awareness and sensitivity to individual differences. Because of this, I think educators must remember to be clear and considerate with their own voices and listen to students’ voices. Language is multifaceted, and meaning is communicated with gestures and tone as well as with words. In fact, Blommaert (2005) claims language is sometimes hidden in gestures and tone. As an

educator, I consider it my responsibility to prepare preservice teachers to hear their students' distinctive voices as important contributors of the community.

Empathy in my teaching. A few additional incidents in my early teaching years deepened my ability to empathize with and hear my students' voices. While teaching in elementary schools, I encountered three students, two in my own class and one in my colleague's class, who I considered select mutes. Their behavior was similar to my select mutism, and I believed I shared an understanding with them. The three students, who appeared to be select mutes, although undiagnosed, talked more by the end of the year. I was patient with them and respected their individual culture. I truly believe my empathy helped them to trust me and feel comfortable talking with me. The relationships I built with these three students illustrated culturally responsive teaching.

Aside from my teachers, another valuable person in my life who helped shape my beliefs was my mom. She finished high school, but lacked the resources to continue her education. We struggled financially after my parents divorced, but my mom worked hard to provide me with a high-quality education. She was determined to see her children succeed, and she wanted to provide us with the opportunity to attend college. Many of my mom's family never graduated from high school and had children at young ages, such as fifteen or sixteen. I went to a private school and never questioned whether I would go to college or not because not only did my mom expect it of me, so did my school. As my family and I experienced financial hardships, I went to a school with students from high socioeconomic backgrounds. These experiences and relationships facilitated my understandings of students from diverse economic backgrounds.

My journey toward becoming a culturally responsive teacher. While I was young, my mom constantly told me I could achieve anything I wanted to achieve. She insisted on creating a belief in women's equality. She was one of the first women to join the National Organization of Women chapter in Cincinnati. She had me listen to songs such as Helen Reddy's, "I am Woman," and we marched together in Washington D.C. for women's rights. I believe my mom and my interest in the 1960's history and music led me to my first bachelor's degree.

My education. When I began college, I took all the prerequisites for veterinary school. From the age of four or five, I wanted to become a veterinarian. I grew up on seven acres on a hill surrounded with woods, and we always had animals: horses, dogs, birds, fish, gerbils, rabbits, and once even a pet ram. In elementary school, I liked to read, draw, and write about animals. I never thought I would do anything different because I only was interested in animals and becoming a veterinarian.

While at the University, I became an activist, president of a women's association, and majored in women's studies. My life was now dedicated to making the world a better place for women. My eyes opened widely as I discovered the social inequities within the United States. I began to see inequalities based on race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. However, I still thought I wanted to be a veterinarian. So I applied to veterinary medical school, but was not accepted because of my grade point average. After I graduated, I had no idea what I would do with a women's studies degree.

I searched for employment with agencies dealing with social inequities within our society. Unfortunately, I only had work experience at veterinary hospitals during

summers from high school through college. I found a job at an animal clinic and worked hard for the next three years as a surgical coordinator (veterinary assistant) for minimum wage, struggling to pay my bills. During the time at the clinic, I realized I no longer wanted to be a veterinarian. I thought I would not be able to grow as a person or make a difference in the world by advocating for marginalized populations, so I decided to return to school. I was not sure what degree or major I would choose, but through my experience helping my brother coach my niece's softball team, I discovered I loved working with children and thought I might make a difference by teaching. Only two years later because of my previous coursework, I graduated with a second bachelor's degree in elementary education.

As I completed my student teaching, I planned to move from Ohio because I had lived there my entire life, and I coveted experiences in different environments. Someone informed me the Indian Reservations were recruiting teachers. I contacted the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and in January of 1998 I sent my resume to several Native American schools. I received a call three weeks later for a position in New Mexico. I then received an offer for a kindergarten position and moved 1,500 miles away from my home.

My first teaching position. For a little over two years, I taught on a Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. My experience was beautiful and amazing; the place, the students, and the culture stole my heart. The first year I struggled with classroom management because I arrived in the middle of the year, and the students had received little instruction and structure from the previous teacher. However, I felt a true connection to Native American children, and I became absorbed in the culture and tried hard to learn as much as I could, including the language. I practiced culturally responsive

teaching, although at the time I had no knowledge of this term for I have no recollection of the term being used in my undergraduate program. During my time on the reservation, I sometimes felt as if I understood what Jim Morrison (1978) meant by the Indians floating into the sky. I never saw Indian “ghosts” that Jim claimed he did, but I often felt the tragedy in the air. I witnessed heartbreaking devastation: unemployment, poor living conditions, alcoholism, prejudice from others, and death of people and culture. Many people still lived in isolated areas on long dirt roads, possibly without running water or electricity. Our school had designated days to provide showers for the students without running water at their home. This new place in which I lived was quite different from my past life experiences, and I was happy because I thought I could make a contribution to the community.

I did what I could to help the Navajo students understand their culture. The Navajo culture was slowly disappearing, and it made me angry and sad that language and culture were vanishing on the reservation. I met Navajos who had received an education at missionary schools in the 1960s. I heard stories of Navajos being punished for speaking their own language in schools. I witnessed communication difficulties between generations because the older Navajos were forced to speak English when they were in elementary school or missionary schools. As I listened, I recognized the negative impact schools had on students’ language and culture.

I tried to maintain Navajo culture and language within my classroom. My Navajo assistant and I posted Navajo words and phrases around the classroom, integrated the language into the curriculum, learned and then taught the students Navajo songs, and created small rug weavings. Similar to my classroom, I became immersed in the

community outside of school, and I attended fundraisers, rodeos, rug auctions, and gatherings in the community. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the students and their culture. As I observed other teachers in their classrooms, I knew something felt different in my own teaching. At the time, I could not figure out what that difference was. I remember the playground where students, not just my own, gathered around me. Sometimes the students pulled on my skirt, wrapped their arms around me, and tried to climb on me. It was occasionally difficult to walk because students clung to me. The Navajo teachers began to call me “The storyteller” and not because I told stories. In many Native American communities, storytellers are part of tradition. Some tribes, such as Pueblo, often create clay figurines that depict the storyteller: a woman with children sitting around her and on her lap. The connection became clear that these students gravitated to me, but why? As I reflected toward the end of my time on the reservation, I realized I made personal connections with the students, and we built relationships of trust, care, and empathy. I also maintained self-awareness and often thought of how others might feel when I talked or taught, such as my worry I might offend someone when I was asked to speak at a student’s funeral. I now believe the missing pieces in teacher preparation to become culturally responsive are deep self-reflection and personal interactions and connections. One of my experiences on the reservation in particular reflects this idea.

Another teacher and I began to rehearse a dance with the students for our school’s end of the year celebration. Some of the students even helped with the choreography. They did the twist, the two-step, the swim, and other dances to music from the fifties to the nineties. The music we chose varied from American pop to a Navajo country rock

band. I was with them every step of the way, all of us wearing blue and white tie-dyed shirts.

After the celebration, Grandma Yazzie (a revered elder) who remained distant to me throughout the school year at last spoke to me, “I like the way you dance with the children.” She did not say that to me because she thought I was a good dancer. At that moment, Grandma Yazzie saw in me what it means to be a caring and thoughtful teacher. She understood and respected me for my genuine attunement to her granddaughter and to the other unique students in my classroom. She trusted me with her granddaughter and other Navajo grandchildren. Grandma Yazzie finally understood how special these students were to me.

Grandma Yazzie was one of the grandmas who helped out in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. These Grandmas lived in the community, knew the families of the students, spoke the Navajo language, and knew the traditional ways. The community had great respect for Grandma Yazzie. I often felt Grandma Yazzie’s caring, attentive eyes on the playground as she watched my students and her granddaughter, and I wondered if she believed I was good enough to teach and care for her granddaughter and the other Navajo students. Grandma Yazzie never spoke much to the *Biligaanas* (white people), and she rarely spoke to me. Our interactions were limited to a friendly *yahteeh* (hello) on a daily basis. When Grandma Yazzie spoke these words to me, “I like the way you dance with the children,” I felt an immeasurable sense of pride because Grandma Yazzie finally saw I was good enough to teach and care for her granddaughter and other Navajo grandchildren. She saw me as a respected teacher. The teacher within me emerged, and I became part of the Navajo community. I embraced every part of each unique individual.

I experienced with the students and became part of their “lived world,” and I learned with the students. My time on the reservation illuminates what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher.

Teaching in urban schools. I felt successful and prepared as a teacher by the end of my time on the reservation, but I knew I still had much to learn. Family concerns called me back east. After I left the reservation, I taught at two urban schools where the students were predominately African American with some Caucasian and Hispanic students. I was again in a different culture from my own. I thought I was prepared for diversity. After all, I earned a women’s studies degree and learned all about the social inequities in the United States. In my undergraduate program, my instructors familiarized me with poor conditions of the schools and the social inequalities within the schools. In addition, I took a multicultural course in my undergraduate program. Although I never received explicit instruction that defined culturally responsive teaching, I learned all students are individuals and teachers must use different instructional techniques to meet their needs. I also understood I should use multicultural literature and use the students’ culture in my classroom. However, my good intentions were not enough. I cared, loved, and made strong connections with my students, but I still struggled at times with classroom management even though I had taught for a little over two years and was culturally aware. Turner (2007) suggests that teachers sometimes overlook the connection with classroom management and culture. She claims, “the idea that teachers set the standards of behavior in the classroom based on their expectations and ideals and that student diversity need not be a consideration” (p. 19), and it might be that appropriate behavior is culturally defined. Therefore, a disconnect exists between a teacher’s expectation of classroom behavior and the students’ expectations. This may have contributed to my lack

of success. Although I had mastered classroom management in Navajo schools, my lack of experience with urban culture resulted in struggling once again to maintain on-task behavior.

I taught in urban schools for three years in Ohio and one year in Florida. Two of those years, I had good assistants who understood urban culture, and the class ran well with two teachers in the classroom. If a student caused a disruption, one of us continued teaching while the other teacher diffused the situation. In addition, those two assistants developed similar positive relationships I had with the students. As a team, we practiced culturally responsive pedagogy through our high expectations and respect for our students. The other two years made me question my understanding of culturally responsive teaching. One of the years, I had an assistant who had no education background. She had no understanding of students from diverse backgrounds, of classroom management, or of instructional techniques. She handled many situations inappropriately, such as yelling at the students. Her behavior made me have work harder than if I did not have an assistant. In the second difficult year, I shared three assistants with six kindergarten teachers, and I rarely had an assistant in my room. The administration did not provide me with enough support. I experienced what Kozol (2005) wrote about: schools in lower socioeconomic areas often lack sufficient funds to provide the resources necessary for quality education. On some afternoons, other teachers and I would go home frustrated because of the insufficient support available either from administration or assistants. Most days though, I knew my students learned, and I had good relationships with my students and parents. This aspect was important to

me as a culturally responsive teacher, and I tried to learn everything I could about the students and their culture.

The culture in the urban schools where I taught was different from my own. Many racial tensions existed in the Ohio city. During my first year at this school, the city police shot an unarmed black 19-year-old man. In the downtown area, people broke windows and started fires, and the city made national news. The city imposed curfews due to riots; some of the students in my school lived in this area. The school was close to downtown, and we closed school for a day. School resumed the next day, and the administration asked us to leave for our safety as soon as the students were released. Although the riots ended, my students still dealt with societal inequalities. Some of my students had family members in jail, came from single-parent homes, heard gun shots from their windows, and did not have food for dinner or breakfast. I also had parents who were actively involved with the school and checked every day on their child's progress.

The students in Florida dealt with similar circumstances as the Ohio students. Many days the school enforced lockdowns as the helicopters flew overhead in search of people on the run from the police. This culture was different from my own, but as a culturally responsive teacher I wanted to be part of the community.

In both urban areas, I sought to become more involved with school activities. For example, in Ohio the school had a double dutch jump rope team, and I joined the adult team to connect to the community. The team consisted of me, a kindergarten assistant, and one of the custodial staff members. I also attended the talent shows, chaperoned after school field trips, offered keyboard and guitar lessons to first graders after school, and

assisted in the musical program. I volunteered at the yard sale for the school in Florida, and I chaperoned fifth and six graders at a college basketball game. I became an active member of the school community, not just a teacher in a school.

I began to understand the community and culture of my students better, but I still witnessed disheartening occurrences similar to those on the reservations. Students were tardy or absent on a regular basis. Sometimes students' clothes were dirty, or parents or guardians picked their child up and smelled of alcohol. Students had knowledge of sexual behaviors at early ages. Many students were raised by their grandparents, and in some cases they were raised by older siblings. During my first year in Ohio, I was amazed at the number of students in the In School Suspension room, a room too small to accommodate them. I experienced that African American males were often twice as likely to be suspended as white males (Kaplan, 2004; Kozol, 2005). Some of my students demonstrated difficulty with anger.

Connecting with my students. Culturally responsive teaching became a part of my practices as evidenced in the following incident. One little boy showed a caring side; however, he had a great deal of energy that sometimes was misplaced. On the day of a fieldtrip, he walked in the classroom at the beginning of the day and threw several objects for no reason. I worried about this boy and the other students' safety because he would not listen to me or the other teachers. I decided he could not go on the field trip. I struggled with this decision because I wanted him to have the opportunity to go on the field trip. I found ways to keep his energy busy and his mind challenged. The mother and I worked together so he could attend future field trips.

Another case involved a male student who made bad choices at school. He would begin to cry hysterically because he did not want us to talk to his father. His mom finally told us that he was afraid of his father, but we did not know the extent of the circumstances. We found out later that his father would hit him if he received a bad report at school. Eventually at the end of the year this student and his mom were in a safe home for domestic violence victims. My assistant and I worked respectfully with this student to help him make better choices, so he would not become upset. He made progress, and the boy began making improved decisions. He missed our end-of-the-year celebration because he was in this safe home, and his mom told me he was upset that he could not come to say good-bye to me. I took his end of the year goody bag to the safe home. Unfortunately, when I went to this safe home, he was not there.

My last year teaching elementary school definitely was my hardest. I had 25 kindergarten students and I shared my assistants with six other teachers. At the beginning of the year, I was isolated in a room away from all other classrooms. I did not have a place for my students to go to cool down. The headstart teachers told me three of the male students should not have been placed in the same classroom. I soon learned these boys sometimes revealed anger inappropriately by hitting others or throwing objects. Two of those male students were raised by their grandmothers with little visitation from the mothers or fathers. One of the boys lived with his mom who worked two jobs, and his brother was in jail. According to teachers who lived in the neighborhood, Keith (a pseudonym) often played in the streets unsupervised at night. When Keith was upset, he bellowed obscenities and made inappropriate sexual gestures.

We gradually developed a mutually respectful relationship, and I helped him learn to express himself more appropriately.

Although I sometimes faced challenges with classroom management, I nevertheless had a classroom full of students with whom I developed relationships with and who were engaged and learning. Students from other classrooms often were inclined to visit my classroom. Horror stories and narratives concerning minority and lower socioeconomic students linger in dominant ideology, and the optimistic stories remain untold (Comber, 2007). I shared a few of my students' stories, but I think all of my students' stories are important. All of my students and I shared success in our classroom.

Expectations of my students. As a supervisor of internships and as a research assistant, I have listened to preservice teachers, graduate students, and in-service teachers' low expectations about students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They expressed negative comments such as "Parents do not get involved with their children's schoolwork," and "Students demonstrate below grade level achievement" (Morton & Bennett, 2010; J.C. Richards, personal communication, July 9, 2008). In spite of many challenges, I had kindergarten students who were reading and writing above grade level. I had parents who helped in the classroom and met with me on a regular basis. Some of my parents consistently communicated with me. I remained persistent with innovative techniques for classroom management and worked to find ways to connect to the culture of each individual student. I had the students who were artists express their anger through drawings. I gave students with extra energy (some might label Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) activities to challenge them or provide them with jobs around the classroom. I respectfully communicated and had

conversations with them because I was determined to practice culturally responsive pedagogy.

These students dealt with similar problems as the Navajos I had taught: poverty, abuse, neglect, drugs, alcohol, and poor living conditions. Many schools neglect to meet the needs of students from diverse and lower socioeconomic areas (Banks, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Richards, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). In these schools and on the reservation, I saw teachers who I thought lacked understanding and insight about culturally responsive pedagogy. As teachers and educators, we cannot blame parents and students for low academic achievement of minority and low socioeconomic groups (Howard, 2006). Poor preparation and weak qualifications of teachers contribute to the academic achievement gap (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Richards, 2006).

These less qualified teachers shared concern for the students and an awareness of their students' culture with me. However, good intentions and awareness are not enough because "awareness or appreciation without action will not change the education enterprise," (Gay, 2000, p. 14; Greenman & Jacquelinemel, 1995). Teachers may go out of their way to help students find a meal when students are hungry, but these teachers still express feelings of frustration toward students, which may be on a subconscious level (Anyon, 1995). Teachers may even inflict verbal and emotional abuse. Some teachers I observed implemented the bare minimum to maintain their job, and some showed no sign of change toward culturally responsive teaching. As my cultural awareness grew, I developed a stronger commitment to strive to help end the social inequities within our society and to prepare culturally responsive teachers.

My Reflection as a doctoral student. As I became more educated, I developed further awareness of social inequities. I became more aware of how my own biases and my own judgments had slowly transformed and progressed for the better throughout the years. I also had developed an understanding of what it meant to accept differences between others and me versus just tolerating them, to empathize with people different from me versus just sympathizing with them. All of the events in my life have brought me to this point. I realized as I obtained my master's degree that I would love to teach Multicultural Education because I thought the courses I took did not create cognitive dissonance in teacher educators. An individual experiences cognitive dissonance when he/she acquires new knowledge that contradicts prior knowledge (Lea & Sims, 2008; McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). For example, a person who finds out a stereotype about a group of people is not true and this new information contradicts their prior beliefs about that group of people. In Multicultural Education, I think it is necessary for teacher educators to understand their own biases and prejudices through cognitive dissonance and therefore, develop self-awareness. Now, as I finish my doctoral program, I continue to instruct preservice teachers in literacy and elementary education courses while I practice culturally responsive teaching and try to provide my preservice teachers with their own understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

I participated as a research assistant in two separate studies in which either graduate students or preservice teachers tutored students in literacy at a charter school or community center. At the end of the semester, some of the graduate students said they did not use students' culture in their tutoring. They also thought culturally responsive teaching meant to read literature that depicted children from around the world. Both

professors of the courses tried to effectively create an understanding with the graduate students and preservice teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy. However, they recognized their instruction needed improvement, and I think I need to improve my instruction. Research is needed to understand how to better prepare preservice teachers' attitudes and understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching consists of various approaches, characteristics, and effects (Gay, 2000). “*Culturally Responsive Teaching* is about *teaching*, and the teaching of concern is that which *centers* classroom instruction in *multiethnic cultural frames of reference*,” (Gay, 2000, p. xix). This definition of culturally responsive teaching includes the use of cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of diverse students as a channel to teach and better meet students' needs (Gay, 2000). Therefore, the teacher must first attempt to understand the unique diverse experiences of the students and use a range of approaches.

Instruction to develop culturally responsive teachers connects to the diverse student populations that include students from various backgrounds such as ethnic, racial, linguistic and socioeconomic. Therefore, academic knowledge and skills must be integrated into the instruction within sociocultural contexts to help students experience meaningful and personal connections with their learning (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009). Culturally responsive teachers must know their students, build relationships, and integrate culture into the curriculum and everyday classroom activities. Taylor and Whittaker also stress teachers must utilize strategies to meet the needs of different learning styles and integrate multicultural information, resources, and materials into the classroom to not

only incorporate students' culture but to develop understandings for other cultures.

Culturally responsive teachers connect class lessons to home, sociocultural, and school experiences. Culturally responsive teachers embrace an attitude to support diversity and knowledge and skills to incorporate content with culture relevant to individual students in order to facilitate learning (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001; Gay, 2000; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006).

Culturally responsive teaching centers on the culture of the students. Culture affects our actions, beliefs, and thoughts, and therefore, affects teaching and learning. "Culture is often defined as the underlying phenomenon guiding humanity," (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p.72) such as how people think, behave, and interact. Culture, as it relates to school learning is "defined as those values and practices that shape the content, process, and structure of initial and subsequent intellectual, emotional, and social development among members of a particular group," (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 74). Students become acculturated concurrently with the student's cognition and growth (Bourdieu, 1993). Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997) add students' school learning is enhanced and more effective when their culture is interconnected with classroom instruction and environment. "Teachers must learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies. If this is done, then school achievement will improve" (Gay, 2000, p.1). All students possess the potential to succeed, and an essential need exists to implement culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, culturally responsive teachers should possess a broad cultural knowledge base, create culturally relevant curricula, exhibit care toward students, offer

cross-cultural communication, interconnect culture with instruction, and develop learning communities (Gay, 2000).

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is similar to culturally relevant pedagogy, and for the purposes of this study, I will use the terms interchangeably. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) originally created and described the term culturally relevant pedagogy in the early 1990's. "Culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17). Culturally relevant teaching incorporates three tenets identified with culturally relevant pedagogy (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1992). The three principles are as follows:

- Teachers recognize conceptions of self and others.
- Teachers understand the significance of social interaction and promote social engagement in the classroom.
- Teachers consider the conception of knowledge.

The first belief suggests teachers consider teaching as an art by understanding and empathizing with students; teachers do not use a set script or technique in order to teach. Teachers understand there is not one way to teach, but that teaching requires instruction to meet individual students' needs from diverse populations. Culturally relevant teachers hold high expectations and believe all students can succeed.

The second principle states that teachers develop connections and sustain meaningful relationships with the students. Relationships play an essential role in school's culture and achievement (Kaplan, 2004). Culturally relevant teachers appreciate

the value of community and social interaction within the classroom for students' success (Ladson-Billings, 1992). The teachers support collaboration among a community of learners.

The last belief proposes teachers consider the conception of knowledge. Culturally relevant teachers connect learning to the students' lives with enthusiasm to facilitate and scaffold development from personal schema, knowledge, and skills to more difficult and bigger ideas. Culturally relevant teaching includes the use of students' cultures in order to empower the student and allow the student to critically analyze education as a democratic institution and create meaning and understanding of the world (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Culturally relevant teachers recognize knowledge is not permanent but is shared and recreated. In addition, they recognize the need to utilize a variety of assessments (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Through learning communities, culturally influenced instructional techniques developed for diverse student populations, and positive teacher connections, students develop empowerment, and culturally responsive teaching is achieved.

Multicultural education. Pertinent terms to discussions of culturally responsive teaching are multicultural issues or multicultural education. The purpose and goal of multicultural education is to revolutionize schools and educational institutions in order to ensure all students from various ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups receive an equal education (Banks, 2001). I believe as a researcher and educator it is my responsibility to facilitate the understanding of multicultural issues and development of culturally responsive teachers who are willing to work toward equity in education.

Multiculturalism maintains that gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity should be reflected in all educational institutions across staff, administration, and students (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Grant and Ladson-Billings further stress this point: “Multicultural education is a philosophical concept and an educational process” (p. xxxvi). Multicultural education embraces the notions of equality, social justice, and equity. The purpose of multicultural education is to encourage equality in schools and educational institutions through the elimination of stereotypes and creation of tolerance and unity (Leistyna, 2002).

Banks (2001) identifies and describes five dimensions of multicultural education needed to achieve equity in educational institutions, which interconnects with the tenets of culturally responsive teaching: a) content integration, b) knowledge construction, c) prejudice reduction, d) equity pedagogy, and f) empowering school culture. I provide a brief overview of these concepts in order to explain how teachers can reach and better understand all dimensions of such a complex idea. Content integration is the use of information from diverse cultures integrated into the curriculum and the inclusion of various perspectives. Knowledge construction refers to teachers who help students understand how knowledge is impacted by race, ethnicity, and social class. Prejudice reduction helps students develop positive attitudes toward racial groups different from their own. Equity pedagogy is when teachers help diverse students experience success academically through differentiated instruction if needed. Empowering school culture provides an environment free of inequities and injustices, an environment in which all students feel empowered as agents of their learning, the ultimate goal of multicultural education. I will use these ideas to inform my work with preservice teachers.

Unfortunately, I witnessed many teachers whose incomplete understanding of multicultural education or culturally responsive teaching lead them astray. Tokenism was often their method of incorporation of multicultural education. Tokenism is “the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort (as to desegregate)” toward the goal of equality (Miriam-Webster Online, n.d.). Teachers revert to celebrating Black History month and believe they are incorporating and integrating multicultural education, yet in reality they discuss civil rights and famous African Americans only during this month instead of throughout the nine month curriculum. I also witnessed teachers utilize multicultural books in the classroom, but they neglected to use the content as a way to integrate the culture. Some teachers filled their classrooms with tokenism when books that contained pictures with people of color were read, but cultural meaning was not taught. I observed teachers celebrate winter holidays around the world because schools no longer encourage Christmas parties, thinking they were teaching about varied cultures. This focus on culture may have occurred once yearly. As earlier stated, good intentions are not always enough. Once again, I witnessed teachers’ misinterpretation of multicultural education or culturally responsive pedagogy.

Research indicates teacher education programs have provided inadequate and ineffective preservice teacher preparation for multicultural issues in the classroom (Barksdale, & et. al., 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Irvine, 2003). Preservice teachers usually have few experiences with students whose backgrounds differ from their own, such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and linguistics (Lazar, 2007; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006; Ukpokodu, 2003). Currently, research provides few insights into changes of preservice teachers’ understandings as they face challenges related to

teaching diverse student populations. In addition, noted scholars posit society neglects how to better prepare teachers to embrace cultural experiences and be successful teaching in low socioeconomic and high minority schools as students fall behind academically (Delpit 2003; Irvine, 2003).

Academic achievement gap. School demographics continue to change as ethnically diverse populations increase in many schools, yet teachers still are predominately white and middle-class (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Olmedo, 1997; Santamaria, 2009; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). At present, the United States population consists of approximately one-third minorities, and by the year 2042 this minority population will become the majority (U. S. Census, 2008). In 2023, half of the children in the United States will be from minority populations. At this time, an academic achievement gap exists between these minority populations and Caucasians. Lavin-Loucks (2006) claims the achievement gap exists due to marginalization of diverse ethnic and economic populations in schools and society. The No Child Left Behind Act is an education reform bill created in order to close this gap and to ensure that all students achieve proficiently (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). No Child Left Behind legislation produced an atmosphere of accountability and testing (Kaplan, 2004). Instruction narrowly limited to a teach-to-the-test practice might decrease opportunities for students to succeed. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching is essential to facilitate success with low income, minority students.

Statistics show that African American and Hispanic students made gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading and Mathematics tests between 2005 and 2007; however, a significant gap in achievement still exists between

African Americans and Caucasians and Hispanics and Caucasians (NAEP, 2007).

Although the gap lessened between Caucasian and African American students in reading, it is still a disturbing 27 points. Furthermore, students from lower socioeconomic areas, which include students eligible for free and reduced lunch, scored lower on the NAEP Reading and Mathematics tests than those students not eligible.

These problems continue as students of diverse populations enter high school. Students face failure and as a result drop out of high school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) between the years 1972 and 2006, the dropout rate for high school has declined across all racial and ethnic backgrounds, and the gap between White and Black or Hispanic decreased. However in 2006, Blacks' dropout percentage of 10.7 % is almost two times Whites' 5.8%; Hispanics percentage of 22.1% is almost four times their White peers. The dropout rates and academic gaps remain greatest in our society among these students of low socioeconomic and minority groups.

Currently, the United States faces the educational challenge to provide high-quality education to students from diverse ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds; and teachers need an essential understanding of diverse populations in order to best meet their needs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006; Seidl, 2007; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Research in regards to culturally relevant teaching requires more attention and investigation (Garmon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Research can contribute to understanding how to best meet the needs of students emotionally, culturally, and socially and to improve teacher education programs.

Culturally responsive teaching research. The academic achievement gap and dropout rates are significant issues within education (Au & Blake, 2003). Researchers and educators have the responsibility to understand and develop ways to best meet the needs of these students of diverse populations. My study of preservice teachers in a writing methods class will add to the understandings of culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching. Many studies that investigate culturally relevant teaching utilize research methods that employ surveys and questionnaires (e.g., Barksdale, & et al., 2002; Phuntsog, 2001; Siwatu, 2007). These studies neglect alternative research methodologies and triangulation of data that might reveal deeper meaning. For example, Phuntsog examined perceptions and attitudes of 33 teachers who chose to complete a Likert-Scale survey. Phuntsog utilized qualitative and quantitative approaches, although this study still focused only on one data source, the questionnaire. Few teachers decided to take the questionnaire, and a possibility exists that only teachers who possess culturally responsive teaching qualities were willing to respond. The results relied on just one method of data collection, the survey. Nevertheless, a unique aspect of the survey included a section for teachers to offer ways to improve teacher preparation for diverse populations. Teachers offered ideas, such as placing teacher candidates in field experiences that are in culturally and linguistically diverse settings, access to multicultural resources, modeling instructional strategies and techniques to teach students from diverse backgrounds, and receiving instruction in multicultural issues. The teachers in the Phuntsog study viewed culturally responsive pedagogy as important, and responses indicated these teachers demonstrated characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. In addition, responses indicated these

teachers generally wanted to be prepared to effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds and meet all students' needs (Phuntsog, 2001; Taylor & Sobel, 2001).

Some research about culturally responsive pedagogy includes alternative teaching approaches such as the inclusion of interventions to better prepare preservice teachers for diversity (Athanases & Martin, 2006; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006). These interventions positively affected preservice teachers' attitudes toward multicultural issues, which affected attitudes toward diverse student populations. Wiggins, Follo, and Elberly (2007) documented some preservice teachers who developed positive attitudes and expressed feelings of discomfort about culturally responsive teaching. Additionally, Athanases and Martin (2006) found when experienced teachers modeled instruction and preservice teachers were placed in field experiences in diverse educational settings, it facilitated better preparation to teach diverse populations.

Field experiences. Researchers suggest field experience placement in classrooms with diverse populations facilitates preservice teachers' preparation to teach in these settings (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Participation and full immersion in field experiences with diverse populations has provided deeper connections between course material regarding culturally responsive pedagogy from the college and practical application in the classroom (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Tang (2003) contends "different student teaching contexts offer varied opportunities of growth for student teachers" (p.495). Preservice teachers claimed field experiences provided challenges to their own beliefs and improved their understandings (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005). Preservice teachers who tutor students within students'

cultural contexts developed an increased awareness of cultures different from their own and awareness of their own biases (Barton, 1999; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Sleeter, 2001).

Although quantitative research provides valuable information, their inquiries do not offer insight into how teacher education programs give preservice teachers the best possible experiences to become effective in diverse communities (Au, 2002). Qualitative research reveals that preservice teachers gain confidence, become more prepared, develop new conceptions of teaching and learning, and demonstrate better attitude toward teaching through field experiences (Fang & Ashley, 2004). Hedrick, McGee, and Mittag (2000) suggest preservice teachers recognize the need to teach the “whole” child, emotional and social, through field experiences. In these experiences, preservice teachers found opportunities to work with students from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds not possible in traditional university coursework. Additional qualitative and longitudinal research about how to best prepare teachers is still needed (Hoffman, & et. al, 2005).

Writing and writing instruction. Limited research also exists on connections to writing and writing instruction in relationship to culturally responsive teaching (Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). Schmidt and Izzo reported a study of preservice teachers who wrote an autobiographical piece and interviewed someone from a different background from their own. The preservice teachers gained awareness and developed better understanding of teaching literacy to diverse populations (Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). Culturally responsive teachers want all students to succeed and in turn develop instruction to sustain a well-designed literacy classroom (Gay, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Turner, 2007).

Writing instruction needs to be an integral part of teacher education programs (Chambless & Bass, 1995). Histories of preservice teachers' writing experiences offer valuable understanding to their writing instruction and to teacher educators (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Preservice teachers' beliefs and experiences influence their writing instruction and learning (Berry, 2006; Norman & Spencer, 2005). In order to make explicit the experiences that shape their beliefs and attitudes about writing, Norman and Spencer (2005) had preservice teachers write an autobiography, and through this self-examination develop self-awareness to facilitate their transformation to become culturally responsive teachers. Preservice teachers' alleged these experiences were personal and creative, consequently more meaningful. This demonstrated teacher educators must first know preservice teachers' beliefs and understandings in order to design course content and field experience to facilitate preservice teachers connections between writing research and practice (Chambless & Bass, 1995; Norman & Spencer, 2005;).

Maimon (2002) concluded teacher educators must provide opportunities for preservice teachers and in-service teachers to explore their personal and field-based beliefs. O'Reilly-Scanlon, Crowe, and Weenie (2004) concluded memories of positive writing experiences connect to family and community attitudes toward writing. Likewise, preservice teachers who have relationships and conversations with students help reluctant writers develop a better attitude toward writing and experience success (McIntyre & Leroy, 2003). Teachers need to interact and be aware of students' affective and cognitive qualities. Teachers' beliefs lead to instructional techniques utilized in the classroom because a strong connection exists between affective and cognitive domains of self and students (Maimon, 2002). During field experience, reflection about teaching

practice and writing instruction is important to preservice teachers' development of understanding themselves and the students (Wold, 2002).

Through texts individuals can understand and explore the self, and through preservice teachers' written text, they find their own voice and explore the self (Pattnaik, 2006; Schmidt & Izzo, 2003; Vicars, 2007). Writing allows individuals to think, to gain "new insights and understandings," and to reflect, and writing connects the personal to the professional or academic (Richards & Miller, 2005, p. 197). Leftwich and Madden (2006) conclude that writing reflections provides preservice teachers with a mode to understand the self and their teaching practice. In addition, writing text allows for interpretations and perceptions about the self (Vicars, 2007). In conclusion, writing is a complex process that is constructed through community and individual experiences, and it must start with students' concerns and interests (Bearne & Marsh, 2007).

Self-reflection and self-awareness. The college writing class offers a valuable opportunity to engage students in reflection about culture and teaching.

Attitudes toward concepts such as race or gender, for example, operate at two levels—at a conscious level our stated values direct our behavior deliberately, and at an unconscious level we respond in terms of immediate but quite complex automatic associations that tumble out before we have even had time to think. (Berlak, 2008, p. 51)

Research suggests preservice teachers must reflect critically about experiences with students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). In courses I taught and in research studies I have helped

conduct, I observed preservice teachers in a “survival mode.” Preservice teachers worry about grades and how to complete a course. During one of my research experiences at a summer literacy camp, a disconnect existed between the preservice teachers’ and graduate students’ expectations of their courses. The graduate students wanted to learn and improve their instruction. However, the preservice teachers expressed concerns of, “What do I have to do?” As educators and researchers, we need to find ways to better prepare preservice teachers in a time efficient manner and facilitate deeper reflections (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Fecho, 2000). Preservice teachers need to understand their own identities before they can understand others. Essential to becoming a culturally responsive teacher is awareness of differentness of self and others and relatedness to other people and cultures (Howard, 2006). Preservice teachers need to know what the differences are and how they connect to others.

In summary, field experiences and integration of multicultural issues within the content of coursework has the potential to result in positive outcomes in culturally responsive teaching. However, investigations are needed to explore preservice teachers’ concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy, student-preservice teacher interactions, and preservice teachers’ self-awareness. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine preservice teachers’ understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy as they participate in a writing methods course, which includes tutoring of children from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. This investigation can contribute to preservice teachers’ adoption of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Rationale

Now I have come to the most challenging event in my life thus far; I am writing my dissertation. I am passionate about social justice and culturally responsive teaching. I think often about how I will create cognitive dissonance that leads to greater understanding or at least spark some change in people and their self-awareness about cultural awareness and understanding. People must understand who they are and how they come to be where they are. Even though I consider myself an enlightened person, I know I still have imperfections. I know I would never intentionally treat someone unfairly due to race or gender or hopefully not for any other category labeled or constructed by society. This type of personal reflection is difficult because it taps into emotions we fail to acknowledge exist. I am conscious of how I see people and think about people. I know as much as I have learned and become aware of different cultures throughout my life that biases will persist. I am aware of biases and prejudices because of the experiences that have shaped my values and beliefs. Therefore, I have developed self-awareness about my beliefs. My concern is how to facilitate understanding with preservice teachers about cultures different from their own. Our culture creates categories and labels not only for race and gender, but other categories such as sexuality, socioeconomic status, learning disabilities, and weight that serve to marginalize individuals. Culturally responsive teachers can work with students to resist marginalization of populations in schools.

I think it is unacceptable people are mistreated because of differences in culture. In particular, it is appalling our school systems construct and create such an apartheid, as Kozol (2005) says is *The Shame of the Nation*. According to the Merriam-Webster

Online Dictionary, the definition of apartheid is racial segregation. Although the *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) supposedly ended segregation, it still is a major part of our school system, and schools possibly are even more unequal than during the civil rights movement (Orfield, Frankenberg, &, Lee 2003; Kozol, 2005). I witnessed racial segregation and societal inequities in the schools in which I taught. As a teacher educator, I believe it is important to raise awareness and understanding in preservice teachers in order to improve the inequitable situations in schools.

My rationale for conducting a study about culturally responsive pedagogy developed from my experiences of childhood and was enriched as a doctoral student and classroom teacher. I have taught considerably with children of diverse populations. During these experiences, I recognized the need for research relevant to my own personal beliefs and how to strive for more equitable schools. I want to contribute further to the understandings and insights related to culturally responsive pedagogy. According to the literature, it appears teachers remain unprepared to teach children from diverse populations many of whom continue to fall behind academically. Insufficient information exists in the literature regarding attitudes and understandings of preservice teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy.

In particular, I focused on writing as it connects to culturally responsive pedagogy. Writing in many cases provides an alternative communication form. I find writing about my experiences essential to my understanding and self-awareness of myself and to my teaching because writing is thinking and self-reflection (Richards & Miller, 2005). I have taught the writing methods course on campus and realized I want to ensure

that I am better preparing my preservice teachers to teach diverse students and develop insight through field experiences and partnerships.

For three summers, I worked in partnership with the community center, where this research took place. I worked with preservice teachers enrolled at the university and with my colleagues. Partnerships between the community and university offer beneficial opportunities and transformative experiences for all stakeholders (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007). In the time I spent at the Community center, elementary students experienced positive, student-centered experiences; preservice teachers and graduate students were able to apply coursework to their instruction; university professors and doctoral students conducted insightful research; and doctoral students developed better understandings of research and building partnerships with the community. Graduate students and preservice teachers shared how valuable and useful their experiences at the community center were. Last summer, one doctoral student conducted research at the community center. I helped her conduct some interviews with graduate students and found unsettling information. She found inservice teachers, already in the classroom, held low expectations of elementary students at the community center prior to the camp because the elementary students came from a lower socioeconomic area and diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (K. Thomas, personal communication, July 9, 2009). Field experiences alone possibly do not provide sufficient understandings of culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, I wanted to continue my research at the community center to discover how we can better understand preservice teachers learning about teaching writing in culturally responsive way.

Additional research is needed to examine the connection between teachers' verbalized beliefs and actual actions or teaching behavior (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). More research needs to investigate teachers' beliefs and interactions with students. Researchers need to determine variables and best practices related to culturally relevant pedagogy. Researchers need to look at current teaching methodology to reach culturally relevant teaching (Barksdale, & et al., 2002; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). This field setting afforded me with the opportunity to investigate these ideas.

Researchers suggest a more extensive approach to better understand culturally relevant teaching is to conduct more observational, ethnographic, or case studies (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006). Therefore, I conducted a case study that is bounded by time and place with detailed data collection through multiple sources (Creswell, 1998). In particular, I chose an embedded case study because I could not see or write every aspect of the entire case at the community center. However, I gained further insight of a smaller part of the case, eight preservice teachers, embedded within the larger case of an entire writing methods course taught at the community center.

I took observational notes, conducted individual and focus group interviews, and collected eight preservice teachers' reflections and writing samples to gain deeper insight. I investigated changes in understandings of preservice teachers enrolled in a required writing methods course as they tutored elementary students from different ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Situated Learning and Sociocultural Theory

Situated learning theory and sociocultural theory informed my inquiry. Situated learning and sociocultural theorists contend understanding and knowledge develops through social situations and interactions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Noted educational theorists from the past believed problem solving, social interactions, and intercultural experiences provide opportunities for students to develop and learn (Dewey, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978). In this investigation, four preservice teachers in two groups tutored four to six elementary students as a group in writing at the community center. I investigated eight preservice teachers in two groups as they learned through the interactions with their peers and elementary students about their writing instruction, themselves, and the elementary students. The situated learning environment places emphasis on the idea that knowledge learned is specific to the situation (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The goal was to provide the situation for culturally responsive pedagogy to emerge.

Lave and Wenger (1991) focus not only on co-participation and social engagement but also on the context in which learning occurs. Characteristics of situated learning environments include authentic contexts and activities that provide real-life experiences of how to use knowledge (Herrington & Oliver, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Preservice teachers learn and develop understandings through social interaction within real life contexts (Richards, 2010; Richards, Bennett, & Shea, 2007). Through collaboration the preservice teachers at the community center problem solved and constructed knowledge about instruction with diverse learners in a real-life situation. This learning environment provided preservice teachers with authentic teaching

experience that mirrors future classroom instruction to understand better how to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

Other key characteristics of situated learning theory are reflection and assessment (Herrington & Oliver, 1995). The preservice teachers reflected throughout the semester on their experiences tutoring at the community center. These self-reflections focused on their understandings about instruction with elementary students from diverse backgrounds. Preservice teachers also reflected on assessment of their own learning. Situated learning theory embraces the notion that process and product are both important in acquiring knowledge (Herrington & Oliver, 1995).

Preservice teachers gain valuable understanding within this social context of learning through shared experience, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities and experience better quality development in a community environment (Richards, 2006; Richards, Bennett, & Shea, 2007). According to Shor (1992), situated teaching centers on the problem-solving pedagogy and neglects a traditional curriculum by incorporating preservice teachers and elementary students' culture. This situated teaching contributes to the development of critical thinking skills as it facilitates empowerment of the elementary students and preservice teachers. The novice preservice teachers become experts as they increase their knowledge, skills, and understandings through immersion in sociocultural situations (Billet, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Traditionally, research focused on individuals and environment as separate entities and not as interrelated (Rogoff, 1995). Few researchers employ sociocultural theory to guide their investigation of preservice teachers' education (Goos & Bennison, 2002; Richards, 2006). However within a community and as an individual, changes and

transformations occur as participants interact in an activity and different interpretations transpire (Rogoff, 2003). Culture is part of our everyday and past experiences; people develop through culture and cultural processes. Individuals develop and gain knowledge and understanding through shared community activities (Goos & Bennison, 2002; Richards, 2006; Rogoff, 1995).

On a personal level, preservice teachers developed writing instruction and teaching abilities as they worked with diverse populations. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching was evidenced as preservice teachers wrote and reflected on their experiences. On an interpersonal level, preservice teachers worked collaboratively to tutor students in shared community activities. Therefore, situated learning theory and sociocultural theory guided my inquiry as I investigated the preservice teachers in a social learning environment.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my inquiry:

- 1) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold prior to the semester field experience teaching diverse populations?
- 2) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold after completion of a semester of teaching diverse populations in the field?
- 3) In what ways do eight preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum?

- 4) In what ways might course content influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?
- 5) In what ways might the instructor influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?

Overview of Methods

I explored preservice teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy. In order to find meaning, I decided to utilize a qualitative design, in particular an embedded case study. I chose an embedded case study because I could not investigate and see all aspects of the case, and thus I gained understanding of a smaller part of the larger case (Stake, 2005). The larger case was the entire class, community center, preservice teachers, course instructor, and the elementary students. I focused my investigation on eight preservice teachers within the whole case. I utilized constant comparison methods, within-case analysis, and cross-case analysis. I chose constant comparison in order to find developing themes within all of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I then used within-case analysis to deeper examine the themes found in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to gain deeper understanding of these discoveries being relevant to other cases, I employed a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I conducted three individual and two focus interviews with eight preservice teachers, and I collected eight preservice teachers' electronically posted reflections and course documents. I also took field notes and kept a reflexive journal.

Delimitations of the Study

I limited my inquiry to one writing methods course taught during spring semester, 2009, at an area community center near the university I attend. I previously taught this

course for three semesters; therefore, I knew the course content well. I limited the participants to only eight preservice teachers in order to collect rich data and attain saturation.

Potential Limitations

As a qualitative researcher, I must address the limitations of my study. I consider myself the main instrument in this study. Therefore, the threat of researcher bias exists. Researcher bias occurs either as the effects of the participant on the researcher or the effects of the researcher on the participant (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). In all probability, my presence as a participant observer will affect my conclusions (Patton, 2002). However, my relationship with the instructor and the knowledge of the course facilitated a better understanding of the research. The assumption that data speak for the individual and that the researcher is neutral is not practical (Fontana & Frey, 2005). In order to eliminate the potential risk of bias and increase legitimation and credibility, I utilized member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, and an audit trail, and I conducted interviews in a neutral site (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). Furthermore, qualitative research is an interpretive process, and my personal prior knowledge added to this process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

I utilized a peer de-briefer in order to limit biases and increase the trustworthiness of my discoveries (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007b). The purpose of the peer de-briefer is to assist the researcher during analysis to prevent biases interfering with interpretation (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). Jacqueline (pseudonym), my peer de-briefer, is a doctoral candidate in my department. Jacqueline observed and listened as I conducted interviews with the preservice teachers. Jacqueline and I met to de-brief to promote

inter-coder reliability. Jacqueline's research experiences and credentials qualify her to act as my de-briefer. She presented at 13 state, national, or international conferences and co-authored two book chapters and three journal articles. Jacqueline formed a partnership with the community center prior to my study. She conducted research and taught preservice teachers enrolled in literacy courses as they tutored students at the community center, where I conducted my study. In addition, Jacqueline conducted her dissertation research at the community center the preceding summer, which I assisted by interviewing the literacy graduate students.

Other limitations include the interpretive process of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers study phenomenon in natural setting to make sense of the phenomenon or find meaning in the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This process can lead to misinterpretation or alternative interpretations, which may result in the researcher only considering one perspective and neglecting the multiple realities or perspectives of the phenomenon (Stake, 2005). Moreover, the quality of the discoveries depends on the rigor of research, and qualitative researchers must be careful not to fall into the trap of analytic bias, such as finding patterns that are not actually present in the inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Conversations with Jacqueline helped me challenge my conclusions.

Time might have provided limitation to the study. I only collected data for one semester. I collected observational data and conducted interviews with eight preservice teachers. These eight preservice teachers formed two groups of four teachers. I conducted focus interviews with each group of four preservice teachers. I also conducted individual interviews with each preservice teacher every other week during the semester.

Generalizability was another limitation in my study. My discoveries were limited to my sample population, and my population was limited to eight preservice teachers. Therefore, I was not able to generalize my assumptions to a larger population or to another context (Patton, 2002). However, I gained insight and understanding into culturally relevant teaching.

Definition of Terms

Academic Achievement Gap: This term refers to standardized test results of disparities among social, ethnic, and economic groups (Lavin-Loucks, 2006).

Cognitive Dissonance: Cognitive dissonance is when an individual acquires new knowledge that contradicts prior knowledge (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001).

Constant Comparative Methods: Constant comparative is an analysis of data to discover the central themes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Cross-case Analysis: Cross-case analysis is the investigation of more than one case in a context to gain deeper understanding of relevancy to other cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Culturally Relevant Teaching: Culturally relevant teaching includes: 1) Teachers recognize conceptions of self and others, 2) Teachers understand the significance of social interaction and promote social engagement in the classroom, and 3) Teachers consider the conception of knowledge (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Culturally responsive teaching indicates teachers should develop an improved understanding of their students, how they learn, and what type of instruction the students need (Geneva Gay, 2002).

Embedded Case Study: An embedded case study is a case study of a smaller part or subsection of the larger case (Yin, 2003).

Member Checking: Member checking refers to feedback participants provide to check the data for accuracy (Creswell, 1998).

6+1 Traits: The 6+1 traits is a contemporary model used to teach writing which includes ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation (Culhan, 2005, 2003).

Within-case Analysis: Within-case analysis is the examination of a single case within a particular context (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Summary

In America as schools and society become more racially and socio-economically diverse, teachers are predominately Caucasian from middle-class backgrounds and lack sufficient experiences to best meet the needs of students from backgrounds different from their own (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Richards & Bennett, In Progress). The academic achievement gap persists and might continue to expand (Richards, 2006; Sanchez, 2005). In order to narrow the widening gap, teacher educators must continue to research culturally responsive pedagogy as it relates to writing, self-reflection, teachers' understandings, and connections of research to practice (Chambless & Bass, 1995; Howard, 2006; Schmidt, 1999).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

In the subsequent chapters, I convey information that offers additional insight into this study. In Chapter Two, I reviewed current literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, situated learning theory, writing and writing instruction, student-teacher

interactions, development of self-awareness, and field experience. In Chapter Three, I offer a detailed explanation of the methods I chose. In Chapter Four, I present descriptions and interpretations of my discoveries about eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching, enrolled in a writing methods course. In Chapter Five, I provide a discussion of my discoveries and future implications of my study for teacher education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

“Let us not be too urgent; these things take time

Let us raise our children to be wonderful

and healthy, wise and determined against injustice.

O let us not waste the precious moments we have.”

(Ortiz, *Our Children Will Not Be Afraid*, p 68)

As the nation continues to change demographically and minority populations increase, scholars note teachers lack the preparation required to meet needs of students from socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds different from their own (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Richards & Bennett, In Progress). Preservice teachers lack experiences with diverse student populations (Lazar, 2007; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006). In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act has created an atmosphere of high stakes test preparation and accountability that limits time for building cultural connections (Kaplan, 2004). As a result, an academic achievement gap for these populations remains and may even be widening (NAEP, 2007; Richards, 2006; Sanchez, 2005).

In attempt to close this academic achievement gap, teacher education programs need to better prepare teachers in their instruction and to be culturally responsive. Self-reflection and awareness of one’s interpersonal insights are essential to teacher education programs and culturally responsive pedagogy; in order to understand others, individuals

must first understand themselves (Howard, 2006; Schmidt, 1999). Students and teachers must participate in meaningful interactions. In order to develop these meaningful interactions, teachers must share conversations about diversity in teacher education programs and experience cognitive dissonance, the psychological friction that occurs as prior knowledge does not match new knowledge (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). This dissonance provides an opportunity for teachers to challenge their prior beliefs, such as low expectations of students from culture different than their own, and develop more positive beliefs about their students.

As I conducted the literature review pertinent to my research, I considered the questions that guided my inquiry and enabled me to determine deeper meanings.

- 1) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold prior to the semester field experience teaching diverse populations?
- 2) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold after completion of a semester of teaching diverse populations in the field?
- 3) In what ways do eight preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum?
- 4) In what ways might course content influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?
- 5) In what ways might the course instructor influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?

To increase understanding of topics related to my questions, I provide information about *culturally responsive pedagogy* in the first section. I include a description of student-teacher interactions, interventions, multicultural issues, and concerns of teachers' expectations of students. In the next section, I present information about *self-reflection and self-awareness*. I introduce *writing and writing instruction* in the third section. This area of the review is important because limited research exists that connects writing instruction with culturally responsive teaching. In the fourth section, I offer research and knowledge in reference to *field experiences*. The final section of the literature review consists of *situated learning* and *sociocultural theories*.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Schools contribute to social inequities within our society and further marginalization of minority and lower socioeconomic populations (Kozol, 2005; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee 2003; Rosenberg, 2003). Preservice teachers generally possess few encounters with students' from backgrounds unlike their own such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and linguistics (Lazar, 2007; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006; Ukpokodu, 2003). Researchers suggest teachers are not prepared to support cultural experiences and to teach in lower socioeconomic and high minority areas (Delpit, 2003; Irvine, 2003). Therefore, this lack of teacher preparation might contribute to the academic achievement gap (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Richards, 2006) and to schools that fail to meet the needs of diverse populations (Banks, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Richards, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). Teachers' good intentions and awareness are not sufficient enough to initiate culturally responsive teaching and to meet the needs of students from diverse populations (Gay, 2000).

Culturally responsive teaching incorporates a more extensive view than good intentions and awareness. Delpit (1995) contends teachers must welcome and appreciate the cultural experiences and backgrounds of ethnically diverse students. These cultural experiences include values, beliefs, and attitudes that are shaped by individuals' experiences (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). According to Geneva Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching denotes teachers should develop an enhanced understanding of their students, how they learn, and what type of instruction students need. Teaching in a culturally responsive way begins with the development of a knowledge base and progresses to the design of curricula responsive to cultural diversity, in which teachers demonstrate thoughtfulness, build a community with effective cross-cultural communication, and deliver classroom instruction for cultural harmony. In addition, Gay believes in the necessity of instructional techniques embedded in the culture of diverse learners.

A culturally responsive teacher integrates culture into academic instruction within sociocultural contexts and environments, and the teacher develops meaningful and personal connections to students and their learning (Taylor & Whitaker, 2009). In addition, the teacher who practices culturally responsive pedagogy utilizes multicultural information, resources, and materials to link learning to home and maintains an attitude that embraces diversity (Morton & Bennett, 2010; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006).

During the 1990's, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994, 1995) developed the term culturally relevant teaching, an interchangeable term of culturally responsive teaching. The term transpired from Ladson-Billings' research in the late eighties. In this study, she investigated eight teachers who taught in a predominately African American school over

a three-year span. She asked parents and administrators to choose teachers they identified as successful. The parents based their criteria on the mutual respect in the classroom, the children's enthusiasm for learning, and the teacher's understandings of students' complex cultural worlds. The principals selected teachers according to standardized test scores, attendance rate, and limited discipline referrals. Ladson-Billings interviewed the participants, observed in the classroom, and video taped instruction. She realized the need to look beyond the teaching practices and strategies of these teachers because she could not find a common thread. Ladson-Billings examined their ideologies on a deeper level. She discovered these teachers made a conscious choice to teach at this school. All of the teachers considered themselves as part of the students' community, in and out of the classroom, and believed in giving back to the community. The teachers shared a belief that all students are capable of success, and they would scaffold their instruction. In these classrooms, teachers and students demonstrated reciprocal, equitable relationships with a bond between them. Out of this research Ladson-Billings created the three tenets of culturally relevant teaching.

According to Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994, 1995), culturally relevant teaching includes three tenets: 1) Teachers recognize positive conceptions of self and others, 2) Teachers understand the significance of social interaction and promote social engagement in the classroom, and 3) Teachers consider the conception of knowledge that best supports cultural awareness and learning (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1992). The first principle suggests there is not a set way to teach, but teaching requires discovering the capabilities of individual students from diverse backgrounds. Teachers also have high expectations for all students and believe all students can succeed.

The second tenet proposes teachers recognize the significance of communities within the classroom. Individuals learn from others and through social interaction. Teachers maintain connections and develop meaningful relationships with students in the classroom. Culturally relevant teaching appreciates the need for community and social interactions to ensure success for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1992). The last belief asserts that teachers think about the concept of knowledge. Teachers connect learning to students' lives to help scaffold development of broader schema, knowledge and skills to bigger ideas. Culturally relevant teachers recognize knowledge is shared and recreated, and the use of students' culture empowers students. Through these principles, culturally responsive teaching is achieved.

Student-teacher interactions. Relationships, social interaction, and community are necessary for school culture, students' success, and academic achievement (Kaplan, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Kaplan (2004) conducted workshops and seminars to increase understanding of diversity and to facilitate decreased conflict and tension. A total of 27,000 participants were primary and secondary teachers and administrators, school support staff including bus drivers and resource officers, and secondary students. In addition, Kaplan provided experiences for teenagers to develop multicultural leadership in a camp specifically created to help promote social interaction of students from diverse backgrounds and create increased awareness of diversity. From these case studies, Kaplan recognized the essential role interpersonal interaction contributes to the success of teachers and students. His analysis of these case studies demonstrated how miscommunication, misunderstandings, a lack of fairness, and friction due to race and class in schools result in students who drop out, withdraw, fail, or underachieve.

Effective communication is an essential part of teaching, culture, and learning, and in effect necessary for culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000). Through communication, individuals make sense of their world and each other. Sometimes individuals fail to notice meaning because of social context, intonation, non-verbal language, or cultural differences. Athanases and Martin (2006) suggested that talk and conversations play a significant role in understanding self and others. One-third of the participants in their study reported discussions with their peers about diversity issues helped better prepare them to teach students from different cultural background. Therefore, good communication facilitates a culturally responsive classroom.

In a classroom learning community, students need to feel safe and comfortable (Trumbull & Fluet, 2008; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Principals believe effective teachers have good rapport with students and positive excellent classroom management (Torff & Sessions, 2005). A culturally responsive teacher connects learning to the whole student, socially and emotionally (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000). In addition, a culturally responsive teacher does not place blame on the child but attempts to identify why he/she failed to meet the student's needs. Preservice teachers gain beneficial knowledge in field experience and use the information to adjust instruction to meet students' needs cognitively, physically, and affectively (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Morton & Bennett, 2010). Hedrick, McGee, and Mittag (2000) and Morton and Bennett (2010) investigated preservice teachers as they tutored elementary students one-on-one in high minority and low socioeconomic areas. In these studies, preservice teachers' reflections revealed teachers made personal connections to the students and adapted lessons to meet their instructional needs. Culturally responsive teachers allow students to have some

choice and responsibility. The relationships lead to emotional and personal connections and to deeper awareness of students' needs. Culturally responsive teachers link students' economic and cultural backgrounds of students to instruction.

Culturally relevant pedagogy creates an environment that intertwines the social-emotional connections, child-centered instruction, and professional growth to meet the needs of individual students for writing instruction (Morton & Bennett, 2010) (See Appendix A). Morton and Bennett (2010) found preservice teachers adapted lessons to reach students' interests and individual strengths once they were familiar with the students. In addition, preservice teachers revealed positive attitudes toward students that promoted social and emotional connections. In another study, students demonstrated greater engagement when they had strong relationships with the teacher, which indirectly effected achievement (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). In one case study, the teacher presented a less formal and more relaxed environment for Yup'ik Eskimos that reflected a portrait of the community and illustrated personal connections to cultural backgrounds and learning (Lipka, 1991). These studies are helpful, but additional research in connection with student-teacher interaction, writing instruction, and culturally responsive teaching is needed.

Teacher expectations. Studies have linked teacher expectations to student success. Lazar (2007) reported preservice teachers in their study still held low expectations and thought students from low poverty and culturally diverse areas lack literacy abilities. Morton and Bennett (2010) reported initially preservice teachers in a field-based writing methods course predicted low academic achievement, lack of parental involvement at home, and lack of motivation with diverse student populations. Research

suggests in-service teachers possessed low expectations for diverse urban populations as a result of preconceived notions of stereotypes (Song, 2006). These teachers' instruction resembled a formula or a script instead of individualized instruction as a result of the renewed focus on standards and accountability. In the Song (2006) study, schools focused on low achievement among minority and low income groups who were less likely to live in two parent homes, more likely to have difficulty speaking English, more likely to change schools, and more likely to be identified as learning or behavior disabled. They found a majority of the preservice and in-service teachers in their study believed students from low socioeconomic and minority areas could not learn to utilize their higher level thinking skills. Schools need to restructure curriculum and school settings, and teachers must have high expectations for students to experience success (Howard, 2006).

Understandings of teacher beliefs and actions are essential to closing the academic achievement gap and to students' success in learning (Comber, 2007). Teachers must declare the position, "what can I do to ensure my students are learning?" Schools should rethink the curriculum to move "beyond the classroom walls" (Comber, 2007, p.116) of the classroom and connect to the students' learning. Research needs to concentrate on the teachers and students who experience success to illustrate techniques and curricula that is beneficial, but it is important to note there is not one particular way to solve inequities within educational institutions. Every student experiences and learns in different ways for different situations, and teachers need to understand their own beliefs in order to best teach diverse student populations.

Researchers point out that disconnect exists in regard to social inequalities from teacher and students' beliefs, values, experiences, and perspectives (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Delpit 1988; Phuntsog, 2001). Teachers fail to identify the connection between students' background and the consequential impact on their learning, and often teachers neglect to recognize how their own backgrounds impact their beliefs and negative biases toward students (Wake & Modla, 2008). These low expectations represent constraints teachers place on diverse students' learning. Students receive limited opportunities to apply their prior knowledge because of their teachers' beliefs and lack of preparation.

Interventions and multicultural issues. Many teachers believe they are not prepared for multicultural issues in the classroom or to teach diverse populations; for this reason, university courses needed to infuse field experiences (Wake & Modla, 2008). Barksdale, et al. (2002) investigated the perceptions of 223 preservice teachers about preparedness to teach students from different cultural, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. The preservice teachers were in literacy education courses enrolled in seven colleges and universities around the United States. In this study, 125 of the preservice teachers reported they were not prepared to teach students from different cultural backgrounds. Yet, the demographics of the United States continues to change rapidly, and a plethora of multicultural issues also will remain a high priority in the nation's schools.

Multicultural education was developed to change schools and educational institutions to create equal education for all students from diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Banks, 2001). Diversity should be maintained for all educational institutions across staff, administration, and students

(Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Multicultural education's goal is social justice, which means elimination of stereotypes and the creation of tolerance and unity (Leistyna, 2002).

According to Banks (2001), multicultural education includes five dimensions to ensure equality in educational institutions. These components reflect similar aspects as culturally responsive pedagogy. These characteristics are as follows:

- Content integration
- Knowledge construction
- Prejudice reduction
- Equity pedagogy
- Empowering school culture

Content integration is the utilization of information from different cultures integrated into the curriculum. An example would be to teach about understanding westward expansion through the eyes of Native Americans. Knowledge construction is when teachers facilitate the understanding of how race, ethnicity, and social class impact learning. Prejudice reduction helps students build positive attitudes for groups from racial backgrounds different from their own. Equity pedagogy means the teacher assists all students in experiencing academic success. Empowering school culture indicates reform and transformation of school culture to produce an environment without inequities and injustices, where students become empowered and critique schools' shortcomings. These principles connect and overlap with the ideology of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Some research about culturally responsive pedagogy includes alternative teaching approaches such as the inclusion of interventions to better prepare preservice teachers for diversity (Athanases & Martin, 2006; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006). Mysore,

Lincoln, and Wavering (2006) investigated the attitudes of preservice teachers toward multicultural issues. Forty-eight participants in a Master's Teaching program completed a Multicultural Attitude Survey at the beginning and end of a semester. The researchers utilized interventions throughout the semester; interventions included additional content approaches such as discussions, films, research articles and presentations, case studies, internships in the field, and guest speakers who focused on aspects of culturally responsive teaching. The researchers suggested interventions and field experiences positively affected preservice teachers' attitudes toward multicultural issues, which in turn affects attitudes toward diverse student populations.

Researchers continue to investigate interventions as an approach to best prepare teachers to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Some researchers utilize film such as *The Color of Fear* (Wah, 1994), *Crash* (Hagis, 2004), and *School Colors* (Andrews, 1994) to cause a cognitive dissonance in teacher educators and to raise awareness and challenge preservice teachers' unconscious or conscious beliefs, biases, and stereotypes (Alquist & Milner, 2008; Berlak, 2008; Lea & Sims, 2008; McGarry, 2008). Wake and Modla (2008) reported success when teacher educators and researchers modeled culturally responsive pedagogy with children's multicultural books and asked preservice teachers to create their own autobiography and a biography of their student. Wake and Modla concluded these interventions increased educators' comfort level and awareness of diverse student populations, but preservice teachers still felt some uncertainty about their own biases, stereotypes, and beliefs.

One part of a larger investigation by Athanases and Martin (2006) concentrated on an education program's effect on how preservice teachers learn to teach diversity.

The larger longitudinal investigation included course documents, questionnaires, interviews with faculty members, observations, and surveys of over 300 graduates. In this study, the researchers conducted focus interviews with thirty-eight of the graduates who were teaching. These graduates emphasized that integration of topics addressing culture, language, and equity into the content of courses led them to feel better prepared to teach diverse populations. Many of the participants felt cohort discussions assisted the development of culturally relevant pedagogy as well.

As some research suggests, field experiences connected to the university coursework about culturally responsive teaching provides enhanced preparation for teachers of diverse learners (Sleeter, 2001). Consequently, integration and consistency with field and course work are essential for educational programs, and more longitudinal research is needed to prepare preservice teachers to teach diverse populations (Athanases & Martin, 2006; Taylor & Sobel, 2001).

Researchers must examine how to connect teaching practice with the research, and teacher educators should begin with what teachers already know (Wake & Modla, 2008). Wake and Modla also add that although teachers sometimes have sociocultural awareness, they have insufficient practical knowledge and application with reference to this awareness (Wake & Modla, 2008). More extensive qualitative research is needed to enhance for teacher preparation.

Self-Reflection and Self-Awareness

Critical reflection is an ongoing process in educators' beliefs and practices and includes questioning behaviors, beliefs, and values (Powell, Zehm, and Garcia, 1996). A teacher participates in critical reflection when she/he ponders a specific teaching situation

or incident. Teachers improve instruction and understand their teaching better through reflection in three areas: instructional content, students and their learning, and environment and social context of teaching (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Self-reflection facilitates individual development of a broader perspective of multicultural issues, and research indicates it is essential for preservice teachers to critically reflect about experiences with students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). Teachers, students, and administrators bring cultural influences and assumptions to school (Zeichner & Liston 1996). Individuals construct new knowledge through self-discovery and reflections of self-identity supported by reflection (Ukpokodu, 2003). Teachers' experiences shape their beliefs and values, and through knowledge of self, the teacher can identify how their own bias can affect others in the classroom (Hale, Snow-Gerono, & Morales, 2008).

Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate awareness of differentness of self and others and relatedness to other people and cultures (Howard, 2006). Culturally responsive teachers who recognize the differentness of self and others possess self-awareness. Teachers must respect values and beliefs of others. Through words, individuals can know the self and others, and through their own awareness see connections to others. Preservice teachers' reflections illustrate social/emotional connections and personal growth, and reflections can provide further insight into the development of culturally relevant teachers (Morton & Bennett, 2010).

Culturally responsive pedagogy consists of areas hard to measure: self-awareness, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000). In Schmidt's

ABC's of Cultural Understanding and Communication, preservice teachers first write an autobiography, then interview a parent or someone from a different cultural background and write a biography about that person. Subsequently, they compare and contrast the autobiography and biography, analyze differences, and make connections (Schmidt & Finkbeiner, 2006). This model shows success for transformation at all levels of education: elementary school students and preservice and in-service teachers.

Researchers who used this model found in a two-year study of in-service teachers that the teachers made more connections to home and family and planned better lessons to connect to the family, home, and culture (Leftwich & Madden, 2006).

Reflection is a means to examine cognitive dissonance and change; reflection provides a way to achieve better understanding of students' culture and the significance of linking family, home, culture, and learning (Vogt & Au, 1994). However, teacher educators must offer in-service and preservice teachers guidance and resources to initiate meaningful reflection. Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004) realized teachers had no reference point to analyze reflections as they pertain to oppression, race, or stereotypes and to how their self-awareness affects interpretations of students. Teacher educators must model the process, ask the right questions, facilitate deeper discussions, and present more in-depth prompts in a time efficient way (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Fecho, 2000; Morton & Bennett, 2010).

Vogt and Au (1994) reported that In Hawaii and on the Navajo Reservation, researchers from various fields provided teachers tools and resources to reflect and collaborate. Teachers taught for half-day and participated in professional development for the remainder of the day. In this time, the teachers had conversations and

collaborated with the researchers and other teachers. Collaboration with authentic dialogue led to worthwhile reflection (Vogt & Au, 1994), and successful reflection requires exceeding the comfort zone and taking risks to a point of cognitive dissonance (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004). This opportunity helps teachers develop a better sense of their self-awareness. Continued research is necessary to find ways to best help preservice teachers with further reflection and understanding, specifically as it pertains to culturally responsive pedagogy and writing instruction (Trumbull & Fluet, 2008).

Writing and Writing Instruction

Culturally responsive teaching has the potential to close the academic achievement gap in literacy (Leftwich & Madden, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act produced an atmosphere of accountability and testing, and the district offices and administration required a focus on standards, which dominates the schools and instruction (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Kaplan, 2004). The pressure of this environment impacts teachers' beliefs and understandings.

Teachers lack knowledge to connect literacy and writing to students' culture and family (Izzo & Schmidt, 2006). Prior experiences shape teachers' beliefs and attitudes about writing and writing instruction (Chambless & Bass, 1995). A major concern in the United States is the limited requirements for writing instruction (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Gaps are still apparent in literacy understandings, and teachers often fail to mention the connection between reading and writing (Richards, 2001). Connections between coursework and field experience generally focuses more on reading theory and practice than writing, and preservice teachers have difficulty linking knowledge to practice (Chambless & Bass, 1995; Hoffman & et al., 2005). Field experience and

practicum provides the best results for teacher preparation in reading and writing instruction. Literacy education situated in a social context or field placement provides positive affects for preservice teachers' understandings in diverse cultural and lower economic areas (Lazar, 2007). Although increasing numbers of literacy programs include culturally responsive pedagogy, more research is needed on the impact of these programs.

Several researchers utilize preservice teachers' writing samples as data such as reflections, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies. Pattnaik (2006) and Schmidt and Izzo (2003) found writing an autobiography and a biography of someone from a culture different from preservice teachers' own culture helped them to find their own voice and explore the self (Pattnaik, 2006, Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). Writing and reflections offer ways to understand self and teaching practice (Leftwich & Madden, 2006). Leftwich and Madden (2006) implemented Schmidt's model (1998 as cited by Leftwich & Madden, 2006) with their own practice to investigate the usefulness of the model for literacy instruction and diversity issues and to examine their experiences. The researchers wrote autobiographies, conducted interviews of people from different cultural backgrounds, and then wrote a biography of that person. Leftwich and Madden (2006) discovered the written documents provided opportunities for them to self-reflect, which facilitated conversations and think-out-loud reflective practices. The researchers believed this reflection led to deeper understandings of how to provide safe environments for their students to develop self-reflective practice and to discuss controversial, cultural issues. Many teachers provided lists and detailed descriptions of what happened, but they neglected to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions or how to develop more effective

lessons. First, preservice teachers need to learn how to look at their own “life text” with a critical eye (Leftwich & Madden, 2006). Through autobiographies and asking critical questions, individuals can understand the differences and relatedness of diverse populations (Howard, 2006). However, there are limited inquiries concerning literacy and more specifically writing instruction as it connects to culturally responsive teaching.

Lazar (2007) studied two groups of preservice teachers enrolled in a literacy methods course. One course incorporated diversity and community connections, and the other course focused on literacy methods. The preservice teachers in the diversity and community course demonstrated confidence and developed new understandings. The preservice teachers in the other course showed less confidence and believed they would not teach in an urban school. However, these teachers expressed beliefs in their students but could not apply those expectations to their practice. The less confident teachers could reiterate what they had been taught, but they failed to understand and apply the knowledge.

Other research reveals similar success with addressing culture through writing instruction. In one writing methods course partnership between a charter school and university, elementary students and preservice teachers’ writing benefited from the field experience (Morton & Bennett, 2010). The preservice teachers developed a better understanding about culturally responsive teaching and writing instruction evident in their weekly journals. Vogt and Au (1994) in Hawaii and at a Navajo school in Arizona found it is necessary to understand one’s own literacy experiences as readers and writers in order to teach. In another study, graduate students through narrative and ethnographic writing discovered more about the self and understanding of how others’ experiences

affect education (Hale, Snow-Gerono, & Morales, 2008). Through writing, individuals think and understand the significance of reflection, critical questioning, and seeing the other. For teachers “to become more transformative individuals, they must make a radical shift and reflect on how their values, beliefs, biases, and experiences influence and guide the work they do with students” (Hale, Snow-Gerono, & Morales, 2008, p. 1424). Once this shift occurs, teachers develop an increased self-awareness.

An additional component of writing instruction is motivation and interest. McIntyre and Leroy (2003) suggest teachers motivate reluctant writers if they provide a topic of interest and use good literature about which to write. Writing attitude surveys with students demonstrate younger ones have a more positive attitude, and it decreases as they mature (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). Students experience success if teachers use effective strategies and provide opportunities of choice and give specific feedback (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000; Street, 2005). Teachers, who scaffold individual instruction, provide social writing, offer supportive feedback, and supply writing strategies increase student motivation and engagement in writing (McIntyre & Leroy, 2003). Good rapport with students, emotional connections with students, and knowledge of students’ prior writing experiences are essential to building confidence in writing (McIntyre & Leroy, 2003). These teacher practices are also present in beliefs of culturally responsive teaching.

Other writing researchers found that co-authoring and collaborative writing also led to deeper writing experiences (Wynn, Cadet, & Pendleton, 2000). University level collaborative writing as well facilitates culturally responsive pedagogy because community members share the self and culturally diverse students engage in the writing

process as Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2000) and Wynn, Cadet, and Pendleton (2000) found. Through a social process of writing, preservice teachers gained confidence and built identities as writers, which affected their instruction (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). In this type of setting, the course instructor creates a safe and comfortable environment for communication through self-disclosure, peer tutoring, peer editing, and writer's workshop. Students improve in achievement and acquisition of knowledge, learn about the self, and become more capable of teaching others.

Field Experiences

Research revealed how field experiences also contribute to preservice teachers' understanding of the self and others. Preservice teachers engage in field experience where they have the opportunity to observe experienced and novice teachers and to work one-on-one with students (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000). Hedrick, McGee, and Mittag (2000) conducted a qualitative study that focused on two field-based courses as elementary and secondary education majors tutored students considered at-risk. The researchers suggested the field experience appeared to better facilitate preservice teachers' understandings of their students' needs. Hedrick, McGee, and Mittag reported preservice teachers formed emotional bonds and relationships with the students. They added that learned instruction is not limited to cognitive aspects, but to the "whole child," which interconnects with emotional and social needs. Therefore, through the one-on-one interaction, the preservice teachers made deeper emotional connections and expressed more awareness of students' needs. They observed how the economic and cultural backgrounds of students impact learning. Field experience offers individuals

opportunities to have conversations, to collaborate, to ask questions, and to reflect about cultural diversity and the self (Powell, Zehm, & Garcia, 1996). This discomfort or cognitive dissonance is sometimes necessary for teachers to change the way they think and see (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). At the point of cognitive dissonance, teachers become more self-aware.

In a study by Wiggins, Follo, and Eberly (2007), forty-seven preservice teachers completed a survey about attitudes toward teaching in a multicultural setting prior to field experience. These preservice teachers took the same survey at the end of the field experience, and 15 substitute teachers completed the survey for the first time at the end of the field experience. The participants were divided into three groups and the duration of the field experience varied among the groups from one semester to one year. Although all participants benefited from the field experiences, participants who had longer duration in the field expressed greater comfort of preparedness and deeper understanding.

As some research suggests, field experiences with diverse populations that connect to the university coursework about culturally responsive teaching provides better preparation for teachers of diverse learners (Athanases & Martin, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). In addition, placement in diverse educational settings and observations of experienced teachers facilitated better preparation to teach diverse populations (Athanases & Martin, 2006). When teacher educators connect what is learned from course material and knowledge with practical application in fully immersed field experience, preservice teachers acquire deeper understandings (Grant & Koskela, 1986; Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Tang, 2003). For example, Fang and Ashley (2004) investigated 28 preservice teachers enrolled in a reading methods course embedded in a

field-based experience as they tutored struggling readers. Through journals, surveys, course documents, and interviews, Fang and Ashley discovered preservice teachers gained confidence in their instruction, developed a better understanding of why their students were struggling, and learned how to individualize instruction to meet their students' needs. Aside from feeling more prepared, preservice teachers also improved in confidence, understood new concepts of teaching and learning, and demonstrated more positive and respectful attitudes toward students and teaching as a profession when participating in field experience (Fang & Ashley, 2004). Because preservice teachers are presented with occurrences to observe each other and more experienced teachers in the field experiences, they become more confident in instruction.

Besides teacher preparation and confidence, field experience offers further benefits in the development of culturally responsive teachers. Field placements of preservice teachers provide different varied opportunities and contexts that provide social/emotional and professional growth (Morton & Bennett, 2010; Tang, 2003). Preservice teachers immersed in field base experiences demonstrated an increased cultural awareness and understanding of biases (Barton, 1999; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). Preservice teachers' beliefs were challenged, which facilitated this greater understanding (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005). These experiences supported preservice teachers' expressions of a more positive sense of self (Fang & Ashley, 2004). Fang and Ashley (2004) found that preservice teachers who tutor in the field discover the experience is the most valuable component of their education program. They build better relationships with students, parents, staff, and peers, and the preservice teachers

recognize the disconnect between home, culture, and school. Preservice teachers experienced dissonance with the different backgrounds of students.

Of concern is preservice teachers have rare occasions to work with students (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000). In one study, 21 elementary and secondary preservice teachers offered recommendations for teacher preparation based on their own positive experiences (Phuntsog, 2001). These teachers suggested field experience and immersion in diverse settings provides an increased understanding about diverse populations.

Sociocultural and Situated Learning Theory

Situated learning and sociocultural theorists assert the acquisition of knowledge is generated through interaction and social contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and individuals learn through socially shared activities (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory initiated from early Vygotskyian concepts that knowledge is shared, created, and recreated (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Sociocultural and situated learning approaches focus on social and cultural processes for learning, as students are situated in authentic activities (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Participation and engagement are essential to situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995). Rogoff (1995) contends learning occurs with guided participation and opportunities to observe and participate with experts. Some theorists believe social interactions are essential to learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Novices learn from experts through participation, and beginners move from the periphery to center of the community as they increase their knowledge, skills, and understandings through immersion in sociocultural situations (Billett, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir

& Hand, 2006). As individuals receive increased responsibilities and participation, they increase the complexity of their learning.

Sociocultural theorists allege goal-directed activities, problem solving, social relations, and culture situated in authentic circumstances provide experiences and opportunities for students to learn (Billett, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Authentic means real-life situations that afford students application of learned knowledge. In addition, situated learning includes realistic contexts for students to apply what they know (Herrington & Oliver, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated teaching neglects traditional methods, incorporates teacher and students' cultures, and focuses on problem-solving pedagogy. Through this teaching, participants develop critical thinking skills as it empowers them (Shor, 1992). Through shared experience, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities and experience, teachers gain valuable understanding of effective teaching within a social context of learning (Richards, 2006; Richards, Bennett, & Shea, 2007). Situated learning embraces context, culture, and activity together, and it indicates knowledge learned is specific to the situation (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Nasir & Hand, 2006). Situated learning theory also includes reflection and assessment as key components and supports the belief that process and product are significant to acquire knowledge (Herrington & Oliver, 1995).

Individuals develop knowledge and understanding through the personal, interpersonal, and shared community activities (Goos & Bennison, 2002; Richards, 2006; Rogoff, 1995). Rogoff (1995) established three planes of analysis: the personal, interpersonal, and community. The personal includes cognition, emotion, values, and beliefs; the interpersonal (social) incorporates communication, dialogue, and interactions,

which may consist of cooperative learning; and community involves shared histories and languages. Community combines the personal and interpersonal into the whole. Individuals transform from the interpersonal to intrapersonal, which is internalization of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural research examines the way knowledge is co-constructed and how it becomes internalized, appropriated, transmitted, or transformed in learning contexts (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As participants interact, transformations take place in the community and individual and distinctive interpretations emerge (Rogoff, 2003). The classroom community creates an environment incorporating culture, diversity, difference, and inclusiveness within which individuals construct unique social positions at different times (Brown, 2004). In these settings, individuals develop through culture and cultural processes, and culture is a combination of daily and historical experiences.

Sociocultural theorists concentrate on how individuals participate in a particular context and how individuals use tools and artifacts from their culture (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Predominately, the educational system has separated knowing and doing, but activity and context are integral to learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1996). Hands-on experiences within authentic contexts help individuals learn. Therefore, when an individual is active in the doing, then the knowing follows. Research has traditionally concentrated on individuals and environment separately not as interconnected (Rogoff, 1995). Thought and action arbitrated through social processes, and language and social interactions serve as important features in a collective environment (Brown, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). These aspects are important to consider in a culturally responsive classroom.

Summary

As the United States changes demographically, an academic achievement gap among cultural groups still exists (NAEP, 2007; Richards, 2006; Sanchez, 2005). Teachers lack understandings and remain unprepared to teach students from socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds different from their own (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Teachers must first develop knowledge and self-awareness through writing or cognitive dissonance about themselves in order to teach and build relationships with their students (Berlak, 2008; Howard, 2006; McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001; Schmidt, 1999). My study will contribute to the current body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy, in particular as it relates to writing instruction and self-awareness of preservice teachers. This investigation will add to the literature on understandings of preservice teachers in regards to culturally relevant pedagogy as the preservice teachers participate in a field experience in which they tutor low income, minority students in writing. In Chapter Three, I present a thorough description of the methods I chose.

Chapter Three: Methodology

I conducted my research during the spring semester, 2009, at a community center located near the university where I am enrolled as a doctoral candidate. I chose a qualitative research design because I wanted to understand the perceived experiences of preservice teachers as they tutored school-aged students, approximately five to twelve years old. I chose a case study design because I wanted to better understand the participants, preservice teachers, within a particular setting, the community center (Eisenhardt, 1989; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2003). Specifically, I used an embedded case design because I could not experience or observe all aspects of the entire case, as the entire case was large and complex, and I wanted to examine the smaller part of the whole case (Patton, 2002). Individual, relationships, culture, and everyday life are intertwined together. For these reasons, I chose a qualitative research design to study the above aspects of preservice teachers' experiences within the course.

During the semester of tutoring at the community center, I investigated the understandings of preservice teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy, who were enrolled in a writing methods course. The following questions guided my inquiry:

- 1) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold prior to the semester field experience teaching diverse populations?

- 2) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold after completion of a semester of teaching diverse populations in the field?
- 3) In what ways do eight preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum?
- 4) In what ways might course content influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?
- 5) In what ways might the course instructor influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?

I collected data that included audiotapes of interviews, observations of the writing instruction and tutoring settings, and course documents. In addition, I maintained fieldnotes and wrote in my reflexive journal during the semester.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology. I present information for all aspects of my study: the research design, research context, population sample, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations.

Design of the Study

Qualitative design. I chose a qualitative design because I wanted to examine in detail and depth sociocultural aspects of teaching (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research stresses meaning and relationships constructed within sociocultural contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). I also decided on qualitative research because it offers “a way of thinking about and of viewing the world that can enrich the research” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.4). Qualitative research consists of five general features: 1) data come from the

natural setting, 2) data collection appears as images or words instead of numbers, 3) process is emphasized in addition to product, 4) data analysis occurs inductively, and 5) the research centers on the lives of participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). I wanted to examine the perspectives of preservice teachers in a natural teaching setting about culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, qualitative design was an appropriate choice.

The three main processes of qualitative research are data collection, analysis procedures, and interpretation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1994). The researcher provides observations and rich details about what occurred during the study (Wolcott, 1994). During analysis, the researcher concentrates on the identification and interconnectedness of themes within the research. The researcher then interprets the meanings of the entirety.

I placed myself in the community, the situation, as an “observer in the world,” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research consists of comprehensive exposure and connections to the field in everyday life situations with the purpose to illustrate and illuminate not only the context of the data, but a view from the inside (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My research took place in a social situation, and the inquiry focused on meaning preservice teachers made of their experience, which is consistent with a qualitative approach (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative designs require the researcher to look at experiences and data from different perspectives in order to provide detail and depth in the inquiry (Patton, 2002). In qualitative investigations, the researcher uncovers themes, categories, patterns, and gains understandings and insights. The researcher then interprets and analyzes data in ways that attempt to show meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data extend

beyond written text and include body or non-verbal language and oral language (Gee, 2005; Spradley, 1979). The goal of qualitative research is to understand experiences of individuals from their perspective, and qualitative researchers believe “multiple realities” exist because individuals develop perspectives from their socially constructed experiences (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Therefore in this study, I collected data from interviews, course documents, and observations of preservice teachers as they tutored elementary students in writing. Interviews provide quotations from participants that help illustrate perceptions, knowledge, and understandings about their experiences (Patton, 2002). Observations offer detailed descriptions of participants’ behaviors and how they interact with other participants or members of the community. Documents offer additional insight into participants’ knowledge, understandings, and experiences.

Case study. The case is the component analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I selected a case study design as the most appropriate for answering my questions; “...a case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p.61). Case studies focus on information gained through experience in a context, such as social or cultural (Stake, 2005). The case was bounded by time and place and included thorough and extensive data collection (Creswell, 1998; Richards, 2010). Data collection for a case study includes several sources such as interviews, observations, and course documents (preservice teachers’ reflections, lesson plans, and autobiographical writing samples). A case study is the organization of an investigation of the intricacies of one particular situation from a sociological perspective (Patton, 2002). In case studies, the researcher identifies the interactions within a context

and analyzes them to determine meaning. The case is the component analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis could involve individuals, groups, activities, time and or incidents, which creates micro-or mini-case studies. The case could even include experiences of the observer or researcher. The purpose of case studies is to contribute to the field of information about an individual, organization, social, or related phenomena. I wanted to contribute to the knowledge of preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy embedded within a specific context, thus I chose a case study.

An instrumental design entails the choice of the case based on the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 2005). An instrumental case study facilitates a deeper understanding of a case and adds to the body of knowledge in the field (Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Stake, 1995, 2005). The focus of my study is not the case, but the insights that contribute to the research on understandings in connection with culturally relevant pedagogy. Therefore, I selected an instrumental case study.

Case studies follow the vision of qualitative research: to describe, explain, and understand (Tellis, 1997). In order to conduct an in-depth case study, data collection includes several sources to provide substantiation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). The types of data depend on the study under investigation (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). The sources for data for this study included interviews, observations, participant-observation, and tangible objects as writing samples or reflections. Through the use of these multiple data sources and field notes and a reflexive journal, I strengthened my understanding of preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy.

Embedded case study. As a researcher, I was not able to see, know, or write about all aspects of a case (Richards, 2010; Stake, 2005). Therefore, I chose an embedded case study because I concentrated on a subsection of the entire case. My interest in a smaller part of the case emanates in my concern for gaining insight in the changes of preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching. An embedded case study includes "more than one unit of analysis" (Yin, 2003, p.42) and may utilize both quantitative and qualitative data (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). However, for my particular study, I solely focused on a qualitative design because I wanted to investigate the meanings and relationships as constructed within social contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The case was defined as the entire context of the community center partnership with the university: the class of preservice teachers, course instructor, elementary students, community center staff, and me (the researcher). Then, I analyzed separate units embedded within the context of the partnership: eight preservice teachers.

Research context. My research involved a partnership between a local community center and a large southeastern university. According to the university website, it is one of the top 10 largest in the nation. First, I describe the community center and the partnership, and then I briefly identify aspects of the writing methods course.

The community center. The community center is located in an urban area with a population of 40,000. In 1990, eight task forces merged to facilitate the development of a better community because it is situated in an impoverished area (University Area Community Development Corporation, 2005a, 2005b). The community maintains a high crime and drug use rate and has a large percentage of single mothers and teen pregnancy.

Ninety percent of the children living in the area receive free and reduced lunch. From this merger, the center complex materialized and is now situated on 50,000 square feet. This center contains offices, art and dance studios, a fitness center, gymnasium, and classrooms with an outside recreation area, which contains basketball courts and a deck courtyard. The community center provides activities, programs, and services free to the area community members, which focus on cultural arts, health, education, and crime prevention. Other valuable aspects of the development are the magnet elementary school and career high-school located near the center. Yet, another positive feature is the private and public partnerships that have developed.

University and community center partnership. Partnerships exist with the university I attend and the community center, and I have participated in some of the partnerships. Universities sometimes collaborate with the community to form partnerships in which all stakeholders benefit (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007). For two summers, I served as a research assistant to one of my major professors. This professor brought her graduate literacy education majors to the community center to tutor students in a summer literacy camp. I collected data, assisted the professor, provided mentoring to graduate students, and helped with communication between all participants such as parents, students, and community center staff.

Over the last six years, five doctoral students have taken their preservice teachers to the community center to participate as tutors in afterschool programs. The preservice teachers instruct the elementary students in literacy. Furthermore, the preservice teachers gain field experience, collaborate with peers, and have opportunities to execute lesson plans.

Writing methods course. A fellow doctoral candidate taught a writing methods course at the Community center during spring semester, 2009, to whom I assigned a pseudonym, Maya. Maya utilized the techniques of Culhan's (2005, 2003) 6 +1 Traits Model to teach the methods writing course. Culhan designed the 6 + 1 Traits Model in attempt to create a shared vocabulary to describe qualities of writing. She believed the model would provide a common language for writing assessment and for feedback to students on their writing performance. The model is meant to provide a framework to make sure students write through various genres and for different purposes and audiences. Culhan also created the model to give students the opportunity to receive individualized instruction, gain confidence in their writing, and become responsible for improving their writing.

The 6 + 1 Traits qualities of writing include ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. This process is used by teachers in public schools. According to Culhan (2005; 2003), ideas incorporate the meaning and development of message, the content of writing. The ideas component includes how to select the idea, how to narrow and elaborate the idea, and how to convey the message. For this quality, the teacher illustrates how to find ideas in their writing and in other contexts, such as analyzing children's literature and the different authors' ideas. The next element, organization, consists of the internal structure of the message, the framework of the writing. The teacher provides models of how effective organization looks. Organization contains the sequence and framework of ideas and how to tie ideas together so the content makes sense to the reader. The quality word choice consists of specific vocabulary the writer uses. The writer chooses language and "just right" words to

express ideas in order for the reader to vividly see the message. The teacher illustrates how the parts of speech convey meanings, but it is not about grammar. The teacher helps students learn how to select words to create an image in the reader's mind. Voice is the tone of the piece, the personal stamp, and voice in writing expresses how authors see their ideas. Voice in writing conveys the purpose to an audience. The teacher facilitates the students' awareness of voice through high-quality assessment and teaching. Sentence fluency contains the way words and phrases flow, and students learn to develop well-built sentences and read aloud for natural rhythm and flow of language. Sentence fluency is the quality in writing that relates to where students learn to recognize the importance of how sentences sound and look. The teacher instructs students to vary sentence length and listen to the rhythm of passages. The conventions section is the mechanical correctness, which includes grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The teacher explains how the conventions help readers follow text and make text understandable. In the 6 + 1 Traits Model, students learn about conventions in their own writing, in an authentic context. Presentation embraces the overall appearance of the final piece of writing (Culhan, 2007). The final quality in writing is presentation, which entails how the writing looks on paper. The teacher connects to the final step in the writing process and gives students opportunities to draft, revise, and edit.

In addition to the 6 + 1 Traits, Maya instructed preservice teachers about practices for writing genres, ESOL strategies (English for Speakers of Other Languages), and the writing process. Maya taught the writing process as recursive, yet described the different aspects of the process: prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. The writing genres consisted of poetry, journal writing, letter writing, persuasion, narrative, and

expository. Maya dedicated an entire class to ESOL strategies. She first showed a video of an Iranian woman as she told the audience to make a nametag in Farsi. Then, after Maya stopped the video, she asked the preservice teachers if they understood what she said. No one comprehended the woman's language, and then Maya played the next section of the video. The Iranian woman spoke again in Farsi, but she demonstrated how to make a nametag. The preservice teachers then understood the woman's directions. Preservice teachers first discussed the experience with each other and then with Maya and then entire class. Maya shared different strategies to help with English Language Learners such as visuals, gestures, repetition or paraphrasing, or use of creative arts.

Thirty-five preservice teachers were enrolled in the teaching writing methods course. Maya met five times with the preservice teachers for three hours prior to the initiation of the tutoring component of the class and continued to meet with the students for an hour prior to and thirty minutes after each tutoring session. The preservice teachers collaborated in groups of four and tutored approximately four to six elementary students in writing for an hour once a week for 11 weeks.

Maya used a variety of best practices to teach writing methods. According to Whitaker (2007) and Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, (1998), writing best practices include teaching strategies that promote 1) positive environments, 2) organization of writing, 3) meaningful writing to students, 4) writing for a variety of purposes, 5) collaborative writing, and 6) critical reflection. Each preservice teacher created a reflective personal writing experiences paper. This paper included their writing experiences in and out of school and how they might teach writing based on these experiences. The preservice teachers created a Me-Zine, which is a magazine devoted to

the person who creates it, an autobiography. The preservice teachers chose at least four genres to write about themselves for the Me-Zine. They conducted Garfield writing surveys to gain understanding of elementary students' attitudes about writing (Kear, Koffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). Kear, Koffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2004) created this survey that includes questions about how students feel about writing in different situations and how they feel about writing in different genres. The answers are a four point likert scale that ranges from agree to disagree. They also taught writing lessons provided by Maya to the elementary students. As a group, preservice teachers reflected each week on Blackboard, a web-based course management system, at the university. Maya, the course instructor, and I read course documents that included reflections each week.

Population and sample. Most qualitative designs focus on a small sample within a context to achieve deeper insight and provide rich data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a). I reached data saturation through the voice of my eight informants. I conducted two focus group and three individual interviews with the eight preservice teachers throughout the semester. I achieved the point of sufficient data, saturation (Miller & Crabtree, 2005), which means the researcher does not see or observe anything new in the data (Charmaz, 2005). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into these individuals and not generalize to entire populations.

Thirty-five preservice teachers were enrolled in a required elementary education methods course, entitled Teaching Writing, taught by Maya. I utilized convenience sampling to choose eight preservice teachers. A sampling scheme consists of ways used to select the people in this case. Convenience sampling means participants who are

accessible and willing to participate in my study (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). I explained the study thoroughly to the preservice teachers. Preservice teachers formed groups of four or five the second week, and these groups tutored four to six elementary students throughout the semester. I gave them a week to think about participation in my study as a group. I then asked the class if any groups of preservice teachers were willing to participate in my study, and two groups volunteered. After I obtained signatures from the preservice teachers on the Institutional Review Board approved consent forms, I observed, took field notes of tutoring sessions, and interviewed individually and in focus groups throughout the semester. I interviewed each of the eight preservice teachers three times. I conducted three focus group interviews: one with the eight preservice teachers on the 12th week of class and one with each of the groups that consisted of four teachers at the end of the semester.

Research plan.

Research Schedule

Date	Procedure
March 9 Week 10	Collected historical data from the course instructor about instruction for weeks 1-9 Took field notes Individual interviews of Groups A & B Reflexive journal
March 16 Week 11	No Class Spring Break
March 23 Week 12	Took field notes Focus group interview with Group A & B, together Reflexive journal Member check interviews from previous week
March 30 Week 13	Took field notes Reflexive journal

	Member check interviews from previous week
April 6 Week 13	Community center Spring Break/ Back at University Individual interviews of Group A & B Reflexive journal
April 13 Week 14	Took field notes Reflexive Journal Member check interviews from previous week
April 20 Week 15	Took field notes Final interviews with Groups A & B Reflexive Journal
April 27 Week 16 Final Exam Week	Focus interview with Groups A & B Reflexive Journal Member check interviews from previous week

Researcher. I served as a participant observer because I was “immersed in the culture under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 81). Participant observer is the degree of involvement on the part of the participant in the setting of the study. Participant observer varies on a continuum in which one end of the continuum is total immersion and the other end is complete separation from the setting. My participant observation status varied from immersion to separation. The researcher is an instrument and the credibility relies on the competence of that investigator to analyze the complexities (Patton, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) consider the researcher to be “the main ‘measurement device’” (p. 7). I, thus, carefully describe and interpret the intersection of the difficulties of the context.

Because I was the main instrument of this study, I included my competence and skills as a researcher. Certain criteria illustrated this competency such as familiarity with the phenomenon or setting, strong conceptual interests, and interpersonal skills. I taught

the writing methods course for four semesters, and I experienced the community center. Therefore, I have familiarity with the setting, context, and the writing course. In addition, I think it is important to identify my training as a qualitative researcher. I am now a doctoral candidate and have been a primary or co-investigator and research assistant in eight qualitative studies and two mixed method studies in which I have taken field notes, conducted interviews and surveys, made observations, analyzed data, and written reports. I have presented considerable research at scholarly conferences at the state and national level as first and second author, and at the international level as second author. My publications include one article in an online international journal dedicated to qualitative research, three articles in state and national journals, and two book chapters as second author, and an annotated bibliography chapter as first author. These experiences bring credibility and competence to my analysis.

Interviews. I conducted interviews with each of the eight preservice teachers in order to achieve total understanding. I interviewed the preservice teachers at the community center or at the university (either in a classroom, conference room, or my office). The location depended on the preservice teachers' schedule or the location of class that week. I began the interviews on the 10th week. I utilized open-ended, semi-structured interviews, which provide chances for the interviewees and researcher to engage in authentic dialogue and interactions (See Appendix B for initial prompts) (Silverman, 2000). I interviewed the preservice teachers in order to understand their developing perceptions and beliefs about writing and culturally relevant pedagogy.

The purpose of an interview is to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341), a way to find out the story behind the person. Additionally,

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contend qualitative researchers achieve another's point of view through in-depth interviewing and observation. Fontana and Frey (2005) emphasize that interviews include two or more people who interact in order to reach a shared meaning. Interviews enabled me to become familiar with the preservice teachers' perspectives about culturally responsive teaching.

I conducted three focus group interviews during the 12th week of the course and again at the end of the semester. I chose the 12th week to conduct the focus interview to give me the opportunity to first individually interview each preservice teacher. I decided to again interview the preservice teachers at the end of the semester to see if any changes occurred in their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Focus group conversations have the potential to influence the participants' thoughts and perceptions about culturally relevant pedagogy. The purpose of a focus group is to listen and collect information from a group of people about how they feel and think in regards to an issue, in this case culturally relevant pedagogy (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Groups share common experiences and in this particular study groups learned through social interactions and contexts. Focus groups include open-ended interviews with five to ten participants in a homogeneous group of similar backgrounds, such as preservice teachers but may include as few as four and as many as twelve (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002). I created a guide of questions about culturally responsive teaching in order to keep the interactions of the group centered on culturally relevant teaching while permitting individual perspectives (See Appendix B) (Patton, 2002).

In the first focus group interview, I included all eight preservice teachers. During this interview, certain preservice teachers dominated the conversations. The preservice

teachers and I decided the best time to meet that fit everyone's schedule was before class. However, some preservice teachers arrived late to the interview and shortened the amount of time we had. I decided to read and think more about focus groups to achieve better results for the next interview. I knew focus interviews could include as few as four (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002). I realized each group who collaborated to tutor the students would be more homogenous. They worked together throughout the semester, and in order to achieve rich data, I thought they would more willingly provide open, honest discussion. In addition, I was able to interview for an extended amount of time because it was easier to find convenient times that each group of four teachers could meet together rather than a time all eight preservice teachers could.

After reflection on the first focus group interview, I believed I needed to understand more about this type of interview. I had sufficient experience with individual interviews, but my prior experience with focus group interviews was limited. I read additional information about the structure of the focus interview before I conducted the final one. I selected a model provided by Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) because they designed this approach for education and psychology. In the final focus group interview, I provided refreshments: pizza, cookies and soft drinks. I also created some additional structure to the first interview with a welcome statement and thank you for their time, a description of the purpose, guidelines for the interview, a wrap up, and a member check statement (See Appendix C). As I conducted the final focus groups, this structure with the additional items and smaller group allowed for richer data.

I audio taped each preservice teacher's individual interview and then transcribed each interview directly following. I asked the preservice teachers to read the transcripts

and check for accuracy. I also audio taped and transcribed each focus group interview and then provided the transcriptions to all preservice teachers to check for accuracy. This type of feedback is known as member checking in which the data are checked for accuracy (Creswell, 1998). Member checking allowed for feedback from the participants (Stake, 1995) and provided credibility and descriptive validity (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). Therefore, I ensured the data represented the interviewees' perceptions.

Preservice teachers' reflections. Reflection is necessary to learning and problem-solving, and preservice teachers' reflections on their own behaviors and performance can lead to success with their students and classroom (Reed & Bergemann, 2005). Sometimes preservice teachers lack depth in their reflection and keep responses on a surface level, which consists of factual recounts of what happened (Reed & Bergemann, 2005). Reed and Bergemann (2005) propose preservice teachers might summarize events, but they may not analyze the situations or interpret with questions about their experiences in order to apply the knowledge to future teaching practice. It was obvious the preservice teachers needed support to understand how to reach beyond the surface level. The instructor, Maya, provided critical task questions throughout the semester to achieve deeper reflections (See Appendix D). The preservice teachers posted their answers to the questions each week on the university's web-based course management system. These specific reflections prompted preservice teachers to analyze (ask why and how), appraise (interpret), and transform (apply) experiences rather than just describe the experiences with the elementary students at the community center (Reed & Bergemann, 2005).

Observations. I observed two groups of preservice teachers who volunteered to participate for thirty minutes each week as they tutored elementary students. I alternated watching the groups in the first thirty minutes and the last minutes each week. I took detailed field notes as I observed: descriptions of the environment, direct quotations, questions asked by students and teachers, gestures, facial expressions, and voice intonations (Reed & Bergemann, 2005). The objective of these observations was to watch the student-teacher interactions and lessons taught. However, field notes were not as extensive as planned because of the environment and learning context. Preservice teachers moved around the community center in order to execute the lessons provided by the instructor. Sometimes I spent time searching for the groups of preservice teachers and elementary students. In addition, at times preservice teachers worked one-on-one with the elementary students and I could not hear or observe all of the student-teacher interactions.

Reflexive journal. I kept a reflexive journal throughout my study because a reflexive journal allows the researcher to experience and question the self throughout the research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Janesick, 1999). In this journal, I contemplated critically about my study throughout data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations. Interpretivist research always contains important questions of privacy, confidentiality, and researcher power (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Ethical considerations are essential in all research, and I ensured that all participants were not harmed in any way. I shared respect and trust among all participants. Additionally, I protected the confidentiality of all participants. I used pseudonyms throughout this manuscript. I provided information so all participants understood the research. I

completed the required forms for the Institutional Review Board and collected data only after I received approval.

Data analysis. The ultimate goal of analysis is to find meanings in cultures by looking at the relationships of symbols within that culture (Spradley, 1979). At the center, qualitative researchers are “making sense of the world but also in making sense of our relationship of the world and therefore in discovering things about ourselves even as we discover things about some phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). Spradley (1979) states, “Analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole” (p. 92). In qualitative research, themes and patterns sometimes emerge during data collection (Patton, 2002). Therefore, data analysis begins as soon as the questions are created and takes place throughout the study. As I collected and organized for analysis, I reflected upon my research questions and those themes and patterns I noticed and documented while in the field.

As a researcher, I investigated phenomena in search of insight and understandings to answer my research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I present rich, thick description of the experiences of the participants and the context of the study as a basis of my qualitative analysis (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). I analyzed interview transcripts, my reflexive journal, field notes, and reflections. I increased the rigor and trustworthiness of my discoveries through member checks; triangulation of data collection through interviews, reflections, and observations; and peer debriefing (Eisenhardt, 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I also discussed my observations with Maya, the instructor.

Huberman and Miles (1998) contend data analysis includes three subgroups that transpire before, during and after data collection: data reduction, data display, and conclusion/ verification. Before data collection, I decided on the research design, conceptual framework, and research questions. Through this process, I reduced the data to focus on culturally responsive teaching and continued as I collected data. As I persisted to examine data, I organized and clustered information into data display of brackets and codes to facilitate drawing conclusions. Finally, I interpreted, summarized, and found meaning from data I organized previously, hence the subgroup of conclusion drawing and verification. As I searched for meaning, I analyzed my data with three types of analysis, constant-comparison, within-case, and cross-case analysis, which I describe in the following sections.

Constant comparison analysis. I wanted to unearth the essence of the experiences of the study, not just variables within the case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I aspired to understand the preservice teachers' experiences as they tutored diverse populations. Therefore, I utilized the constant comparison methods of analysis of the data to discover the central themes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

I had to become more than just acquainted with the data and completely familiarize myself with the data (Dye, Schotz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). Strauss and Corbin (1990) contend it is essential to ask questions and make comparisons throughout the process. During the initial step of constant comparison, I read the data completely a minimum of three times, which included everything: all interview transcripts, my reflexive journal, field notes, and course documents (Leech &

Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I categorized the data into chunks beginning with interview transcripts and labeled the chunks with codes. I then checked the new chunks emerging in my reflexive journal, continuing through the rest of the data. Related chunks were labeled and sorted according to similarity with codes previously identified. I identified categories conflating codes from the data and attributed meaning to these categories (Constas, 1992). Constant comparison method expands and transforms throughout the process (Glaser, 1965). I identified categories throughout the progression, an iterative approach, which allowed me to revise, elaborate, or cancel as segments of data were reviewed. I read and reread the data as I analyzed, coded, and then compared to previously identified categories. After I completely analyzed with the constant comparative process, I utilized within-case analysis to further understand themes.

Within-case analysis. I wanted to examine and describe a single case within a particular context; therefore, I employed a within-case display to examine themes and relationships within the context of this study that confirm and disconfirm the evidence toward changes in understandings toward culturally responsive teaching (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Within-case analysis provides descriptive cases to gain insight and helps to make the data more manageable with the aim of analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Miles and Huberman (1994, 1998) assert data display helps organize the data and illustrate an easier view for the reader, such as a conceptually clustered matrix. The visual helps the reader focus on the themes and see the connections.

As I analyzed the data, I realized modifications to the design and analysis might arise as new information enters the study. In this case, I documented all emergent details

and provided evidence of developments and discoveries to ensure credibility and trustworthiness, which I did for each of the eight cases.

Cross-case analysis. As the researcher, I wanted to examine and describe multiple cases of preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching. In order to gain deeper understanding and to enhance the possibility of these discoveries being relevant to other cases, I decided to employ a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Individuals' experiences vary from case to case; therefore, cross-case analysis was an appropriate choice (Patton, 2002). A cross-case analysis groups together responses to common questions from different participants. As I looked through similarities and differences among cases, the cross-case analysis allowed me to find negative cases that enhanced the discoveries (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I began the analysis with an exploration of all of the cases in within-case analysis. I analyzed my observations, the audiotapes of the interviews, the interview transcriptions, and preservice teachers' course documents. Through the utilization of the cross-case analysis, I examined the data to gain a deeper understanding and find meaning to be generalized to other cases.

Legitimation of methods. Legitimation is essential in qualitative research and is increased through different methods. In qualitative research, the quality of the discoveries depends on the rigor of research, and qualitative researchers must be careful not to fall into the trap of analytic bias, such as finding patterns that are not present (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I particularly cautioned myself because I had taught the writing methods course and I am a teacher. Being aware of the possibility of bias allows the researcher to make informed decisions during the entire process. The assumption that

data speak for the individual and that the researcher is neutral is not practical (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I continually reminded myself to be aware such as during the interview I attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible. I stepped back from the data and returned with a fresh frame of mind.

Legitimation is increased through different methods. As I attended every session, I observed, audiotaped, and took field notes in the class session and in two tutoring groups. In addition, I obtained the reflections of my participants, attended all sessions, and obtained the syllabi and course documents from the instructor of the course. These data sources with the interviews allowed me to triangulate my data, which provided multiple sources and reduced the chance of analytic bias and chance association (Patton, 2002). These sources provided rich and thick description increasing credibility and interpretive validity (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

In addition, I used an audit trail with the data and records from my study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). I assembled an audit trail through the use of raw data (written notes and audio tape of interview) and materials related to intentions and dispositions (reflexive journal). An audit trail and member checking facilitates determination of trustworthiness, which establishes credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Through the use of member checking, collecting rich data, an audit trail, and triangulation, I increased legitimation.

I also utilized a peer de-briefer in order to limit biases and increase the trustworthiness of my discoveries (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007a). The purpose of the peer de-briefer is to assist the researcher during analysis to prevent biases interfering with interpretation (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). Jacqueline, my peer de-briefer, is

a doctoral candidate in my department at the university. Jacqueline observed and listened as I conducted the initial and last focus group interviews with the preservice teachers. Jacqueline and I met to de-brief to promote inter-coder reliability.

Furthermore, I augmented credibility through use of peer debriefing with Maya and Jacqueline, class-long engagement, triangulation and member checks (Anafara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Triangulation along with an audit trail increases dependability, and triangulation together with my reflexivity facilitated confirmability. I provided thick description to enhance transferability.

Summary

I conducted this research at the community center, as part of a partnership between the university I attend and this center. I investigated the understandings of preservice teachers enrolled in a writing methods course related to culturally responsive teaching using qualitative research methods. In order to gain insight and understandings, I observed, took fieldnotes, and audio taped each week during the writing methods course as the preservice teachers tutored elementary students. I conducted interviews, kept a reflexive journal, conducted focus group discussions with eight preservice teachers, and obtained reflections and course documents.

In order to analyze data on this embedded case study, I utilized a constant comparison method of analysis to develop categories, within-case analysis, and then cross-case analysis. When any necessary adjustments became apparent during data collection, I communicated with my doctoral committee and included evidence of these changes in the final dissertation report.

Chapter Four: Discoveries

I know as a qualitative researcher I cannot tell the whole story of each preservice teacher in my study. For that reason, I chose to conduct an embedded case study. I could not observe or write about the entire case, all of the elementary students and preservice teachers, because its considerable size, and I wanted to expand my understandings of the smaller component of the larger case (Stake, 2005). However, I can illustrate an in-depth understanding of the stories I observed as I conducted this research. In this chapter, I provide a brief background of my participants and the community center. I present descriptions and interpretations of my discoveries; I utilize direct quotes from the preservice teachers to illuminate as best as I can the data most accurately, and I divulge my reflexive thoughts in italics. In the first section of this chapter, I describe the eight preservice teachers in my study and suggest themes from my within-case analysis of each preservice teacher. I then discuss how the preservice teachers perceived their demonstration of culturally responsive teaching in the writing curriculum. I provide my analysis of the course instructor's and course content influences on the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching. I offer discoveries about preservice teachers' writing instruction and philosophy of teaching. In the final segment of the chapter, I organize the information into five themes from my cross-case analysis: 1) cultural awareness and integration, 2) student-teacher interaction, 3) field experience, 4) questions and conversations, and 5) best practices. I conclude with descriptions of the

preservice teachers' changes in understandings about culturally responsive teaching after a semester teaching diverse populations in a field experience at a community center.

During the semester of tutoring at the community center, I investigated the understandings of preservice teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy who were enrolled in a writing methods course. The following questions guided my inquiry:

- 1) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold prior to the semester field experience teaching diverse populations?
- 2) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold after completion of a semester of teaching diverse populations in the field?
- 3) In what ways do eight preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum?
- 4) In what ways does course content influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?
- 5) In what ways does the instructor influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?

Writing Methods Course

The preservice teachers in my study first met each other at the university. Maya, the course instructor, convened with the preservice teachers five times at the university to prepare the preservice teachers to tutor the elementary students before she moved the class to the community center. Maya had taught this writing methods course for three years and was a research assistant for two other professors who taught this course. She

had just conducted this course the previous semester at the community center. Maya knew the course well and adapted the course to make it better each semester through improved reflection prompts and the incorporation of technology.

In an interview with me, Maya explained why she teaches the course at the community center. One of Maya's goals was directly related to the model of the community center's director, Naomi (pseudonym). Maya said, "All the time I've been there [at the community center]," Naomi "said one of the big goals of the community center is to have preservice teachers exposed to urban kids." Maya thought preservice teachers learn best in an authentic context and "make a connection with kids" at the community center. She thought the preservice teachers "learn to either be able to work with them [urban children]" or the preservice teachers "decide they don't want to work with them." Maya said, "Everyone doesn't have to work with urban kids." She believed she provided an experience that would help preservice teachers choose where they may teach best.

Maya considered the community center an opportunity to "expose new people because we may find really good teachers that can work within this environment." She thought "immersion" in a community of teaching diverse populations is the "best way of learning," and she thought such experiences offer preservice teachers a chance to collaborate and discuss in their collaborative tutoring groups. As a group, preservice teachers have the opportunity to self-reflect and notice changes "along the way."

During the first and second week of the course, Maya provided information to the preservice teachers about the community center and the elementary students. She explained that the elementary students were a population at-risk and were "wonderful

kids.” She also commented the elementary students might be English Language Learners. Maya described the community center as a great experience that could provide extra field opportunities. Maya talked to the preservice teachers about the reciprocal learning that occurs at the community center, “you teach them; they teach you.” She stated as tutors they help the students and at the same time the students help preservice teachers learn about teaching. Maya believed the experience promotes preservice teachers’ development into becoming more responsive and reflective.

The Community Center

From my notes: I observed Maya teaching for one semester prior to this study, and I have been to the community center for the past three years for other research projects as well. I now teach a course at the community center. I also agree with Maya and believe this experience provides preservice teachers with an authentic context to learn about teaching and learning and utilize exemplary strategies and approaches they have learned in class. In particular, the community center offers preservice teachers experience to work with diverse populations.

I conducted my research as a part of Maya’s class. I was interested and excited to investigate her class for multiple reasons. I believe strongly in the need to prepare teachers to become culturally responsive because I recognize teachers fail to meet their diverse students’ needs. I think preservice teachers benefit from field experiences to practice literacy instruction and to develop culturally responsive pedagogy because it offers opportunities to experience cognitive dissonance, where preservice teachers notice ideas different from their own. Increased diversity along with continued predominance of White, middle-class teachers creates an urgency to broaden pedagogical knowledge of

different ways of learning (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Castro, 2010; Olmedo, 1997; Taylor & Sobel, 2001).

Naomi, director of the community center, expressed her belief in a similar philosophy to which Maya and I adhere. She stressed that preservice teachers need experience teaching diverse populations. On the first day at the community center, the director, Naomi, spoke with the preservice teachers. She provided a background of the students and the community center for the preservice teachers and shared her own philosophy and appreciation for the preservice teachers' time and effort as they tutored the elementary students. Naomi discussed her own cultural background from Haiti and told the preservice teachers she was bilingual.

Naomi then began to relay information about research. She said research suggests parent involvement in children's education leads to success. Naomi began to share some of the elementary students' stories about parents from the community center. She said most of the parents at the community center are not involved and told the preservice teachers, "You are a resource to this community," and parents are impressed that university students come to the community center to tutor their children.

Naomi also talked about what some of the elementary students at the community center might have experienced. She described the environment as "urban" and stated the elementary students were "at-risk." She said they might have seen someone get shot, or one of their parents might be in jail for drug abuse. Naomi then described these elementary students as the most innocent and precious part of society. She told the preservice teachers that she believes if a child is in dirty clothes, mistreated, hungry, or uneducated, then an adult is to blame for these conditions. Naomi commented the child

is not responsible for being hungry or wearing dirty clothes, the adults are responsible for the child's well-being. For these reasons, Naomi works to provide a welcoming environment.

Naomi also prepared the preservice teachers for behavior management and offered more information about the elementary students they would tutor. The children consider preservice teachers as special, as they often say, "My tutor." Naomi shared with the preservice teachers that the community center does not allow any bad behavior and that they should ask for help from the coaches who are employees responsible for care of the elementary students if problems occur. Naomi discussed the rules: hug the children from the side to avoid inappropriate contact, bathroom trips are unnecessary, and avoid snacks as they will have already received one before class. Naomi then thanked the preservice teachers for their time and contributions to the center and confirmed preservice teachers supplied a wonderful service. Naomi expressed how the preservice teachers would learn about teaching and themselves as they gave back to the community. Naomi thanked the preservice teachers again and told them to enjoy themselves.

From my notes: I was impressed with Naomi's introduction. Naomi appreciated the preservice teachers and believed the community center, the students, the university, and the preservice teachers benefited from this experience. This is a great opportunity for the university instructors to provide preservice teachers with an authentic learning environment where they gain valuable experiences working with diverse populations. The community center receives tutoring and one-on-one attention for their elementary students.

Within-Case Analysis of the Preservice Teachers

In this investigation, eight preservice teachers formed two groups to tutor four to six elementary students. Group A worked with third grade students who were both boys and girls, and Group B tutored fifth grade girl students. The elementary students in both groups A and B were Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian. I first offer a brief background of the preservice teachers which I obtained from their writing experiences, and then I continue with themes I found during analysis about the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

This research is about the story of the preservice teachers and how their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy developed. I became more acquainted with the preservice teachers in my study through their writing and interviews. I discovered knowledge about their family, friends, hobbies, interests, and writing experiences in writing samples. The MeZines, critical task questions, and autobiographical writing experiences prior to the community center provided information for their stories I did not receive from their interviews. All names are pseudonyms.

Group A: Katherine, Rebecca, Lisa, and Kelly.

Katherine. Katherine was a 21 year old Caucasian woman who grew up with both parents in a Catholic family in a southeastern state. She was the youngest of five and had 10 nephews and nieces. As a child, Katherine spent hours writing stories to read to her family. When she was older, Katherine babysat for her large family. She reported she had strong family ties and relationships with children.

Katherine believed she possessed certain characteristics that were her strengths as an educator. She stated her empathy would allow her "to see another person's

perspective of something,” and to help students understand with different approaches. Katherine created an acrostic poem to describe herself in her *MeZine*; she used words such as charismatic, intellectual, sociable, thoughtful, and humble. She considered herself to be a great friend, empathetic, considerate, a nurturer, a counselor, funny, organized, and fashionable. Katherine also expressed she was an easy-going, patient person. She thought these characteristics would help her as a teacher. Katherine described her challenge as an educator was that she easily attached herself to people. She thought she might push a student too much, stating, “When it’s something that I just can’t change and it’s something that I just need to accept.”

Katherine reflected on her experiences. “I’ll have to acknowledge the kids that are doing well and don’t necessarily stand out because that’s how I was.” Katherine exclaimed that she was a good student and felt she blended into the classroom because teachers forget about the students in the middle. Katherine believed educators must build relationships with their students.

In both her interview and *MeZine*, Katherine said she had wanted to be a teacher since she was a child and would play school with her Barbie dolls and stuffed animals. She “hopes to be a source of knowledge, counc[s]el, comfort, and nurturer of” her students.

Katherine initially described her different life roles: “a daughter, sister, aunt, best friend, girlfriend, councilor [counselor], and most importantly a preservice teacher.” She took her role as preservice teacher seriously. Katherine demonstrated a passion for teaching and believed teaching was a ‘calling’ for her. She wrote in her *MeZine*, “I believe that I am meant to become a teacher.” Katherine thought these qualities she

possessed such as patience and empathy would help her teach children successfully. She also wanted to continue learning techniques and strategies to meet the needs of students.

Katherine's enjoyment of teaching also reflected in her critical task questions, course documents, and interviews. She thought teachers are 'admirable' and hold many special qualities that she believed she possessed. In addition, she demonstrated a desire to help make changes in the world, an aspect of social justice. Katherine wrote in her MeZine:

Being a Preservice Teacher

I believe that in becoming a teacher, I can help change the world one child at a time. Teaching takes patience, knowledge, nurturing, empathy, high expectations, and many more admirable qualities. I feel that I possess these qualities and that I am capable and want[ing] to help children learn and succeed. I have been learning many techniques and strategies by my experienced professors at the College of Education at [the University] and I know that I will be learning much more.

Katherine suggested social justice and equality for all students as an important aspect of her teaching philosophy. She wrote in her *MeZine*:

Every child deserves an equal opportunity at having a successful and prosperous future. No one chooses where they are born, who their family will be, how much money they have, or any struggles they face: therefore, everyone should be treated with an equal opportunity to be educated.

Katherine believed teachers must provide education for all children and treat each child fairly. She commented, "Teachers must be open and willing to educate and help every

child...every child deserves the love, respect, knowledge, and hope that teachers offer on a daily basis.” This philosophy reflects the image of a culturally responsive teacher.

Rebecca. Rebecca, another member of group A, was a 24 year old Caucasian woman who grew up in a Northwestern state. As a child, she “moved around many times and learned to make friends quickly.” She thought her “biggest obstacle” in life was to stay in school while overcoming personal issues and experiences.” For at the age of 21, she lost her son and struggled to “deal with the aftermath” as she continued “to pursue her passion of teaching children.” Although school had “taken longer than expected,” Rebecca remained persistent.

Rebecca described herself in an acrostic poem and bio-cube (a biography cube created out of paper from a readwritethink.org lesson) as “always understanding, outgoing, energetic, and creative.” Rebecca thought she listened well, had a “liberal personality,” and was “accepting of differences and like[s] to learn about different cultures.”

Rebecca remembered as a child that she wanted to be a teacher. She said, “I’ve wanted to teach for... as long as I can remember.” She believed she was “nice to children” and “loves[d] to be around kids.” In 3rd or 4th grade, Rebecca recollected her first babysitting experience. She realized her enjoyment of children as they played games and read books. Rebecca expressed the excitement for the first time because it “was the coolest thing ever, I thought.” She shared her story of the “girl down the street:”

I am sure my parents were home, and her parents were probably at my parents’ house. I just thought it was great. I got to read to her, watch her play games. And... just from that point on...and then I worked in a daycare when I was in

high school, and that was really fun. I liked...I liked working around all the kids, so it really didn't matter what age group...

Rebecca shared her love to be with children and her desire to teach. She considered her life would be significant because she would “teach hundreds of children” and “use personal knowledge to enrich their curriculum and encourage critical thinking.”

Lisa. Lisa was a 23 year old Caucasian woman who lived in a southeastern state. She grew up with a younger brother who was autistic and experienced diversity with special needs. Lisa thought the diagnosis of her brother's special needs caused stress in their family. They experienced money issues because her mom stayed home rather than work outside the home to care for her brother. Lisa believed the teachers in her life helped her stay focused and impacted her life, and she wanted to do the same for her students. She stated, “I've basically lived my whole life around diversity.” She described how her brother had to go to many different therapies such as occupational and speech.

Lisa also discussed her elementary school, which had “a lot of diversity.” She thought her experiences from elementary school and her brother's autism contributed to her strengths as an educator. Lisa believed her strengths as an educator were acceptance, understanding, supportiveness, organization, and patience. She wrote in her critical task question, “I genuinely care about each student I work with and want them to do their best. I think I offer great emotional support for all students who need help.” Lisa discovered her weakness as an educator during her first internship. Lisa was soft spoken, and she described her weakness as classroom management and discipline.

Lisa described herself in an acrostic poem as adventurous, spiffy, happy, loving, exciting, youthful, animated, lively, likable, enthusiastic, and nifty. She also wrote on her bio-cube that she loved to talk and get to know people's background. Lisa also noted she "loves to read non-fiction books" and "enjoys photography and watching movies." She also said she "is fascinated [b]y my places and different cultures." She wrote she was bubbly, easygoing, spontaneous, and flexible. She aspires "to become a wonderful educator," and "plans on changing how students learn and view education."

Lisa decided "to teach because there are so many negative influences on students." She wanted "to provide positive resources and enviro[n]ments for students to learn." In particular, Lisa said she liked to teach social studies because she always found it interesting, and she thought it "teaches tolerance for differences that seems to be lacking." Lisa suggests social justice as an important idea in her teaching.

Kelly. Kelly was a 21 year old Caucasian female who grew up with both parents in a southeastern state. She had two sisters and one half-brother. She was married and had a one year old daughter. Kelly thought she was significant to her "most beautiful daughter." Kelly considered writing to be one of her "biggest hobbies." Kelly described herself as organized, enjoyable, and "always willing to help someone in need out."

For as long as Kelly could remember, she knew she "wanted to do something with children" because she "love[d] kids." In high school, she "wanted to become a doctor," but she could not "because of schooling and what not [academics and finances] and just the expense and not being able to get in the program." So, Kelly "looked for a second option, and it seemed like education was the best because" she could still work with children. She considered teaching a good fit because she "just love[d] sitting there

having everything organized and teaching them, being able to educate them.” She said, “I will one day teach a classroom of children and become one of the stepping stones to their future.”

Kelly thinks one of her strengths as an educator is organization. She said, “Probably just being well organized and being able to answer their questions and keep them on task.” She also stated:

And... one thing I’ve noticed is that any person I talk to, whenever they want to speak to a child, they try and like baby talk them. And I consider myself to be a relatively intelligent person, and I’m like no, you know you can influence their vocabulary by just putting this word in here or I know that’s definitely one of my strengths.

Kelly thought her size and physical build contributed to her weakness; she was a petite woman with a soft voice. She said, “I might say my stature, to be honest, because I am petite. And I walked into a third grade classroom to just do one observation for pre-education, and the kids in there thought I was in Middle school.” She continued to say, “I think everyone’s going to judge me based on my size and like... We can get away with whatever we want because she’s not going to come after us.”

Kelly thought her “family always taught” her “to be open to everybody,” and she became shocked when she met her husband’s father, who she described as “prejudice[d] against people” from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. For example, he believed people should not come from other countries to work in America. She suggested culture had “probably been the biggest shock.”

From my notes: *Katherine, Kelly, Lisa, and Rebecca are just a year or two older than the members in Group B, but they seem more mature to me or maybe they just seem more relaxed to me. Kelly and Lisa speak less than Katherine and Rebecca. They appear to get along and collaborate well. I see no identification of a leader or person who takes charge in this group.*

Group B: Amy, Julie, Christy, and Sam.

Amy. Amy was a 19 year old Caucasian woman who was a member of a sorority on campus. She grew up in an upper middle class area in a southeastern state. During this semester, Amy was enrolled in my creative experiences course in which I taught students to integrate creative arts into the curriculum. She participated in drama and sports when she was younger. Amy was energetic and enthusiastic in my creative experiences class and this writing course and demonstrated a sense of humor. She said, “I took drama all through middle school. I always...my mom likes to call me a drama queen, so it’s like...um, things I like to do. I really do like bringing in the creative side.”

From the time Amy was a child, she wanted to become a teacher. She considered her parents to be an influence in her love of learning. She said:

...since the time I was little, like four years old, I played school. I didn’t play house. I had my own desk, my own chalk board. My parents were very good. They read to me every night. They... I think it was just instilled in me when I was little, like the need to learn and all, and then I think I work very well with kids. My mom calls me a kid magnet, and so, um... the two just went hand in hand.

Amy said she was described as a kid magnet, which means children are attracted to her. Amy thought she worked “really well with kids” and “it’s just a natural thing” for her because she has “always worked at summer camps, babysitting, all that.” She considered this idea “a strength to have as an educator.” Amy also commented how relationships contributed to her ability to work well with children and be a kid magnet. She believed she could “bond” with the students and “have fun with the kids.” In addition, Amy thought her athletic abilities added to her strengths because she could “relate to them [students] outside” of the “ABC’s” or academic curriculum. Amy’s concern as an educator was she became “frustrated a little too easy.” She said she was working on this challenge, and she “used to get frustrated and then you know, give up.”

Julie. Julie was a 19 year old Caucasian woman who lived in an upper middle class area in a southeastern state her entire life. Family was important to her, and she said, “My family is a huge part of my life and they always will be.” She was also a member of the same sorority as Amy. Julie thought one of the biggest obstacles in her life was “getting over my shyness and really learning to put myself out there.” She said, “I am focused on my goals and will do whatever it takes to reach them. She described herself as nice, big hearted, reliable, responsible, and caring. She also said she loved “to have fun,” “play sports with” friends, and be “very silly at times.”

Julie had not always wanted to be a teacher. She originally thought she wanted to be a doctor, but she realized, “I hated science, so I looked at all other majors. I couldn’t figure out what else I wanted to do, so I landed on education.” Once she decided to become a teacher she said, “So I don’t want to be a teacher for that long.” Julie wanted to get her master’s degree in “educational administration more and like educational

leadership” soon after she finished her bachelor’s degree. Although Julie wanted to become an administrator, she said “I would like to teach, but I want students to get a good education, and I want to help teachers teach better.” She said, “I hope to touch countless children’s hearts by teaching as well as leave an everlasting impression on the people I love.”

From my notes: How can Julie be an effective teacher? I think she is not passionate about her choice in careers. Is she implying that teaching is not high enough on the status bar; therefore, she wants to be in administration? She could not be a doctor and settled on education. If Julie has to become an educator, then is it better to be in the highest position possible?

Julie described her strength as an educator as engagement of students because she “want[ed] to do fun activities,” and she “would never be a teacher to like lecture, and like just do worksheets.” She felt “a lot of teachers do that [worksheets],” so she considered it a strength because she wanted her “classroom to always be engaging.” Julie continued to explain how creativity would impact her instruction and make her classroom engaging. She commented:

I am really creative, so I would definitely make the lessons like that. And I would do like lots of arts and crafts, like not have them do it [worksheets, boring lessons], but have me do it [arts integrated into lessons] and have that incorporated in the classroom. And that’s probably a big strength.

Through creative lessons, Julie believed her students would be engaged.

Although Julie thought her lessons would keep students engaged, she noted classroom management as a challenge for her. She said:

But like, so I could do the discipline, but I just would have trouble enforcing it, probably. I mean I know I would be able to, but it's just like I don't like being mean. And I'm also really quiet. So getting like... I would never yell, but like having it be authoritative and assertive would be hard for me.

Julie expressed enforcement of discipline or good classroom management meant the teacher would be mean and authoritative. She also was concerned about her quiet personality.

Julie described her childhood neighborhood and her high school as “predominately middle class, white people.” She suggested the diverse populations course she took previously increased her awareness. Julie said, “wow, there's like actual... it just opened my eyes about it [culturally responsive teaching]. It made me want to teach that way since I wasn't taught that way.” She thought mentors, “people who have experience with already teaching,” would guide her in the future. She thought mentors could share “what works for them” and “what lesson plans they really find helpful.” In addition, Julie believed mentors could provide information on “how to evaluate” and gain understanding to whether “the students are really learning.”

Christy. Christy grew up in a middle class family in a southwestern state. She was a 20 year old Caucasian woman. She missed her hometown, the beaches, and mountains and planned to move back some day. Christy created an acrostic poem about her old hometown as part of her MeZine. She said her hometown was “always sunny” and a “land of beaches and mountains.” Christy also loved the Zoo. She thought this town could not compare to the state she lived in now.

Christy wrote another poem, which illustrated her close family ties. She wrote:

I am from Daddy's little girl...I am from the box of memories I cherish and the scrapbook of my life. I am from the places which shaped me and the people who loved me. The memories of where I've been will forever be my roots.

Christy said her decision to become a teacher "kind of all started with like babysitting." When she babysat, she "would teach them, like how to play a game or even help them with their homework." Christy shared her love of working with children:

I just love the look on their face and the excitement of learning something new and succeeding at it. And I don't know. I just...I know its cliché, but I just really love working with kids, and I don't know. I just didn't see myself doing anything else. And you know, other than being a teacher, I just really want to be a mom.

So I just...I don't know. Being around kids and teaching them, like honestly, it's a really great feeling for me.

Christy believed teaching was one of the most important things in her life. She considered teaching a calling, something she was meant to do.

As Christy gained more knowledge in school, her love of teaching deepened. She expressed:

But like now it's like I really truly do love like the art of teaching. You know like it's something I feel like I'm good at. I love being in front of people. That doesn't bother me, and pretty much you're talking the whole time you're teaching. It's just something I feel comfortable with.

Christy thought her strengths as a teacher were listening and communication skills. She also believed the performance of teaching was one of her strengths because her love and experience performing. She was an actress in theater during high school.

She said she had confidence and did not fear public speaking. However during her interviews, Christy rarely made direct eye contact with me; she would look down or up. Christy connected her love of theater to teaching because she thought teachers “need a certain enthusiasm to keep students interested throughout the long day.” Christy identified patience as a challenge in her teaching because she thought she had to have “the most patience” to teach reading.

Christy described her experiences with diversity and said it was “a little less based on race,” and she continued to discuss her experience with diversity. She said her sister was gay, so for her diversity came from “growing up in that kind of household” because “obviously that’s a lot different than most families.” Therefore, she felt she had “learned a lot, much more about just accepting different types of people in general.” As Christy talked about her sister’s sexuality, she was not aware of the stereotypes she reinforced. She talked about her sister and family:

I feel like I always kind of knew. And like...so growing up she was always like such a tomboy and like played like hockey and like boy sports, you know so...

And then when she came out to my parents, I think just like everything in the house kind of changed, not in a bad way, but like just having her open like that,

knowing just changed the dynamics of our household. But I think for the better.

Christy thought her sister might have been a lesbian because she was a tomboy and played “boy sports.” She failed to acknowledge her assumptions and misconceptions of lesbians and heterosexual girls. All lesbians are not tomboys, and all girls who play stereotypical boy sports are not necessary lesbians.

Christy said her school was located in a small town, so there were not a lot of different ethnicities. She deemed her life “sheltered” until she moved to a southeastern state. While in high school, her “brother and sister started to hang out with a lot different people and opened up to different type of people.”

Sam. Sam was a 21 year old Caucasian woman athlete who grew up in a middle class area in a southeastern state. She attended a Catholic elementary school and a public high school. Sam had a laid-back personality and described her personality as “very outgoing,” and she “love[d] meeting people.” Sam said she loved “to play volleyball and going shopping,” and she wanted “to live” her “life to the fullest!”

Sam originally wanted to major in psychology, but she changed when she realized she “wanted to be more than one on one with the kids.” She “realized how much” she “loved being around kids” when her younger sister was born. Sam also coached four teenaged volleyball teams, and she expressed how she “absolutely love[d] coaching,” which contributed to her decision to teach. She shared her love for children, for “doing activities” and “just making them smile.” She described an example when she went on the playground with the elementary students. She said she “had so much fun with them. We were playing tag. You feel like you’re making a difference.” Sam utilized the word ‘we’ instead of I or they. She also played ‘with’ the students and did not stand on the periphery. Sam engaged in personal connections and relationships with the students.

Sam discussed her energy and enthusiasm as a strength as an educator. She said, “when I was interning I got to do some lessons with the kids, and I felt like the whole time they were engaged because they seemed really excited about things.” As many preservice teachers disclose, Sam expressed classroom management as a weakness. She

said when “kids are acting out or something” she does not “want to be the mean one.”

She also believed she sometimes became distracted. She stated:

You know so when it comes to disciplining or making sure everyone’s on task the entire time, I like get side tracked also. You know so if they start talking about a sport, I’ll get side tracked with um...you know I really need to stay focused and have that discipline, which I’m not really good at. (Laughs) I like having fun, yeah.

Sam discussed her lack of focus because she valued the conversations with students, especially if the discussion centers on her interests such as sports.

Sam thought her family and prior school experiences did not influence her understandings about diversity. She went to a private school for most of her life. She believed she learned about diversity at the university when she was “in the classroom [at elementary schools] more than anything.” Sam expressed she had now learned “all the different ways to learn,” such as through the creative arts or individualized instruction.

From my notes: This group had different dynamics than Group A. In Group B, the preservice teachers have participated in different interpersonal activities such as acting, sports, and sororities that helped them be comfortable in front of people. Therefore, these preservice teachers had strong social or interpersonal skills and confidence.

All but one preservice teacher in both groups said they considered teaching a calling, even though some of them had chosen another career. Only Julie in Group B did not convince me she wanted to teach. The other preservice teachers appeared to be transforming themselves into teachers.

My participants are all Caucasian, middle-class women from two-parent homes with limited experiences with diversity (See Table 1). Preservice teachers in both groups had strong family connections and mentioned those connections as part of their decision to teach. I wish some of the participants would have been from a different racial or ethnic background, or from a lower socioeconomic or single parent home, or their first language was not English. I think that would have helped my research, but the literature suggests most teachers in the United States come from white, middle-class backgrounds (Castro, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001; Sleeter, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). This sample aligns with the majority of preservice teachers in the United States.

Table 1: Preservice Teachers' Demographics

	Preservice Teachers	Age	Race	Home State
Group A	Katherine	21	Caucasian	Southeastern State
	Rebecca	24	Caucasian	Northwestern State
	Lisa	23	Caucasian	Southeastern State
	Kelly	21	Caucasian	Southeastern State
Group B	Amy	19	Caucasian	Southeastern State
	Julie	19	Caucasian	Southeastern State
	Christy	20	Caucasian	Southwestern State
	Sam	21	Caucasian	Southeastern State

In the subsequent section, I present five themes that represent the preservice teachers' developing understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy. I read the data multiple times and categorized the data into chunks (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Leech

& Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I then compared all the data and conflated the codes into categories to identify themes. I offer direct quotes from the preservice teachers to reveal insight into their understandings.

Theme one: Cultural awareness and integration. The theme cultural awareness and integration became apparent in the preservice teachers' responses to Maya's critical task question, which required the preservice teachers' to define culturally responsive teaching and offer recommendations to implement this philosophy. As Maya asked the preservice teachers to provide initial understandings about culturally responsive teaching, both groups replied that teachers should demonstrate awareness of students' cultural differences in their classroom and then integrate those cultures into the curriculum. Therefore, preservice teachers proposed they should acknowledge the different cultural backgrounds of their students and utilize those cultures to integrate into lessons, such as through the use of multicultural literature or creative arts.

Group A. Preservice teachers in Group A initially suggested awareness of the students' culture and the integration of their culture into the academic curriculum depicted the meaning of culturally responsive teaching. I provide excerpts of Group A's responses to Maya's critical task question regarding culturally responsive teaching to illustrate their preliminary understandings.

Katherine: I think culturally responsive teaching is using a student's prior knowledge, community, cultural environment, etc. to help them understand and connect with the subject material. I believe that most of the information in textbooks is derived from European American culture, which is not representative

of the various cultures in their students the concepts through experiences and situations that the students can relate to.

Rebecca. Culturally responsive teaching takes practice and a variety of literature and tools in the classroom. It is important to include minorities of all kinds in literature being read in the class, as have it available to students in the classroom library. For example, using books printed in both Spanish and English, or books with illustrations that depict different cultures. As a teacher, acknowledging and being respectful of cultural differences and typical biases is important. It also allows for the students to share their diverse backgrounds and could potentially be used in the classroom to teach social studies topics or character building.

Kelly. Culturally responsive teaching uses the experiences and knowledge of diverse students in the classroom by integrating it into learning exercises. Some activities I can think of in my group are using the students' experiences and heritage, such as studying Black and Latino scientists or inventors. The children can read books or short articles about the contribution these people made to our society and how it relates to them. Another activity would be to have the students bring in pictures of their family and write about where they're from, what traditions they celebrated and special holidays, or even about the food they eat.

Lisa. Culturally responsive teaching involves incorporating the views of other cultures within the classroom. A teacher should also be aware of various cultures that exist in his or her classroom as well as others that live in our society. A fun activity to use with our community center group could be a multicultural fair. Students can either choose a culture that they are from or one that they are

interested in. Food is a large part of any culture and if included in this activity would bring interest to it. Literature that has a theme about diversity would be good to use.

Katherine, Rebecca, Kelly, and Lisa offered their definitions of culturally responsive pedagogy, which entails the incorporation of their students' cultural background into the academic content areas including holidays, food, and heritage.

Group B. Preservice teachers who tutored in Group B also thought culturally responsive pedagogy meant to incorporate the students' cultural background into the academic lessons. The following preservice teachers' answers show their initial understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy.

Amy: My understanding of culturally responsive teaching is teaching students about culture, especially about the cultures specific to that classroom. Another aspect includes using different instructional strategies to help them learn, and helping to bridge learning between home and school.

Christy: My understanding of culturally responsive teaching is that I take into consideration that not all students come from the same background and standard of living. What happens at home affects how students learn and act within a classroom, and so it is important to keep this in mind when creating lessons. Also being culturally responsive means helping other students in class to learn about different cultures of diverse students in class, so those diverse students can be proud and share their background and not feel excluded or like an outcast because of their culture or background. I think a fun activity for our group would be to read a multi-cultural book to our group and then have them draw pictures or write

down what the book makes them feel, and something that they think represents the culture or ethnicity of the people, places and events in the story.

Julie: Culturally responsive teaching to me is teaching that incorporates all cultures and doesn't leave out anyone. I feel culture should not be ignored in the classroom but should be welcomed and embraced. There are tons of great books out there that could be used in the classroom and even students' own resources can be used when teaching a lesson.

Sam: I think it is very important to understand that each student comes from a different background and different cultures. It is very important to keep that in mind when dealing with each student[']s situation and how they deal with things. A good suggestion would be to have the students make a collage at the beginning of the year describing themselves. This could help the students to open up and give the teacher an understanding of their backgrounds.

From my notes: I noticed every preservice teacher mentioned how a culturally responsive teacher becomes aware of the different cultures in the classroom and then integrates the culture into the lesson plans. I believe they are regurgitating what they have been taught in previous classes and do not think or reflect critically. I used regurgitate because I think it has a negative somewhat disgusting image. However, I need to put my bias in check as I become disgusted sometimes with the limited understandings of people in our society. I enjoy becoming acquainted with these preservice teachers, and I thoroughly appreciate and love to teach preservice teachers. I want to help them become more effective teachers, especially to become more culturally

responsive. I think, however, their understanding appears to be surface level and lacks depth; culturally responsive pedagogy is a complex, multifaceted theory.

Amy, Julie, Christy, and Sam, members of Group B, disclosed their definitions of culturally responsive pedagogy as awareness and integration of the students' culture into the curriculum. They shared similar, beginning understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy as Group A. This theme of cultural awareness and integration correlates to one of Gloria Ladson-Billings' tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, the conception of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1992). The conception of knowledge is characterized as teachers link learning to the students' lives, such as their cultural background, and utilize the connection to facilitate and scaffold their learning and knowledge to more difficult and bigger ideas. As a result, culturally relevant teachers employ students' cultures in order to empower the student and provide opportunities for the student to critically analyze their learning and create meaning and understanding of the world.

Theme two: Student-teacher interaction. The next theme I identified was student-teacher interaction, and this theme includes two subcategories: 1) misconceptions and assumptions, and 2) personal connections and relationships. Misconceptions and assumptions refer to the preservice teachers' failure to realize how their thoughts or ideas might influence their beliefs and practices. According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), assume means "to take as granted or true," and misconception means a mistaken thought or understanding. Their comments regarding the elementary students could be construed as biased or prejudiced. Due to the preservice teachers' understandings of the elementary students, they sometimes made assumptions and held

misconceptions. Preservice teachers' understandings of the elementary students also facilitated the depth of personal connections and relationships that developed during the tutoring at the community center. Personal connections and relationships suggest preservice teachers valued the chance to learn more about the elementary students and to get to know the elementary students. In addition, preservice teachers believed personal connections to the elementary students demonstrated an aspect of culturally responsive teaching. Personal connections could include personal interests or relating the elementary students to preservice teachers' lives or cultural influences. As the preservice teachers learned more about the elementary students, they developed relationships with them through their conversations and writing lessons. First, I provide the preservice teachers' initial understandings of the elementary students.

Preservice teachers' understandings of students at-risk. Naomi, the director of the community center, and Maya, the instructor, both utilized the term "at-risk" when they described the elementary students to the preservice teachers. Maya utilized the term "at-risk" because she knew Naomi uses the term. Consequently, the preservice teachers' understandings of the elementary students initiated from Naomi and Maya.

The definition of students at-risk is multifaceted because of the complexity of issues that impact students, such as social, cultural, and emotional (Moote, & Wodarski, 1997). In education, the definition suggests students at-risk are more likely to drop out of school and/or to fail to academically succeed (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). Students at-risk might include homeless, physically abused, physically challenged, homosexuals and transsexuals, economically disadvantaged, English or second language learners,

minorities, physically challenged, substance abusers, from single parent homes, and the list continues.

From my notes: I dislike the term “at-risk” for several reasons, although I understand the purpose of it. In reality, all students are “at-risk” for failure or refraining from difficult endeavors or “at-risk” for something, whether poor or rich, black or white. Primarily, I worry if students are labeled in negative ways or with negative terms, then subconsciously teachers are more apt to believe in the label, have low expectations, hold misconceptions, and make assumptions. I also believe culturally responsive teachers should focus on a celebration of differences and create culturally sensitive communities free of branding and categorization.

Before the preservice teachers began tutoring at the community center, Maya asked them to define students at-risk in their first critical task questions. In Group A, two of the preservice teachers have a mediocre understanding of the definition, and two demonstrate limited knowledge of the definition “students at-risk.” In Group B, three of the preservice teachers offered more precise definitions than Group A.

Group A. In group A, the preservice teachers mentioned some aspects of the definition for the term children “at risk.” However, they failed to demonstrate a solid understanding of the term. The following excerpts from the preservice teachers’ critical task questions illustrate their limited understandings of students at-risk.

Katherine: I am not sure about how to define an “at risk” child. I suppose the term “at-risk” is applied towards a child’s life, whether it is in school or out of school, such as family or illness. I believe that when a student or child is

considered to be “at-risk,” the teachers and family of the child have an obligation to whatever is necessary to help the child in any way possible.

Rebecca: I believe an ‘at-risk’ student can mean many different things. Students can have a low socioeconomic status and be considered at risk, or they can have behavior problems that limit their learning. I also think that at-risk students are those not interested in learning for whatever reason, and do not see themselves in school in their future. In fact, I believe that the students who dislike learning are those who are most at risk, even more so than those students who are disadvantaged simply because of financial reasons. While there is some correlation between those two factors, I think that it is vital to stress the importance of learning to the students. It is critical that they realize the impact their education can have on their lives.

Lisa: My definition of an “at risk” student is a student that has a chance of not making it through school. This child would most likely be of a low socio-economic status. This child also most likely comes from an unstable home in which education is not a priority or talked about. Extra attention must be paid towards these students to motivate them to succeed in school.

Kelly: I believe an “at risk” child is someone who is predisposed to negative influences. For example, both genetic predisposition for anger, their environment can contribute to enabling the aggressive side of them. These children are at risk and they all should be mentored and kept in a positive environment. As an outsider, you can never see the whole picture of someone’s life when you’re not with them. It is critical to make them feel welcomed and invited when they are

around you. The choices you make as an educator will be reverberated throughout a life for decades and that's why they need to be inspirational and meaningful.

From my notes: I have a hard time with Kelly's use of genetic predisposition, especially because I am a sociocultural theorist who believes we learn from social interaction. Kelly leaped to a grand assumption or misconception that students are predisposed to negative influences. What does she mean by that? Does she believe students do not have a chance because they are genetically incapable of success? She contradicts herself because she states teachers should create a positive environment to help these students, which would mean she thinks social interaction and situations impact students. If these preservice teachers are told, "you will be working with students at-risk," then how will this perpetuate negative preconceptions or misconceptions or assumptions? They have preconceptions of what the students might be like but really can not define the term at-risk.

The preservice teachers in Group A demonstrated a limited understanding of the term at-risk. Lisa appeared to have the best understanding of students at-risk in her group. She knew students at-risk are more likely to fail at school, and she recognized low socioeconomic and unstable homes might contribute to this failure. Rebecca had a limited understanding, but similar to Lisa, she revealed how economic situations influence students' success in school. Then, she connected behavior problems and lack of interest in learning as a substantial hindrance. Katherine and Kelly believed students at-risk need teachers to help them in any way possible. Group B provided a definition closer to the actual meaning of the term at-risk.

Group B. Amy, Julie, and Christy in Group B were able to verbally define students at-risk better than Group A. However, the last group member, Sam, provided diminutive amounts of detail for her definition. She stated, her “definition of an ‘at risk’ child is a child who doesn’t understand basic concepts, or [has] possible behavioral problems. This could also relate to a child who may have a disability.” Sam relates the elementary students’ behavior and academic abilities to the label ‘at-risk.’ However, she does not make the connection to failure to complete academic tasks or to drop out of school. Amy, Julie, and Christy offered more accurate definitions of at-risk in the following quotes from their critical task questions.

Amy: My definition of an “at risk” child is a child that might be at risk for dropping out of school. These are the children that we need to help the most, so that they have to best chances to stay in school. They may not have the best home lives, or maybe they just struggle in school, but either way they need help and motivation to stay in school.

Julie: An “at risk” child [too] is a child who comes from a low-socioeconomic status and is at risk for dropping out or not being successful in school. They are probably not coming from a stable family life and need extra help, support and motivation during school in order to be successful. I am assuming school would not be their number one priority and doing homework at home is not always focused upon.

Christy: Currently my definition of an at risk child is a child that does not have the same opportunities as other[s] because of their socio-economic status or family background. These children would not have access to the resources that

other kids may have, such as computers, books at home, parents that help with homework, and a number of other things. Not having these resources [a]ffects their continuing education in the home after they leave school, and also [a]ffects them as students in the classroom.

Amy, Julie, and Christy had a basic understanding of students at-risk. They knew students at-risk have a greater potential to drop out of school, emanate from lower socioeconomic background, or have limited resources. Sam in her written responses and oral responses during interviews was brief and to the point. She did not elaborate on ideas or offer more information than necessary. Her definition suggested the students' at-risk have behavioral problems and are incapable of learning.

Preservice teachers in both groups knew the elementary students at the community center were considered at-risk as explained by the director, Naomi. Group B had a better understanding of the term at-risk than Group A. Members of both groups recognized students at-risk might have roots in lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of the preservice teachers also retained misconceptions of the elementary students because they considered at-risk to correlate with bad behavior, inability to learn, and lack of initiative.

Misconceptions and assumptions. An additional sub-theme of student-teacher interaction I uncovered was misconceptions and assumptions. The preservice teachers made assumptions and possessed misconceptions based on what the elementary students shared about their experiences. The preservice teachers filled in the blanks of missing information without family conversations and understandings about their home life and

background. Some of the preservice teachers' assumptions emerged from their limited understandings about students at-risk.

Group A. In Group A, some preservice teachers demonstrated how they had made assumptions prior to this course and to entering the college of education about people such as the elementary students at the community center and education majors in their university courses. Lisa recognized assumptions she had of the elementary students before they arrived at the community center. She said, "I thought they would be like really hard students, but they are just like normal students." After the first time tutoring at the community center, Lisa admitted the students were different than she expected and realized assumptions she had made. She wrote about the elementary students:

The children that I met seem to be very sweet kids. I was surprised that they were interested in reading and were reading when we met them. They also seemed very open and willing to talk and share information about themselves.

Lisa reiterated similar discoveries she found about the elementary students. She stated in her interview:

I think I was really scared because I thought... because they were at -risk students; they were labeled as at-risk students. I thought, I thought they would be like really bad students. You know, like not wanting to do anything and just be like I don't care. But, they really want to learn and they are eager to try new things and stuff. So I think that's what changed, really.

Lisa shared anxieties she held prior to tutoring at the community center. She thought the students might be difficult students and disinterested in learning because the elementary students were at-risk. She realized the elementary students displayed pleasant behavior

and an eagerness to learn. Lisa ascertained the elementary students were different than she expected and she held misconceptions of the elementary students prior to tutoring them.

From my notes: Normal students? What would be considered normal? Lisa thought if the elementary students were labeled at-risk that they would be bad students. Is she relating good students to normal? How many teachers in the field think and feel this way? I would say one is too many. I become upset and disappointed when I hear teachers or preservice teachers who have preconceptions of students.

Kelly also held these misconceptions and assumed the elementary students at the community center would display poor behavior because they were considered at-risk. Kelly wrote in her critical task question about assumptions of the elementary students she had prior to the tutoring experience at the community center. She stated:

When I heard that these children were “at risk,” I assumed that they would have tons of negative attitudes about teachers and that they would be hard-core anti-learning. I was extremely surprised at the soft smiles and diligent answers that the two in my group provided me with. They were extremely enthusiastic about reading and writing.

During the first interview, Kelly again suggested assumptions she had about the elementary students at the community center:

Well, the first couple of times we went in, they were definitely well-behaved, and you know like, minded their manners. And when um... we were asked to write that critical task question on what we thought at-risk children were, I was thinking you know kids coming in, their parents having been on drugs, have been in all

types of horrible situations. And we come in and there are these mild mannered children sitting there. And then, it's like now that they're getting used to us. Oh well, I can misbehave a little bit here or I can hit somebody here because they're not going to do anything to me... They might go tell my coach, but... so I am seeing a little bit more of that behavior come out now.

Even during the second interview toward the end of the semester, Kelly still demonstrated her astonishment of her assumptions about the elementary students at the community center. She stated:

When we first walked in and we were told they were at-risk, like I immediately looked for signs of you know them being in distress or having either something physical or emotional that was wrong with them. You know as time progressed, and they became more acclimated to us, they at first... they were like the best they could be. They wanted to show that they were good kids or whatever, and then as we got through you know the semester and what not; they showed us a little bit more about who they were. And, it was towards the end where you know what they felt the most comfortable with us.

Kelly initially related elementary students 'at risk' to behavioral and emotional problems, negative attitudes toward teachers and literacy, and drug use within their families. Kelly imagined the elementary students lived in horrific conditions, which still could be possible. She demonstrated a new awareness and understanding of elementary students at risk as she talked of her surprise about the elementary students' mild manners. With this same idea, Kelly only thought the students who misbehaved would come from horrible situations not well-behaved students. She never stated whether the students

could be mild mannered and still have difficulties at home, and it seemed that she fulfilled a self-fulfilling prophecy that they were relaxing their behavior.

In Kelly's last interview, she discussed a cultural difference between her and one of the students. Kelly assumed the family dances at home because the boy who was black liked to dance.

The same with Our Space, like certain kids wanted to show off part of their cultural, their upbringing. Like one of the kids that I had, M., he was very much into dancing. And he's a little black child, and I know I can't dance as a white girl. But I know I'm pretty sure that around his family, there's a lot of dancing that goes on; they listen to a lot of music and so forth. So, it's just part of what he does, and he was will able to show us that by doing the Our Space pictures and writing about it.

From my notes: If this boy had been white, would she have stated that she could not dance as a white girl? How does she know his family dances a great deal? Would she have said the boy must have dancing going on at home because he likes to dance if he was from a different ethnic or racial background? Why does she not identify this dancing as a strength in bodily-kinesthetic or musical intelligences?

During Lisa's last interview, she also linked one of the elementary student's ideas to his parents and culture. Even though Lisa began to see the misconceptions she previously heard, she continued to have assumptions about the elementary students' home and family. Lisa stated:

Like one kid, he thought that...writing, he's like oh you don't need a job to write...I mean you don't need to write to get a job. And we're like yeah you do.

Every single job you have to write. Nun't uh, I can get a job. He probably gets that perception from his home, from his parents, so home culture and stuff, so be aware of that.

Lisa did not meet the parents of the elementary student, but she assumed the parents did not think writing was necessary for a job. Lisa and Kelly connected the elementary students' comments and behaviors to their parents and cultural background without any information to support their thoughts.

Rebecca, however, made assumptions of her student based on behavior in class without thinking about how the teacher or academic content life might have influenced the students' behavior. Rebecca noted her deficiency in patience for children who relinquish and fail to demonstrate any attempt or effort on assignments. She stated about her shortcomings, "It is my patience for children who don't want to try." Rebecca often in her interviews referred to her internship because these field experiences of tutoring and interning often overlapped for her. She disclosed a story of a specific child who caused her frustration in her internship:

But this semester, there's this one girl, and she does not want to try, and it just drives me crazy. It's like you need to get up, pick your head up off your desk I'm tired. This is what we are doing right now. Well, me too. I don't care. You gotta try. Just try. I think I have to be more patient when it comes to kids who... I think she has a lot of problems, like at home, and you know her background is kind of messed up, so it's like I have to put those things in perspective. And I have to get, you know, into the idea that like, she's probably one of the one who needs the most help, and you know to focus on trying to help her instead of

becoming so frustrated that I'm just like I have to leave you here while I walk away. So, I have to just deal with more coping strategies, I think.

Rebecca communicated this story of annoyance and nuisance, and she does not know how to react or respond to this girl. She made assumptions this behavior cultivated from her home or cultural background. However, she recognized her irritation as a problem she must address, not the students. Rebecca did not identify alternate reasons to this girl's apathy such as difficult academic content or lessons that were not engaging or vision and health problems.

From my notes: I tried to ask Rebecca questions such as why would this girl behave this way? I had not observed this class because it was during her internship. I thought maybe this girl was bored from a limited repertoire of engaging lessons. Maybe this girl rarely ate breakfast. Did she have a learning disability? Was she an English language learner? What was going on at home? Rebecca did mention that the girl might have problems, and she should take that into consideration. But, Rebecca still was not showing true empathy or understanding of this girl.

Although the preservice teachers made some assumptions about the elementary students at the community center, they began to notice ways in which they previously had made assumptions and how they now considered more than physical appearance as a cultural determinant. Katherine noted teachers should look beyond physical appearance of the elementary students because it might lead to assumptions. She thought, "It's hard to really question a child specifically about their culture, about their home life and stuff like that." She said you then notice culture "by observation, which you know you're making assumptions, but it's better than just um...saying, this is the way it is." Katherine

illustrated her point through a story about a couple who adopted a child from China. She emphasized that physical appearances are not the best way to determine a student's culture. The parents of this Chinese child were American, one of Hawaiian heritage and the other from a Scottish background. She understood not to stereotype according to appearance because she said, "it's so important that just because this little Chinese girl comes into your classroom, don't automatically assume that all the culture what you think being Chinese is going to be shown with this student." According to Katherine, a person or student's physical appearance does not define their culture and the use of physical appearance as cultural categorizations produces misconceptions and assumptions.

Katherine continued to share thoughts of assumptions she made about other preservice teachers in her education courses:

....so you just can't assume that just because the student comes in or that just because it's...just because I'm Caucasian that if I have, you know, fifty percent of my class are Caucasian that they are all going to be just like me; they're all going to come from backgrounds just like me. So...and that's something I think we picked out at the community center this time. Was seeing like kids that you think would be similar to us in their likes and stuff, but their home life is very different from what my home life was or what their home life were.

Katherine's examination of her previous assumptions illustrated that she thought physical appearances do not determine a person's culture.

In Rebecca's final focus group interview, she also noted significant changes in previous assumptions she had made. She said:

But I grew up in a very, like predominantly white, middle class, suburban....there weren't any other ethnicities or any other religions. There wasn't anything different. Like, that you could tell anyway, like what you [Katherine] are saying [not making assumptions about a person by their physical appearance]...I just think that's so true, and I just never really thought about it like that. Is that just judging by how a person looks, or judging by what they say or how they act....like you have no idea what kind of background their home life is. But maybe it was really different, I just never thought of it about like that while I was in those classes. But it just seemed like everyone was kind of the same, like even if you were to go to their homes outside of school or you know if you had friends over....it was still like...you know they had the....well I don't remember what it's called, the type of family...nuclear family. It's like everyone was living with their parents and they had a sibling. It was just...you know, that kind of culture, like they celebrated holidays, mostly the same.

Rebecca also recognized how physical appearance does not define someone's culture and how she made assumptions in her past.

During the final focus group, the preservice teachers connected their understandings about culture to not only this writing course but experiences of assumptions they made beyond this course. I asked the preservice teachers in this group how their culture impacted the experiences at the community center. The following conversation shows examples of how the preservice teacher recognized their whiteness as an influence on their previous assumptions about people who looked like them.

Kelly talked first:

I think that it influenced my perception of culture because it's one thing to know what like...I consider myself to be able to....like..... I am individualized, but I am like along this one line. Like, I can relate to everyone in my group because I kind of fit their profile in one way. Like you know, we're all female. We're all white. We're all Caucasian. And so when I think of them [community center students], you know like I kind of expect them to be the same way I am, like follow the same holidays and traditions, and just you know getting to know everybody as an individual. Like some people celebrate something. And just because they look the same as me, they could be Jewish, and I would never know it. They can have completely different....like one of the girls in my education classes at HCC. I knew her the like the entire semester, and at the end she told us she was Wicca[n]. I had no clue about any of that. I was like oh, wow. It definitely took me by surprise, but just being able to relate with people and understand that everybody does have a different culture and learning about everyone else...is definitely opened my eyes up to what's out there.

Katherine then shared her expanded understandings about culture and assumptions she previously made:

But the college of education...I've seen...when I get into a classroom...like the group of girls I'm with now, I don't necessarily think of their religion or their....um their necessarily their home life when they were younger and stuff. But I think of wow, they're in education, so they must have the same kind of morals that I do. They must have the same passions that I have. You know that's what I think of, and that's something that I've been working hard at to look

at...when I see kids within my classmates, and then kids that were at the community center, kids that are at the internship...that you really have to look at...not necessarily...I think...I think that obviously religion, all this stuff, is a huge part of culture. But just as a person's love, and a person's morals, and a person's passions and what their needs and stuff have a huge impact on who they are as a person.

Katherine then discussed more how culture is more than religion or physical appearance:

Like, there are so many other things that you have to look into um with each individual person to see them as person and say just because they're Catholic doesn't mean they're are going to be acting this way or just because they're from...just because they're white doesn't mean their acting this way just because they're from a family that both parents are still together, doesn't mean that they will be acting this way.

Katherine and Kelly suggested people who looked like them and took the same classes might not share the same culture as they previously believed.

In the same conversation, Rebecca then related stereotypes to assumptions. She discussed as Katherine and Kelly how in the college of education most of the people might have a similar appearance but have different beliefs. Rebecca said:

I think that you have to be really cautious of stereotyping because I think a lot of what she just said was true. Like, you sometimes automatically think...you know once you get into college, there are all kinds of people. But once you get into the college of education, you look around....80 percent of the people you think are pretty much like you in some way, but...there's no way of knowing that without

knowing each person. So I think that you have to be really cautious about the stereotyping or just making assumptions.

Rebecca continued to discuss how stereotypes and comments could hurt and you never know who might be listening. She commented:

You just have to be really careful about what you say and really careful about what you think. You can't just do that, and you can't do that with students either because you never know...you never know who their father might be. You never know who...it's like...it's kind of like that at work. You treat every single person that comes in there like they could have owned the company, because sometimes they could have. Who knows? You just can't ever assume.

From my notes: I think Rebecca hit an important idea, "careful about what you think." She not only thought of what you say, but what you think. I perceive this point as conscious self-awareness of your thoughts, a metacognition about cultural awareness. Is this the missing link to becoming a culturally responsive teacher? It is not just self-awareness but recognizing your thoughts. It is being able to have an awareness of assumptions and biases you might have.

In this same focus group interview, Kelly remarked that she made assumptions about her teachers. She said:

I think one of the biggest assumptions though is I know when I went to school...it's like all my teachers followed this certain criteria. Like, all of them went to church. All were predominantly white women, had families and children. So just based on that, like that's already ingrained in my mind and being open to all different cultures...it's like I still need to keep my eyes open to what is really

out there now. But, I think because of that, whenever you go into education and you still have that mindset the way that you were taught, who taught you, and how they did it, and so it's...definitely you can't make those assumptions like that anymore. I cannot expect to see all my colleagues be white women, go to church, and have kids. It's just not going to happen. Maybe it was back in the 90's, and I just didn't even realize it.

Kelly now thought she had broader understanding and would try not to make assumptions any more.

The preservice teachers in this group recognized they assumed people who looked like them, Caucasian, were similar. However, they realized not everyone who is Caucasian practices the same religion or has the same morals and passions. Rebecca, Kelly, and Lisa still assumed elementary students' behavior depended on home life.

Group B. Preservice teachers also focused their attention about the students on their home life, in particular family make-up and financial situations. In the first interview, Julie suggested assumptions about the elementary students and their socioeconomic status because they were labeled students at-risk. She stated:

I think they're all like from different backgrounds especially. At first, she made it sound like they were all like underprivileged children, but then one of the girls like... isn't at all. Her Mom drives a nice car; she has a nice house; she has like a great family. So, I was like...its' not like that for her. Other people in our group I know are from that environment, and I just learned that even if they are from different backgrounds that they're all like...children and they're all like here to learn, and even if their children...or even if their parents don't value education,

our society does, so I mean they should and probably do hold education somewhat as a priority and... I just think it's like helpful to... it's helpful to know where they came from, but at the same time when your teaching to kind of ignore it, not totally ignore it, but just like treat them equally and not like... pass judgment just because of this and that and don't over think about it.

Julie commented that the girl had a nice car and house, but it contradicted her initial understandings when she thought the students would be underprivileged. Julie also stated she had a great family, and it appeared Julie connected the family with a nice car and house as if only great families provide nice things for their children.

In Julie's critical task question, she mentioned how her assumptions changed about the elementary students. She stated:

I also didn't expect the kids to want to continue to do school work after school but they do what they are told and write when asked, so I am very impressed with that. I realized that despite where the child comes from they are still a normal child in the aspect that they like to have fun, they like to be with their friends, and they like games so even if they come from a rough home environment in the classroom you can get past that and I feel all students should be treated equally.

Julie noticed the elementary students enjoyed learning after school and participating in activities students from different cultures enjoyed.

From my notes: I find it hard to believe Julie will not pass judgment when she makes connections to great families and privilege. She used the word "normal" like Lisa in group A. What do they mean by normal? Well-behaved? Interested in learning? I guess she means an average person.

Christy also mentioned the family structure in their interviews. The stories this group shared about family structure suggested assumptions about non-traditionally structured families. In the first focus group interview, Christy said:

Our one girl, she's like I'm about to have a baby brother. I'm like Oh is that your first sibling? She's like Oh, no I have like 3 step siblings. I'm like, Oh, okay. So, like you see that's the type, not that there's anything wrong with that. But that automatically, you know like having a step dad or mom, you know it is a different type of family to grow up in so I think even that like...

From my notes: Christy emphasized certain words when she answered this question. Examples in this answer were 'type,' 'different,' and 'oh, okay.' I immediately thought her words were derogatory because of the emphasis on these words. It was as if she demonstrated prejudice toward people from non-traditional families. She also covered herself, "not there's anything wrong with that." She defended herself again in the next excerpt. Christy does not want to sound or appear discriminatory, yet she makes broad assumptions about the elementary students.

Christy returned to this idea of family structure and socioeconomic status in her final focus group interview. She stated:

I don't want this to come stereotypical or discriminatory at all, but I just feel like a lot of times, the kids who go to afterschool programs are people...like their parents are working an extra job or like they're coming from a single parent household. So like that parent needs them to go to the afterschool program. So I think that like a lot of the kids we had come from I think definitely came from a lot of different backgrounds and types of households. Like, one girl was saying

you know she has a bunch of step children and a new baby on the way. And things like that, and just I don't know things they said. I just kind of picked up on, their homelives, and like, I think that from that we definitely or I learned, maybe like how to talk to each one on an individual level and on a group level. Christy discovered the elementary students came from homes with step relatives, which was different than her life. She still made the assumption that parents need to send their children to afterschool programs because they are from a lower socioeconomic background or from a single parent home. Christy never spoke with the parents or knew why the parents were sending their children to the community center.

The following excerpt is a conversation during the final focus group interview. The preservice teachers discussed a girl in their group who shared a story about her mother and friends that occurred during her spring break.

Christy: Because there was that one day when the girl was like, we were like what did you do over spring break, and she goes my mom and friends got really drunk and like all this stuff. So...

Susan: I was trying to remember the story for the last group, and I couldn't remember it.

Amy: But, um...So and I mean...she did say like over and over again, my mom wasn't drunk, but her friends were. And like I'm not saying, like drinking is a cultural thing because I think that's across all cultures, but I think it shows what kind of culture she comes from, that they're like on a week night you know just having a shin dig at their house, like you know it's not...which I mean other...I mean granted my family... you know whatever but I was just you know...

Christy: But, I think it does say something about...yeah...where she personally comes from. Like at home. Like I definitely think it said something, whether or not it was you know negative or positive. Like it just, right away, we heard that and we were like, oh...like it made us think about so that's what's going on at your house.

Amy: And I think it was the first time anyone of us had to deal with the, do we tell someone about this? Which...

Christy: Yeah. And also what do you say to her? And be like you know it's probably not appropriate to be sharing with your friends.

Amy: Yeah and it's one thing to be like my parents had a party, but even on her illustrations she drew rum. Like that was when I was oh...and just, I think for me, it was the first time I ever had to say to someone, do we need to tell someone about this? And it's not because like she's being abused, or anything like that, but it's just something to think about with other things. Like that's going to happen in all our teaching careers, something's going to happen at some point where we're going to have to do the, do we tell someone about this or is it not necessary. I don't know...

Sam and Christy described how the girl discussed her life outside of school and mentioned stepsiblings and different family structures. Sam said during a writing activity the young girl discussed her home life. Sam said, "That's when we found out about the step or dad with the girlfriend. And she's like I guess she's cool, and she started talking about that."

Christy also commented on the girl's family life:

Christy: That was... That was the one, and then, that was the one girl, and not only that but wait maybe it is the same, but then the rum girl didn't she, she was saying she spent half of it with her mom and half of it with her dad. So that's another family with divorced parents.

From my notes: I had to check my bias here. I felt offended by Christy's comment. She stressed the word 'another.' I thought she was implying that divorce was the worst thing in the world. I came from divorced parents, and I am successful and stronger because of the obstacles I faced. The preservice teachers focused on the drinking and labeled this girl the 'rum girl.' They never spoke to any of the parents. What about in Europe where there is no drinking age, and children are allowed to drink alcohol? Are they not passing judgment on this family? What really happened at the girl's house?

Sam connected this tutoring experience with her volleyball coaching. She commented about a girl on her team:

Like her mom and dad are never really home. I'm like, well, how did you get here? I took a cab. Like, I'll bring you to practice like... And club's not free. You have to pay a couple grand to play club volleyball. So I don't know where the money's coming from, but anyways I think it's from the grandparents, but that's beside the point. She told me that like, yeah, my parents had a party the other day, and I got to drink. And she's twelve. And I was like, drink soda? (Snaps) She was like, No, she was like they were drinking like beer and stuff, and my mom said she didn't care. So, it's like what do you do when the parents are ok with it; you can't go to them. Because apparently it's ok to them. And like I

never went to the parents. I just went to the director and I was like sketch, something's going on at home. You know I'm glad she's involved in volleyball 'cause she will not see any of us do that. But, it's just the fact that, what do you do when the parents are even thinking it's ok. Because when she said my mom didn't care, I was like oh, and who do you approach?

From my notes: Sam assumes the grandparents pay for the expenses of the volleyball team. She also assumes the parents allowed the girl to drink. She states the parents are never home, but maybe the girl stretches the story to gain attention from adults. It is quite possible the parents permitted the girl to try a sip of alcohol. I am not condoning serving alcohol to children. I am just pointing out the preservice teachers fail to consider other perspectives of the story.

Christy shared her beliefs on alcohol and those of her parents. She stated:

Well even the girl...The girl in our group again, like with the drinking thing, like my...this is just my parents... but like I know like they love their wine now, that we're all grown up, but they never...they didn't have any kind of liquor in the house when we were little. And I just feel like that girl... like if it were me, like I would feel that it's inappropriate to even have my friends, even if it wasn't me getting drunk, in front of like my elementary school kids, and like them hanging out with us like while my friends are wasted. 'Cause like let's be honest, people don't act normal when they're drunk. So like what do kids think, like even if they know the concept of drunk, like they're watching these adults and like you know doing inappropriate behavior or whatever, and then they learn from that. And it's just really not something they should be learning about at like such a young age

because then they'll start younger, well not necessarily, but like they could start younger 'cause they see their parents doing it or their parents' friends. And they think "Oh, like this is a cool social thing."

From my notes: I think it is important to note as the preservice teachers discuss the situation of drinking alcohol they are passing their moral beliefs or religious beliefs on the elementary students and their families. I am not saying I condone parents getting drunk in front of their children or allowing them to drink. I am just saying they are judging these parents that they have never met and making assumptions about their families and home life.

Preservice teachers in both groups made negative assumptions about some of the elementary students. However, the preservice teachers still developed relationships with the elementary students at the community center and made efforts to get to know them.

Personal connections and relationships: Getting to know the students. The second subcategory of the theme student-teacher interactions was personal connections and relationships: getting to know the students. This subcategory included the preservice teachers' understandings of how talking with the students, being a good listener, and connecting with the students on a personal level contributed significantly to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Group A. Katherine recognized relationships with students as an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching. She thought students should be able to relate or connect to the material. She said it is necessary to teach "concepts through experiences and situations that the students can relate to." In addition, Katherine thought a characteristic of culturally responsive teaching was development of relationships through

communication. She said, “The best way I can be a culturally responsive teacher is to be a good listener of the student and the student’s family members.” Katherine suggested students want to share their stories, and “Most students want to talk about themselves and their experiences.” Katherine not only thought students liked to talk about themselves, but she revealed the elementary students needed to feel comfortable with her. She said, “I hope they will feel comfortable in explaining to me where they are struggling, so I will be able to assist them in learning the material.”

Due to Katherine’s cultural awareness and orientation toward personal connections, she noticed the elementary students at the community center were “so unique. Um, I think it’s really important to see the uniqueness of each student and their talents and their strengths.” She also thought, “You can’t show favoritism” because “they all have different strengths, and it’s trying to find how to work with those strengths.”

Katherine continued to discuss how the tutoring experience at the community center influenced her expanded understandings to incorporate building relationships with the students. She stated:

...this whole experience has made me think of there are so many different parts of culture that it’s not...you can’t even count them because every person almost has their own culture. Cause just because you grew up in the same household doesn’t mean you and your siblings are going to have the same beliefs. You know so just because you have two kids in your class that are twins or two kids that you already had one of their older siblings doesn’t mean this kid is going to be anything like the older one. So you really have to work hard in getting to know

the kid as a person and who they are and who they are and try to get them to come out of their shell and express that.

Katherine continued as she discussed how she learned from the elementary students at the community center because she had never worked with such diverse populations.

Katherine learned the elementary students were different than her cultural background.

She uttered:

And um especially kids that are very different from me, different home lives that uh... Like, I was raised both my parents together and a lot of siblings and a lot of love. Some of them [students at the community center] haven't had the best experiences at home, and some of them have had wonderful experiences as well, but still different from my own. So, I've learned um...t.t...to understand and to acknowledge their differences and understand they're not always going to have to understand my perspective, and I'm not always going to understand theirs. But I need to work hard on trying to understand their perspective.

Katherine suggested she should attempt to understand the perspective of her students even when it is different than hers.

Katherine also realized teachers should express curiosity for students and develop a safe environment. She stated:

One positive aspect I have learned about teaching is that by becoming excited and showing interest in the students as individuals they are much more comfortable in expressing themselves to me. They also get excited when I relate to them.

Katherine thought teachers should relate lessons to the students. She said, "...when we showed interest in something that they liked, then they became excited about the activity

and we could not get them to stop thinking about ideas.” According to Katherine, the elementary students demonstrated greater engagement when they could relate to the ideas.

Rebecca alleged she developed a relationship as time progressed throughout the semester. She commented:

I really had no understanding of them at first because it was just kind of like a, you know, like a thrown together, like this is who you’re going to be with, and I didn’t really have any background knowledge of them. So, I think I’ve learned a lot about them, definitely in the last couple of weeks. And...I mean it’s more so every week because every week you hear something different or something new about them. Like last week, we learned that... [Jack] really likes music. And he hadn’t ever said anything about music really before. But, he went on and on about how he plays keyboard and how that was like his thing now. You know his dad does music, so that’s what he wants to do now. So, I just think that over time we learn a lot more about them.

As Rebecca built relationships with the elementary students, she ascertained further background information and understandings about them through their writing projects.

She said:

As teachers, we are also able to learn a lot about the students’ background through these [writing] projects. The same student who liked Kung Pao chicken has eleven brothers and sisters, yet his mother has no car, so he had to walk to the doctor’s office last week for a check-up, which is why he missed out on the

community center. It puts a lot of what we are doing in perspective when we are able to see what else is going on in their lives.

Rebecca illustrated how the students' background helped her understand a different perspective. She could not imagine how to be without a car in her own life and stressed how difficult it must be for this student's mom. She also mentioned it is important to teach the students about perspectives of people from diverse cultures. Rebecca avowed:

I think it's my idea of it has changed a little bit because before I thought it was like...and it still is that you do need to connect with your students in your classroom too, but I feel like more now that even if the students aren't of a different culture, it's still important to be culturally responsive because it effects how they view other people in the future and in different...I think in like different ways.

Rebecca recognized the importance of teaching about cultures unlike the students' cultures.

Lisa was surprised at the genuineness of the elementary students and their eagerness to share stories about themselves. She said, "They also seemed very open and willing to talk and share information about themselves." Lisa thought teachers should provide an opportunity for students to feel comfortable and safe. She asserted:

I think the most important aspect of teaching is being a dependable source of support. By being reliable students will perform better in tasks. Many students, especially those who are at risk, live in a world that is unpredictable. While in school, these students may have their mind on these issues. If students know that there will be that one person who will always be in the classroom, they will be

able to focus on their studies and tasks in the classroom instead of the troubles they may have out in the world.

Lisa believed as a teacher you should not only provide support and interest, but she thought the interest should be authentic and not bogus. Lisa said, “But you want the interest to be genuine. You can’t have fake interest.”

Kelly suggested children need to be able to connect to the content. She said, “I know from experience and from just learning, children relate to something or learn from something, they can relate to it.” Kelly also affirmed:

You know as time progressed, and they became more acclimated to us, they at first... they were like the best they could be. They wanted to show that they were good kids or whatever, and then as we got through you know the semester and what not; they showed us a little bit more about who they were. And, it was towards the end where you know what they felt the most comfortable with us. Kelly noticed how the elementary students seemed to become more reassured as they developed relationships with each other.

Kelly thought a way to practice culturally responsive teaching was to find out more about the students. She said:

I would say so by asking them questions about where they’re from. Like one of the kids in particular had lots of siblings, and they’re ...um...it was [Jack] & [Doug] that were close together when we first met the kids. And um,... [Doug] has a new s...brother I think, only a couple of months old, and [Jack] has like 12 brothers and sisters. So, it was getting to know both of them and their situations, and kind of like you know talking to them about it, while bringing their families

into play, and they are two different... you know two different cultures. So,... you know kind of talking to them about how they get their homework done; how they can better you know work with their situation, and like if that would be culturally responsive, but just kind of dealing with what they have.

Rebecca agreed with Kelly and thought students' interests outside of school was important. The group continued to discuss the significance of building relationships not only with the students but with the parents too.

Rebecca: What interests them outside of school...like what is that they like to do, their hobbies... And actually listening, don't be just like here's our first day of school activity where tell me about yourself, and then you don't use that to your advantage. Like you actually have to look at responses and think about ok....well if this many kids like sports and this many students like technology, how am I going to use this and incorporate it? You know because there are so many different ways you can do that, like integrated units. All those things you can be used to your advantage if you know what the students like, and you actually pay attention. 'Cause there's tons of teachers...almost every teacher does the.... tell me about yourself on the first day, even college....or teachers here....tell me about yourself. Get out an index card and write down these five things.

Katherine: Cause that's how humans connect. That's how...that's just what we...

Rebecca: The teacher just has to make a connection to each one of those students, whether it be....Oh, I have a brother too. Or oh, you know this is my favorite movie too. You just have to make a connection to each one of your students and discriminate....

Susan: So basically you have to build relationships?

Rebecca: Right.

Katherine: And with their parents as well, I think. With the students, but if you can...I mean not all parents want to be involved, but you really have to try because you can learn a lot from the parents too. And you can see how...um...like some kids that don't pay attention, and they get very distracted in the class. And they're doing all this different stuff. And I've met one of the parents once at my internship, and the mom, cell phone, you know...palm pilot... all this different stuff constantly going on at the same time. And you say no wonder why the kid has to have all this stimulus going all at the same time because that's how he sees his mom live her life. So you really have to...you'll learn a lot through the parents as well and what the kids home life is like. [Someone says, "That's true."] Because some kids don't want to talk about what's going on at home because they're embarrassed by it or they don't like it. But, you can talk to a parent and learn a lot too, and you know how significant that's going to affect the kids.

Preservice teachers in Group A offered how important it is for teachers to connect to the students' interests, build relationships with them, understand their students' situation, and relate to the students.

Group B. Three of the four preservice teachers in Group B discussed the significance of getting to know the elementary students at the community center. Julie was the preservice teacher in Group B who never mentioned getting to know the students.

However, the other three preservice teachers connected with the elementary students, listened to their stories, and related to their interests.

Amy enjoyed engaging in humor with the elementary students at the community center and relating to her past as a fifth grade girl. She said, “It’s just so funny because they are older, and you can joke with them. And I like that because I don’t know...because they are just funny. They like to have fun.”

Amy also shared a story about a girl in their group who was shy and hardly ever spoke. She discussed how the girl did not want to have her picture taken alone, but when the girl was in front of the video camera, she became more confident. Amy believed the girl developed a relationship with them and felt more at ease.

Amy: And the funny thing is, at the beginning of the semester, and we took their like single shot for their My Face pages, she wanted to have someone stand with her in her personal shot. We cropped the other person out; she didn’t know that, but we were like yeah, it’s fine. And now video camera, like so she was actually speaking and moving and all that. She got out there by herself and was talking and talking and talking. And it was just very surprising, but good for her.

Susan: Yeah. So, you don’t have any thoughts on why that changed?

Amy: I don’t know. I mean... I’m hoping it’s ‘cause she finally feels comfortable with all of us.

From these experiences at the community center, Amy realized support, communication, and friendliness were significant aspects for culturally responsive teaching. She commented:

At this point, I think that the most important aspect of teaching that will help meet the needs of my students is being there for the students. I think that a listening ear and smile can go a long way in the classroom. Sometimes a teacher's smile is the only one a student sees and is the only ear that will listen. A teacher needs to be understanding and friendly. I do understand that you need rules and structure, and I am not saying do away with that, but a teacher does need to be there for his/her students.

Amy thought she built relationships with the elementary students through their writing. She said, "And lastly the MyFace page is an interactive and fun way for the students to get to know one another and for the teachers and students to know one another." Maya provided the preservice teacher with a power point slide entitled, *MyFace*. On this slide, the preservice teachers completed their page and helped the elementary students fill in the background information about themselves, such as favorite food or hobby. Amy suggested getting to know the students was an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching. This provided a way, through writing, preservice teachers could learn more about the elementary students.

Christy also believed building relationships with the elementary students was a significant facet of culturally responsive pedagogy. She pronounced:

So, I just think that like getting to know them, more about them and like you know regardless...their background, like what they like to do, helped me with like to figure out how to teach them day by day...

Christy shared her astonishment for the interest the elementary students took in them. She uttered, “I was surprised at how open the kids were right off the bat, they seemed really excited to meet us.”

Christy concurred with Amy about the MyFace page, and she considered the page to be an avenue to get to know the elementary students at the community center in order to connect to the students’ interests and build relationships with them. Christy revealed:

The MyFace page was not only a great way to get these kids to express themselves but it was also a great way to get to know them and see where they come from. It was interesting to see what they wanted to mention about themselves when it came to the “About Me” section. One girl made it an important note to mention that she was Puerto Rican, and she also mentioned having step siblings and a new sibling coming soon. Just hearing about her ethnicity and the type of household she lives in, having a step parent and step siblings, shows what a diverse type of life she has at home. It important to realize that their experiences at home affect who they are when they come to school each day, and that [a]ffects their learning in the classroom.

Christy continued to say:

And like that day just, I think all of them shared something about like their house, their home life, and they didn’t have to. That wasn’t something we told them to write about; Like that was all just something they chose to write about and like wanted to share.

Christy expressed how the elementary students displayed an eagerness to impart personal stories of their lives with the preservice teachers.

Sam commented on the elementary students' desire to work individually with the preservice teachers. She said:

And you can tell that they want to learn, and they like enjoy the fact that we're giving them like our time to [be] here with them, even though they know that we're in class and stuff and that's why we're here, but they still appreciate us being here.

Sam thought the elementary students were grateful for the time preservice teachers gave to them.

Sam also recognized the elementary students developed relationships with the preservice teachers and became more comfortable with them. She said, "Because when it started, they were really quiet, and their personalities really started showing as they got to know you." She then indicated:

And as I was saying, as it progressed, the girls got, 'cause we have all girls in our group, so they got very comfortable with us and kind of weren't staying focused on the work that we were trying to accomplish.

Sam believed the MyFace also was beneficial in connecting with the students. She proposed:

I think that the My Face did that same thing, and the kids got really excited because you wanted to learn about them. So I thought that was really culturally responsive because it was just about them and what they do and not you know the girls together or anything, so it's individual.

Sam thought the activities provided opportunities for the preservice teachers to learn more about the elementary students. She said, "I think when we did activities, we really

focused on learning more about them, and I think that reflected how we taught them.” Therefore, through the development of the relationships, knowledge of students’ interests, and connecting to the students, the preservice teachers were capable of being more culturally responsive.

From my notes: I noticed Group B would sit or stand on one side of the table during the first sessions of the tutoring at the community center. This group had all fifth grade girls who talked often of hippies, peace signs, and the Jonas Brothers (a popular boy band). The fifth grade girls giggled and laughed every session. It almost appeared as if they were in control of the group not the preservice teachers, like they were just hanging out with their older buddies. The preservice teachers also would huddle together while one teacher worked with the fifth graders. The preservice teachers laughed with the girls and talked with them. Amy even commented that the fifth grade girls were into similar things as she was when she was in fifth grade. However, the preservice teachers seemed hesitant and dubious.

The preservice teachers in Group A interspersed among the third grade students, made eye contact, and talked with them, but they still would leave one teacher alone with the students while the others planned and discussed the next step in their lesson. The preservice teachers also appeared nervous and unsure of what to do next.

Preservice teachers in both groups mentioned how the elementary students began to feel more comfortable. I observed how the preservice teachers appeared to be more at ease. As the semester progressed, all the preservice teachers began to become part of the community of learners as they built relationships with the elementary students.

Theme three: Field experience. The theme, field experience, refers to the authentic context or real-life situation in which the preservice teachers learn how to teach elementary students from diverse populations. Maya, the instructor, offered field experiences to the preservice teachers in which they tutor elementary students in the afterschool program at the Community center. The preservice teachers gained hands-on and real life experiences as they tutored the elementary students from different backgrounds. Seven of the eight preservice teachers, all but one in Group A, identified this field experience component as one of the course instructor’s influences on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching (See Table 2).

Three preservice teachers replied in their individual interviews, when asked whether the instructor influenced their understandings answered, “No” or “Not directly.” However, the preservice teachers mentioned three aspects of the course instructor’s influences about culturally responsive teaching: field experience, critical task questions, and what the preservice teachers’ called activities and ideas and I label best practices. This theme presented in this section is field experiences.

Table 2. Instructor’s Influences on Preservice Teachers’ Understandings about Culturally Responsive Teaching

	Preservice Teacher (PST)	Did the Instructor Influence PST’s about CRT?	Influence 1	Influence 2	Influence 3
<i>Group A</i>	Katherine	Not directly	Field Experience	Best Practices	
	Rebecca	Yes	Field Experience		Critical Task Questions
	Lisa	Yes		Best Practices	
	Kelly	Yes	Field Experience	Best Practices	

<i>Group B</i>	Amy	Yes	Field Experience	Best Practices	
	Christy	No	Field Experience	Best Practices	
	Julie	No	Field Experience		Critical Task Questions
	Sam	Yes	Field Experience	Best Practices	

Group A. Katherine, Rebecca, and Kelly mentioned how the experience of tutoring, or field experience, influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. The preservice teachers believed the tutoring of the elementary students impacted their understandings because they gained valuable information on how to approach and teach different students. Katherine said:

I guess just working with a very diverse group of kids and their personalities, and their cultural background and their home life. Um... I've learned... I don't know. I guess I've learned a lot about how to approach kids in a way that's respectful towards their cultural background, um which is sometimes hard to determine.

Kelly recognized the need for different approaches for how students learn. She stated:

Well, just with working with the kids there, I've noticed that each...you know even though they tell you so many of the different modalities to work with kids. It's practicing it and actually experiencing it. You know, knowing well I can get away with this with this child, not get away, but be able to work with this child in this manner, verses you know this one needs a different approach to ...um... you know teaching them that. And I've learned that each kid has a different way of

doing it. And when you sit down and you work with them a little bit, you ask them questions and find out about them.

Kelly and Katherine suggested the field experience offered opportunities for them to find ways to learn and practice new approaches in order to teach students who learned differently and came from diverse backgrounds.

In Kelly's final interview, she shared this field experience opened her eyes and assisted in her cultural awareness. She realized how different her world was compared to the elementary students' lives. Kelly believed the interaction with the elementary students and the hands-on tutoring helped her to further develop insight. Kelly stated:

I think it would better help facilitate with the kids here because each child comes in with a different perspective than what I normally see...so just interacting with them and working with them one on one it kind...it showed me something different than what my little world is; it's outside. And it gives me insight into you know each child is going to be different and you have to react to whatever they come in with and you know kind of work with them from that point. So it's definitely opened my eyes up to a lot of different things that are out there that I don't usually see.

Kelly expanded her perspective on not only the elementary students but her teaching and view of the world.

Rebecca also believed the field experience Maya required provided a unique chance not given to other preservice teachers, and Rebecca uttered:

I mean having us come here. She didn't have to do that. I mean I have a couple of other friends who took writing, and they didn't have any experience with kids at all. So I mean that's...that's a huge different...[experience].

Rebecca continued to express the vast knowledge she gained as she encountered interactions with populations with whom she had never become acquainted:

Well, I think that's [being at the Community center] helped a lot because before this I really didn't have any consistency with culturally different students or different um... I really didn't have anything good to compare it to. So I mean I had...I had worked in a school before, but really there wasn't very many cultural differences at all. So I guess this has been my first real consistent experience with the same students in the cultural diverse atmosphere.

Rebecca acknowledged she had limited experiences with people from different cultures than her own, and she recognized how this field experience offered an opportunity to work with students from different cultures.

Rebecca, Katherine, and Kelly identified the field experience, tutoring elementary students at the community center, as an important influence on their understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy and how to approach and utilize different techniques to meet the needs of diverse populations.

Group B. Sam and Amy both believed the instructor influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching through field experiences. Christy and Julie did not believe the instructor influenced their understandings. However, both in their interview responses suggested the field experience Maya made available increased their understanding of diverse populations. Preservice teachers learn and develop

through shared experiences as they gain understandings about diversity (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Morton & Bennett, 2010; Richards, 2006; Richards & Bennett, In Progress; Sleeter, 2001). All members of the group proposed the field experience made them see how the elementary students came from many different backgrounds.

Amy discussed how the instructor prepared preservice teachers for field experience tutoring at-risk elementary students. Amy commented:

But, outside of preparing us for like what kind of kids they could be, because obviously ahead of time she didn't know what kids I was going to have, what kids you know what I mean, like she had to prepare all of us for the same like in case everyone got them.

Amy believed the instructor provided information to prepare her for diverse populations of students at-risk. Amy commented again about field experience during the focus group, "Like we didn't learn directly about culture, but working with the kids is how I learned more about it..." Amy thought the instructor provided a valuable learning opportunity to work with students in this field experience from different backgrounds (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Morton & Bennett, 2010; Richards, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). She gave an example of a girl who did not talk very much, but Amy thought the girl opened up toward the end of the semester. She reflected, "And I mean that could definitely be cultural related, how she is at home, everything like that." Amy recognized Maya brought the class to the community center to gain experience with diverse populations.

Sam also recognized this experience as beneficial. As Sam's group discussed the instructor in a focus group interview, she mentioned field experience as an essential part of learning to teach. She thinks, "...it's like really going to help to be hands-on, so it's good that we have internships." According to Sam and Amy, Maya furnished them with knowledge and experience to tutor at-risk students from diverse backgrounds.

In Sam's last interview, she described how the experience provided an opportunity to observe how the elementary students all had distinctive personalities and came from various backgrounds:

I think that tutoring here are...we had five girls. They were all completely different. Like one, she would explain how her mom had uh, like a boyfriend, and that her parents were separated; she never saw her dad. Like they all had different situations. And also I think it reflected in their behavior, so I think that with having them, teaching them... some were off the wall, and some were like quieter, really quiet. Like one girl started crying one time, and we had no idea why. And um...I think you really just have to, as far as cultural responsive teaching goes, I think you just really have to consider what their situations are. And that's... I mean we had trouble doing it with five girls, so it was a good experience before you get a whole classroom.

Sam described how working with the elementary students at the community center helped her become aware of their assorted backgrounds.

Christy and Julie stated the instructor did not influence their understandings about culturally responsive teaching, but then Christy continued to express how the field experience facilitated better understandings. Christy replied to whether the course

instructor influenced her understandings, “I don’t think so. Like I mean I think working with the kids was like a good experience...” Although Maya chose to incorporate field experience into the course, Christy did not make the connection that the instructor influenced her thinking. In addition, she iterated in the focus group interview:

I don’t think that the instructor has at all...but I think that working with the kids that we did work with...the kids we had come from I think definitely came from a lot of different backgrounds and types of households.

Therefore, Christy did not recognize the instructor’s influences on her understandings about culturally responsive teaching. She admitted the field experience offered opportunities to work with elementary students who came from diverse backgrounds and homes.

Although Julie thought the instructor did not influence her understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy, she also considered the tutoring experience endowed her with practice and hands-on teaching in order to increase her pedagogical practice. Julie alleged:

But, I just think like just more practice with students and like being more aware of it has helped me like become probably a better teacher at that and just like being around more students of different cultures. Just like it’s easier to be more culturally responsive. So, the more I’m around it, the better, I think.

Julie confirmed that field experience resulted in her increased awareness and valuable training to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

Theme four: Best practices of teaching writing. Although some of the preservice teachers did not explicitly say Maya impacted their understandings about

culturally responsive teaching, preservice teachers' conversations indicated that they were influenced by Maya's instruction as they acknowledged distinctive aspects of her instruction they thought was culturally responsive. Preservice teachers suggested instructional strategies or best practices such as *MyFace* or *Our Space* integrated students' background and culture into the writing content. Best practices for writing include 1) positive environments, 2) organization of writing, 3) meaningful writing to students, 4) writing for a variety of purposes, 5) collaborative writing, and 6) critical reflection (Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Preservice teachers in their words stated "activities and ideas." After analysis, I determined preservice teachers discussed best practices for writing.

These best practices incorporated different purposes (genres) for writing and writing experiences that were meaningful to the elementary students. In addition, the best practices provided opportunities for students to share and express information about themselves, which gave preservice teachers a chance to get to know them. Preservice teachers offered understandings about scaffolding from students' prior knowledge. Therefore, the best practices Maya provided facilitated the course content's influences on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

The instructor, Maya, offered best practices each week to the preservice teachers. She provided the exact lesson preservice teachers would conduct every week, and then the preservice teachers could supplement other activities and ideas if time allowed. The preservice teachers thought these activities and ideas or best practices demonstrated ways to be culturally responsive in the writing curriculum and motivated and interested the elementary students.

Culturally responsive teaching. Six of the eight preservice teachers recognized Maya's instructional activities and ideas as another influence on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Instructional "activities and ideas" is how the preservice teachers referred to writing instruction, or as in terms of best practices: writing as meaningful to students or writing for a variety of purposes. Maya expected preservice teachers to use these best practices while tutoring and in their future classrooms. Some activities were *MyFace*, *Our Space*, write a story about an object, "Garfield Writing Survey" (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000), and a spelling inventory from the text *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008). Maya then instructed the preservice teachers to complete a *MyFace* (See Appendix E).

Maya created a PowerPoint (2007) slide titled *MyFace*, which resembles *MySpace* in pop culture. *MySpace* is an international social networking website to communicate and share photos with friends, colleagues, and family (MySpace.com, 2003-2009). This *MyFace* slide contained sections for favorite food, school subject, and movie. Another section included space to write about personal information. The last section provided space for a digital picture of the student. After the preservice teachers completed their own *MyFace*, they worked with the elementary students in their group to create a *MyFace*.

Maya demonstrated another technological activity similar to *MySpace* called, *Our Space*. The preservice teachers worked with the elementary students to create the PowerPoint, *Our Space*. The elementary students took pictures of different aspects of the Community center they liked. The students then wrote captions to correspond with the pictures.

Maya introduced the last technological strategy to the preservice teachers. The teachers helped the elementary students create a movie utilizing the program *QuickTime* (2009) as a public service announcement for the community center. They collaborated to create story boards and scripts and to take video shots around the community center. As a culminating activity, each group presented the movies to the entire class.

The other activities Maya demonstrated did not require technology. During the first and last tutoring session at the community center, the preservice teachers conducted a “Garfield Writing Survey” (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). The survey asked questions about the elementary students’ attitudes toward writing. The survey consists of 28 items that asked “how do you feel...” about different aspects of writing. The students answered the questions based on a four point Likert Scale represented by Garfield pictures of very happy to very upset. The survey did not provide information about why students like or dislike writing; however, the instrument served as a preliminary guide to the students’ writing attitudes, a pre/post measurement, and a way to examine the impact of the instructional techniques in the course.

Toward the end of the semester, the preservice teachers utilized an additional activity, a Spelling Inventory from *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008). This inventory consisted of lists of words structured to indicate grade level of the speller. The preservice teachers read the words and then read the words in the sentence provided. As preservice teachers administered and scored the Spelling Inventory, they gained authentic experience with an assessment that helped them learn more about the elementary students.

Preservice teachers thought the last activity engaged the elementary students. In this activity, the elementary students wrote a story about an object they pulled out of a container. The objects included different things such as a button, bracelet, toy shoe, or story characters. These objects engaged the students because the objects provided a focus for the students' writing but also allowed for creative expression. The preservice teachers believed the instructor influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching through these activities and ideas.

Two preservice teachers suggested the final influence the instructor had on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching was with critical task questions. The instructor posted critical task questions online weekly for preservice teachers to teach reflective practice (See Appendix D). The questions included topics such as definitions of culturally responsive teaching and at-risk students, the writing course content, own writing experiences, students' needs, class activities, and strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. The preservice teachers recognized critical task questions, as well as field experience and activities and ideas, as instructor influences on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Group A. Katherine, Rebecca, Lisa, and Kelly noted best practices were aspects of the instructor's influences toward culturally responsive teaching (See Table 2). Lisa and Kelly identified the "activities and ideas" or best practices that Maya provided influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Katherine stated the instructor did not directly influence her understandings, but the activities Maya provided offered insights into her understandings. Rebecca was the only preservice teacher in this group who mentioned field experience and critical task questions as influences.

In the focus group interview, Lisa stated she believed the instructor influenced her understanding about culturally responsive teaching through “the different activities she presented to us, like the toy thing and using media...” Lisa refers to the “toy thing,” which is the activity where the students pick an object out of a container and write about it. Lisa mentioned the use of technology as part of culturally responsive teaching, “Because technology is a part of children’s live, and that’s part of their culture.” Lisa suggests these activities meet the needs of the individual students and the activities connect to the students’ cultures, two principles of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995). These principles are conceptions of themselves and others as the teacher and students make connections between their identities in a community and globally.

Lisa recognized the need to connect to students’ culture, in this case technological culture. Lisa commented on how Maya utilized technology as innovative techniques to facilitate culturally responsive teaching:

I think so because she taught us to use different mediums, like the video and different things I would have never thought of. Because whenever I think of writing, I’ve probably said before, um is just paper and pencil and just write. And she brings in lots of different mediums: videos, cameras, you know all those different things that I probably never would have thought of. Because technology is part of children’s lives, and that’s part of their culture. So...

Susan: So her ideas?

Lisa: Yeah.

Susan: Her instructional techniques?

Lisa: Definitely.

Lisa also recognized culturally responsive teaching incorporates the individual student's needs, and culture represents more than ethnicity. She said the instructor was "teaching us how to be culturally responsive because it's looking toward different ways to motivate students to learn." Lisa identified how heritage and ethnicity is not the only identifying aspect of culture:

I think a lot of times we always think of culture....we think of heritage type things. I think culture also has to do with like pop culture and how technology has really been a big part of children's lives. So bringing that sort of aspect to it will maybe inspire them to write more, and she showed us that. That there is other ways to have them write rather than pen and pencil.

Lisa associated Maya's best practices as influential to her understandings about culturally responsive teaching because she noticed writing includes more than "pen and pencil" as way to meet student's individual culture needs.

Katherine also noticed other aspects of culture such as technology and pop culture. She remarked:

I definitely agree with that, ...that's stuff that we have to remember to think about when we are educating our kids. So they do need to be exposed to a lot of technology, and they do need to be exposed to a lot of things that have to do with pop culture because the culture is constantly changing. So that's just something I thought of when she was mentioning that because it is really important that they are exposed to those things. And basically, the culture because it is changing its going to be a new culture for them, if that make sense? So...I just think that the

more that we can show them...um different ways of working with technology and exposing them to as many cultures, they'll be...it will be easier for them to adapt to all the new things that are going to be coming at them.

Katherine's definition of culture broadened the topic to include pop culture and technology. She acclaimed as culture changes students and teachers adapt and knowledge is shared and recreated, a tenet of culturally responsive teaching's conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Lisa's comments also represented conceptions of knowledge. Therefore, both Lisa and Katherine's reflections demonstrate Maya's influences about culturally responsive teaching.

The last preservice teacher in group A, Kelly, reflected on the course instructor and said, "...she definitely has" influenced her understandings about culturally responsive teaching, and she stated, "I think there's a lot of activities that she's given us that are very representational for different cultures." She thought the activities or best practices were "not geared toward one" culture. Kelly provided as an example the activity Maya brought in an object, and students wrote about the object. Examples of the objects included small toys that were story characters, household items, or accessories such as jewelry. In the focus group, Kelly mentioned the button activity, suggesting "that's something that was perfect for cultures" because in almost all cultures people wear buttons and students in different cultures can relate to buttons. She thought different children could write about buttons because many cultures around the world have buttons and are not just "specific" to "white middle class" in the United States. As Kelly reflected on Maya's influences on her understandings, she noticed Maya "mentioned cultural responsive teaching, but she didn't go into a lot of depth about it." Then, Kelly

commented about the instructor, “But, um...she lists a lot of things that you don’t really grasp until you sit down and analyze it. And wow, you know, this actually is cultural responsive teaching, and I didn’t even realize it was happening.” In addition, Kelly discussed the instructor’s influence with her group members in an interview. She shared, “there were so many activities that she did throughout the course and a lot of them involved technology or simply thinking of different ways to talk about it.” Katherine then noted not only did the instructor influence them through the technology and other activities, but the experience “made us work together.”

Rebecca shared how the instructor influenced her understandings about culturally responsive teaching through the critical task questions, reflection as part of best practices. Rebecca expressed, “I guess by asking those questions and then having us reflect on them.” Rebecca asserted, “But, so I think that... having us do those once a week was good because if you can kind of see, if you can see progress through questions, from question one through question nine. I like that.” Rebecca understood to learn one must see progress throughout the process of teaching and learning. Rebecca noticed Maya offered experiences with hands-on and reflective questions in order to help her understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Katherine suggested Maya did not provide understandings about culturally responsive teaching, but she thought the instructor provided techniques to utilize with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Katherine commented in response to an interview question about the course instructor’s influence on her understandings:

Not particularly... She’s taught...she’s taught me a lot about different activities that you can do that can be correlated to different cultural backgrounds, and there

are ways that you can bring different kids or have kids explore their own cultural backgrounds or talk about their cultural background by using...doing different activities and having kids talk to each other and learn about each others' backgrounds and stuff, but not like direct teaching about being culturally responsive.

Katherine believed Maya focused more on writing content than culturally responsive teaching she learned about in an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) or diverse populations' course. Although Maya focused more on writing, Katherine noted her ideas could be adjusted to fit the needs of diverse students:

I mean a lot of us have taken ESOL or taken classes that already talk a lot about cultural responsive teaching and about the different diverse groups, where this is focused on teaching writing so she just correlated [Maya connected writing to different cultures]. Um, I don't think she really talked about how to specifically work with diverse groups, but how you can do writing activities and that can be used to working with diverse groups.

After discussion with her group members in the interview, Katherine stated:

So just all different types of methods that she...she did activities in the classroom. We talked about that. So she just did a lot...She just made me think of a lot of different things that I wouldn't have thought of before because it's not the way I was taught.

Katherine thought the different activities and methods Maya provide influenced her understandings of culturally responsive teaching.

The preservice teachers believed the instructor influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Preservice teachers mentioned Maya chose to conduct the course at the community center. Here, the preservice teachers gained hands-on experience tutoring the elementary students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, preservice teachers noted Maya asked reflective questions throughout the semester to connect the course content and culturally responsive teaching. Lastly, preservice teachers suggested Maya demonstrated activities and ideas that engaged students and focused on meeting the needs of the diverse student populations. Therefore, all preservice teachers recognized different aspects of Maya's instruction that influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Group B. Group B included the preservice teachers Amy, Christy, Sam, and Julie. Amy and Sam believed the course instructor influenced their understandings of culturally responsive teaching through the provision of “activities and ideas” or best practices (See Table 2). Although Christy and Julie stated the instructor did not influence their understandings, they shared the best practices facilitated insight into culturally responsive teaching.

In addition to preparation of at-risk students, Maya offered meaningful writing experience for the elementary students and writing for a variety of purposes (best practices) to practice culturally responsive teaching. Sam mentioned in the focus group interview:

I think using the activities that our teacher did give us to do. I thought they were good activities. Like two or three of them. Like the My Face was a really good one. That's when I found out her parents were divorced, and then the dad had a

girlfriend and stuff like that. I think what I really noticed was doing activities, so they didn't feel pressure. And it wasn't like a one on one thing, and you could learn more about them activities. So, I thought that was a good preparation of activities.

Sam recognized the activities allowed students to share information about their culture and home life without stress or anxiety. In addition, Sam and Amy acknowledged *MyFace* and other activities allowed for alternative techniques for learning such as technology. Amy believed the instructor's best practices provided opportunities for the elementary students to write and express themselves in non-traditional ways in order to meet the needs of their diverse backgrounds. According to Amy, "...she encouraged us to let them draw and then write about what they draw or drew... I think will work really well culturally if we have an ESOL student... she opened us up to other things to do..." Like Amy, Sam also stated Maya afforded information about culturally responsive teaching before they began tutoring at the community center. She also indicated Maya suggested ideas, motivation and engagement were essential to culturally responsive teaching. Sam added the following:

When we were in the classroom, I think she taught us a lot before we got here. So um...and she also really made us understand, if you want these kids to respond and learn, you have to keep them engaged; you have keep them wanting to learn more. And the activities she gave us helped a lot too. Activities that she picked out were really good ones.

Sam emphasized the activities kept the elementary students motivated and developed a desire to continue learning.

Although Amy thought the instructor provided activities and ideas that influenced her understandings about culturally responsive teaching, she believed the course focused on writing instruction and not culturally responsive teaching. She still considered field experience and best practices influenced her understandings about culturally responsive teaching. She said, “It was mainly about writing, not necessarily writing culturally.” In addition, she believed the instructor did not spend much time on culture. She commented, “our writing teacher she didn’t really focus too much on culture...” However, Amy continued to explain ways the instructor provided strategies and techniques that would facilitate culturally responsive teaching. Amy asserted:

I think one thing that I guess...I guess could go under that was um even though it was a writing class, she encouraged us to let them draw and then write about what they draw or drew. Or like if they draw it, then they can tell us what it’s supposed to be and we can write it for them, which I think will work really well culturally if we have an ESOL student, or anything like that because maybe they aren’t able to write, but she opened us up to things to do if this student can’t write or something like that...

Amy and Sam deemed Maya’s best practices and the hands-on experience tutoring as influences on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Julie and Christy, however, believed Maya did not influence their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. During an interview, Julie responded about the instructor, “She just like asked us some questions that we had to write about...” Then, she continued to discuss the *MyFace* activity the instructor provided.

Julie: But like the *MyFace* and stuff they had um...they were able to express

themselves which allowed them to like under...we learned more about them and like their family, and everyone in the group learned about that too.

Susan: So maybe her ideas and activities?

Julie: Yeah.

Julie suggested the activities that Maya demonstrated helped her form a relationship with the students because her group learned more about the students and their backgrounds. The development of relationships represents an aspect of culturally relevant teaching, conceptions of social relations (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995). This tenet includes a student-teacher relationship, connectedness to students, and community of learners. Even though Julie stated Maya did not influence her understandings about culturally responsive teaching, she recognized how best practices developed her understandings of the students. Therefore, Julie failed to identify this connectedness to students as culturally responsive teaching, while, in fact, Maya influenced her understandings of culturally responsive teaching.

In written response to critical task questions Christy described the best practices the instructor provided for the class halfway through the semester as culturally responsive. The activities included the “Garfield Writing Survey” (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000) and *MyFace*. She said, “I think as a whole these activities relate to culturally responsive teaching because they provide a variety of ways to help understand each student’s needs and likes when it comes to learning.” She believed the Garfield Survey helped her “to see multiple views [how] come from the students with different backgrounds and home lives...” Christy described the *MyFace* as not only a

way “to get these kids to express themselves, but it was also a great way to get to know them and see where they come from.” Although Christy stated the instructor did not facilitate her understandings about culturally responsive teaching, she recognized the field experience and best practices that Maya utilized as influences.

Amy recognized writing as the focus of the instructor and course, not culturally responsive teaching. Amy commented, “It was mainly about writing, not necessarily writing culturally.” However, in her last individual interview, she claimed Maya, the instructor, supported alternative techniques such as drawing to meet the needs of diverse populations.

Julie also realized how practice writing lesson plans facilitated her understandings about culturally responsive teaching. She stated, “At the beginning, like when we did our lesson plans, we had to make ESOL modifications so I mean I guess it gave me more practice...” Julie suggested to be a culturally responsive teacher modifications to lesson plans are important for English language learners. She identified lesson plans as part of the writing content and as an influence in her understandings of culturally responsive teaching.

Motivation and interest. Preservice teachers utilized alternative teaching methods that were meaningful to the students or best practices provided by Maya to teach writing throughout the semester. These methods, tutoring, and conversations with the elementary students facilitated the preservice teachers’ changes in writing instruction and philosophy. They connected these alternative methods to student interest, engagement, and motivation. Preservice teachers throughout the semester became aware of the

significant role motivation and interest plays on students' learning, and they proposed their writing instruction must connect to the students' interests in order to learn.

At the end of the semester, Maya interviewed and recorded the elementary students at the community center. She asked questions about writing such as what students like or dislike about writing, what was their favorite thing about writing, and what are differences between writing at school and tutoring. Preservice teachers listened to the podcasts, which reinforced how importance of motivation and interest on writing instruction. Therefore, the theme motivation and interest transpired.

Group A. Katherine suggested how to motivate some of the elementary students: "...the ones that loved drawing and painting...have them first draw and paint stuff, and then have them write." In Katherine's final interview, she noted how to motivate and interest the elementary students. Katherine stated:

...having those types of activities where it's more fun; it's not so much structured. This is the correct way of writing; you need to do this. Kinda letting their true colors show and then helping them out along the way, but not judging every second of the way, not analyzing everything.

Katherine believed the best practices were enjoyable and more meaningful to the students than structured writing.

Lisa thought writing might be more interesting for the students if they worked in groups sometimes. About collaborative work (an aspect of best practice) (Whitaker, 2007), she said, "I think that would be more fun for students you know than just sitting at the desk by themselves writing," and Lisa offered teachers for the elementary students

should, “Let them kind of choose how they want to learn.” Lisa thought personal choice, meaningful to students, was important:

... because I can see how the attitudes of the students toward their attitude toward writing maybe. ‘Cause there’s lot of emphasis in it to like get it perfect, and there’s no way you can really get it perfect. And so maybe just help them, guide them, do steps.

Lisa reflected on the podcast of the elementary students from the community center. One student shared a story about his teacher who disparaged his handwriting. She said:

It’s just so irritating. It’s like...you know...I mean obviously handwriting is important for everybody, but to sit there and criticize a student on a crooked A. I mean...they’re not going to want to write. They’re going to take too long because they’re going to be so focused on getting their A’s straight or whatever. And it’s like...They are not going to find writing fun. They’re going to think...every time it’s... you hear take out a piece of paper they’re going to dread it because what kind of criticism are they going to get. And it’s like everyone has a different handwriting anyway.

Lisa discovered how writing should be different than the way she learned in elementary school, and writing should allow for more creativity. She thought:

‘Cause we would choose like the toy activity. That was really fun. I never would have thought of that because when I was in school, we always like, we would choose, she would like write a topic on the board and we had to write about that. That is all the prompt we would get, a few words on the board, no like... no creative stimulation whatsoever to like...start to develop ideas ‘cause it’s really

hard to like ok, what should I write about. Even now, so don't like write a sentence on the board, and (groans) uhhh, ok. So, think of more creative ways to present it, other than just writing.

Lisa provided examples of creative writing projects such as ones they did at the community center; she said, "Like skits, the commercials, and stuff like that." Lisa suggested motivation and interest as significant features of writing instruction.

During Rebecca's last interview, she mentioned how she thought schools focus more on quantity versus quality. She said the elementary students' interests supports quality. She commented:

I think that it has because it's made me realize what the kids like and what they don't like. I think it's really important to see because a lot [of] them don't like to write in school or say you know they don't like writing because they have to write six sentences exactly, or they have to write at least four paragraphs. And I think it should be less about the number of sentences or the number of paragraphs versus the content because I think if they are not writing anything, any quality, then it's why are they writing. Because it's just—"I like birds. Birds are cool. Birds are fun." Like that doesn't...that's not helping them.

Rebecca also thought the best practices Maya provided facilitated motivation and interest in the students. She stated:

And I think that we found a lot of interesting activities. She pointed out a lot of activities that we can use in the classroom that we even used last week. And it got a lot of the students more interested. I mean Dee [student].... or... Jess [student] wrote a whole two pages...

Rebecca reflected during the last interview about the podcast of elementary students from the community center. She thought it provided an understanding about what motivates and interests the elementary students. Rebecca stated:

...the podcast that she did was very helpful, I thought...in determining like what kids like about writing, what they really just can't stand I think what you were saying about first having them type it all out, and then go back and re- ...hand write. That's a really good idea because those kids don't want to focus on handwriting. They don't want to focus on sentence length.

Rebecca emphasized again students in schools are often told to focus on quantity versus quality. In addition, she noted how one student shared how his teacher scrutinized about his handwriting. She said, "... it [podcast] showed a lot of the different students, not just the students from our group, but... 'my teacher says I don't write an A right or my A's sloppy.'" Rebecca shared how the community center and the writing methods course facilitated better understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy in addition to writing instruction. She said, "I think we have to take a look at that...the community center and the class both helped me." She considered the Maya's provision of best practices as a significant aspect of culturally responsive teaching.

In Kelly's critical task question, she realized the elementary students' writing ideas were important to motivate and interest them. She wrote, "I am now more open to the children's suggestions on what they want to write about so that it's more fun for them, but I have learned how to better control the directions in which their mind ventures."

From my notes: Kelly realized how students gain interest in writing if it is something they want to write about. However, she still has the need to control. If she controls, then how does that stifle the creativity and how does that impact their motivation and interest?

Preservice teachers were asked how a podcast of the elementary students' voices from the community center influenced their writing philosophy in the last critical question. In the podcast, elementary students discussed their attitudes toward writing experiences at school and the community center. In Kelly's last critical question, she documented her thoughts about motivation and interest. Kelly wrote:

After listening to the students' voices and their overall opinions about working with the tutors I have found that I need to make the writing process as enjoyable as possible. From what the student's talked about, we, the tutors, had many interactive activities that they thoroughly appreciated because they weren't the same boring tasks as school. I want my student's to want to write and remember that it can be fun... The overall impression is that the more one-on-one and creative the activity, the more the students will be engaged in the writing and learning process altogether.

Kelly believed writing must be fun and enjoyable, not boring. She also emphasized the importance of interactive and creative activities to develop engaging writing lesson and improve the learning process. Therefore, Kelly thought writing experiences that were meaningful to the elementary students, a facet of best practices, facilitated engagement.

Kelly also described the writing projects the elementary students worked on at the community center motivated them. She wrote: "I believe it [scriptwriting and digital

video] gets student's more engaged in their writing because based off of what they decided open they can act it out for the camera." She continued to say, "Many times I've noticed, students get extremely bored performing the same boring tasks if they have the opportunity to change it up it makes the learning process more enjoyable." She related the experience to her teaching in the future and suggested, "I don't want my students to find all writing to be a boring monotonous tasks that they believe won't get them anywhere in life." She also said, "I believe that the writing experience for the students should be interactive and exciting. They need to be creative and explore their ideas and thoughts." Kelly believed, "There are so many fun activities that can help with the writing process and develop an awareness of the rules without boring the students out of their minds." Kelly advocated for motivation and interest, meaningful experiences, or best practices as an essential element of writing instruction.

During the last focus group, Kelly and Rebecca commented on the monotonous writing assignments elementary students experience in school. Kelly suggested teachers should offer best practices, assignments that motivate and interest elementary students, such as technology. She stated:

It's [technology] kind of like an incentive for them to get involved and stuff because they never know what's going to happen if you incorporate a lot of technology. It could be using a Smart Board one day or you know using the Elmo to read a story the next. Like every day could be something unique for them, and it definitely does educate them in different ways too.

In the last focus group, Kelly thought as a teacher she should know her students and what they like in order to gain their attention and interest in a lesson. She remarked:

I think the biggest thing about writing for the kids is knowing the right buttons to push. Like I know a couple of the boys that I've been working with a lot, they love playing Halo games. Like any game that you can talk about, they will sit there and ramble on. And I can use that you know as a tool, ok, why don't you write it down rather than just tell me about it. You know just like, when you talk to the kids, find out what their hot button is, what they like to do in their free time. And you can get them to write forever about that. That's just one thing I've noticed.

Preservice teachers in Group A suggested the best practices Maya recommended were an imperative component of writing instruction. They also considered motivation and interest important for culturally responsive pedagogy.

Group B. Preservice teachers, not just individually but in their groups, believed writing instruction must include creative techniques and catch the attention of students to enhance attitudes toward writing and their willingness to write. Group B commented on their wiki the 13-th week of class and after six weeks tutoring the elementary students:

One thing that we have learned is to give writing assignments that appeal to the students. Writing doesn't always have to be expository; it can be fun and interesting to the child. We have discovered that the more the students enjoy what they are writing about the better they will write and the more they will want to write.

Preservice teachers in Group B considered best practices, motivating and meaningful writing experiences for different purposes, an essential part of writing instruction.

Amy described her enjoyment of writing as a way to help her students in their writing. She said:

I think it will help me in the fact that I do enjoy writing, so I can think I can hopefully help my students with that and be like...you know present it to them as not a scary thing. Like, I think little kids think of writing as, ooh writing, I have to write an essay, like you know and it's... I think if since I enjoy it, I can hopefully portray that to the students. Like this is a fun thing; it's a creative thing, like just write what you feel. And maybe, hopefully that will make them feel more comfortable.

Amy stated she learned what to do when the elementary students were stuck on writing one thing. She would help motivate the elementary students, and she would “ask questions and motivate them to branch out and think of new things to write ‘cause you know maybe to get them more on topic or something like that.”

Julie shared that she gained knowledge about the creation of engaging activities for the students. In her second interview, Julie said, “...when I see like fun things to do, I’m like oh, I could incorporate that into the writing lesson.” Julie recognized the need to make writing interesting and enjoyable for the students as she reflected on her aversion for writing in school. Julie mentioned the best practices Maya provided as an approach to motivate and engage the students. She suggested one way to create amusement in the classroom was the scripts the elementary students wrote in collaborative groups. Julie said, “I like when we did the scripts or whatever, and then they got to work together and make the video. I thought that was really good because then they all got to like work together and have fun.”

Julie proposed the elementary students should have fun when they write as compared to how she felt about writing when she was younger. She stated:

I'm a math and science person, and I dislike writing. And it made me like...I know when I grew up, I hated writing, and if I can make it fun for the kids, then that would be amazing, and I think she [Maya] gave me a lot of great ideas on how to do that because I was not...I was just like oh this is not going to be a fun class. She gave me fun ideas that the kids actually liked doing. And now when we had to do a writing activity, we decided to make...have them do a comic strip and have them like write about each day and draw pictures. So they really liked that, so I just think of I think funner things now. And she gave me a lot more ideas. And now I don't think writing is as bad.

Julie thought the best practices Maya presented offered a way to motivate and interest the elementary students at the community center.

Julie in the last focus group interview shared how the elementary students were more motivated when they became aware of the type of writing they would do. Julie said:

You know every time we brought up writing, they'd be like writing, boo, blah, blah, blah. But then like once we worked with them like for awhile, they realized like we weren't making them write like essays, and it's not the end of the world.

And then they began to be ok about it.

Julie thought the best practices they learned from Maya engaged the elementary students.

She also said:

I know the one girl we had them... she wrote about like a shoe. So, she wrote like a poem, and then she really liked it and was like really proud of her poem. So like if you like... if teachers, do the fun stuff that like we would do and do it like often, I feel they would like writing a lot more. Because the only thing they thought of writing, was like it was so boring, academic, and like they all hated it. But what we did with them, they didn't like hate. So like if the teachers just like did fun stuff, like they would enjoy it a lot more, and they'd probably learn a lot more since they would actually participate and try harder.

Julie considered the fun assignments as motivators to help students learn more and work harder because they would be interested in the assignment or writing project.

Christy stated in her interview, "I got to see what things they do like to write because even the ones who said they didn't really like writing at least liked one of the writing things." Christy in the last focus group interview commented on the Garfield Writing Attitude Survey. She thought it provided knowledge and awareness of the elementary students' interests, which facilitated ideas to motivate them. She said:

Well, I think that Garfield survey definitely gave a lot of insight to that age group and the writing that they prefer. 'Cause like there's no person that said... had the mad Garfield for every single thing. Like there was at least one type of writing that they had the happy face for. Like, I think two of them said they'd rather write in a diary or something than an essay in class or whatever. And I think they all said they'd rather write about personal experiences than some history topic or science topic whatever the thing said. And I just think that gave us really good insight.

Christy also concluded elementary students do not always have to write about academic content. She thought elementary students should write about personal experiences because it motivates them and gets them excited to write. She noted:

Because yeah there are going to be times when you have to have them write about you know academic things, but I definitely think seeing how much they really do like writing about personal experience and knowing that they're going to be excited to write about that. Like, definitely will influence like the type of topics I give them or like the type of you know freedom that I give them like with their writing because I know like what kids that age wanting, I mean a few of them, like prefer. But I think that all kids like usually write about, would rather write about like personal things because obviously if it's about themselves, it's easier and they get excited about it because you know it's about them.

Christy believed she could use this new understanding about personal choice in her future writing instruction. She said:

So, it's just like learning that [what students like to write about and when they like to write] and then bringing like that in the future with you. And be like you know they really do like to write about their hobbies, but they don't like writing in science or something like that. And then, you know like in the future, you can remember to incorporate more of what they like than that they don't. So I definitely think when I know you said assessing to help you know further their learning is really important.

Christy recognized motivation and interest as a best practice that provided incentives to elementary students to write.

In Sam's last interview, she discussed different types of best practices to engage the students. First, Sam thought activities with drawing pictures and physical items to write about would help motivate students because these writing experiences were more meaningful to the students. She also believed personal connections to the students facilitate more engagement and interest. Sam said:

...with writing I learned that doing pictures and having like physical objects will help them to like...you know motiv...like get thinking and like want to write more about it 'cause when... we did one activity where we put like objects in front of them and write about this and that. And they were able to develop and come up with these off the wall stories, but they enjoyed them. Because they had more of a task instead of being like write about this specific subject, and I think that for me what I'm going to do with writing is have them do more personal talk about, not personal, but like things that they like. Let them focus on just getting something on paper as opposed to giving them subjects they're not really interested in.

Sam in the last focus group indicated drawing is another technique to motivate and interest elementary students in writing. She commented:

I think drawing with writing is good too. They like that. (all agree) And then even if you have to incorporate it with a subject that's not about them personally, you can explain whatever you want them to write about. And be like, now what I just talked about, can you produce a drawing on it, and then from your drawing and what I said, write about it. I think it would be a good step by step to keep the

interest there. Instead of just being like we're going to write about this, now listen, dadadadadada. Now write.

Sam suggested drawing and visual arts as an alternative way to motivate and interest the elementary students.

During the last focus group interview, Sam reflected on best practices Maya provided that would motivate and interest the elementary students. She said: "I really liked the My Face. That's a really good one. 'Cause they all know about My Space. It's kind of like we get to create our own...and they're interested in it." Sam also noticed the elementary students preferred writing about personal experiences. She commented:

Some really, really do like it, and the ones that don't, they still like writing about personal experiences and things like that. Maybe what I'm learning about them is that when I start teaching, when I'm teaching writing, maybe start with personal things and then not only will I get a feel for what they're about, but at the same time I can engage them and make them want to learn.

Sam recognized the elementary students preferred writing assignments that were meaningful and of personal interest to them, an aspect of best practices (Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998).

Group B reflected collaboratively about writing instruction. They wrote on their wiki:

One thing that we have learned is to give writing assignments that appeal to the students. Writing doesn't always have to be expository; it can be fun and interesting to the child. We have discovered that the more the students enjoy

what they are writing about the better they will write and the more they will want to write.

The preservice teachers in this group realized writing instruction must include best practices. Writing instruction must be motivating and interesting to the elementary students.

The theme of best practices emerged from the data. This theme was noticeable as an influence on their understandings of culturally responsive teaching. In addition, best practices became apparent and overlapped in writing instruction as motivation and interest. Best practices incorporated meaningful writing experiences, writing for different purposes, and positive environments (Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Preservice teachers came to appreciate best practices as a significant facet of writing instruction and writing is not defined as just paper-pencil but transcends traditional ways of writing. The preservice teachers discussed traditional ways of writing: five paragraph essays, only writing with pencils on paper, lack of creative techniques, and writing prompts. They connected to ways their teachers taught them to write. They identified various types of instructional ideas the instructor, Maya, provided to use in the course and future to teach writing. Preservice teachers found new ways to differentiate writing and suggested alternative writing methods such as use of technology, drawing, group writing, and inspirational props.

Theme five: Questions and conversations. For the final individual interviews with the preservice teachers, I decided to inquire how I might have influenced the preservice teachers' understandings and instruction. The rationale for this query stemmed from my reflexive journal because as a participant observer I situated myself

with the participants in the context of the study and during this time noticed the preservice teachers in my groups seemed inexperienced.

From my notes. I wonder if the preservice teachers feel inhibited, anxious, self-conscious, or nervous because I observe them every week. They do not seem confident in their teaching and only demonstrate novice understandings in their instruction.

Therefore, I think their experience as a teacher or tutor has been limited. I remember during the participants' first interview they shared experiences they had with children, but they primarily had experience as a counselor or babysitter.

Some of the preservice teachers in this course were enrolled in courses I taught previous semesters, and two of my participants are in my Creative Arts course now. I feel more acquainted with them; I feel I know them better. Many preservice teachers in this course seem to trust me and value my knowledge and expertise of teaching because they come to me and seek advice when Maya is not available. They inquire about behavior management, the best way to handle a situation, or instructional techniques to meet the students' needs.

When I talked to Maya about my two groups, she said they were new to the education program. We also discussed her observations of other groups, and Maya suggested the other groups were more confident in their teaching, and from the critical task questions Maya asked, she thought they demonstrated a better understanding of culturally responsive teaching than my groups. As tutors, she said my two groups appeared to be weaker in their instruction. Could I possibly interfere in their abilities to interact with the students or to execute a lesson effectively? It could just be their inexperience. I noticed my groups of preservice teachers stayed on one side of the table

while the other groups were interspersed among the students. I believe I should ask the preservice teachers how I might have influenced them because maybe their weakness is a direct result of fear and anxiety as I observe. Maybe they feel as if I analyze their instruction and interactions with a critical lens.

During the final interview, I posed the query: “How might I have influenced your understandings about culturally responsive teaching?” Preservice teachers suggested I played a pivotal role in their understandings through the questions I asked in the interviews. They considered the questions as a channel to reflect on their instruction and sometimes led to discussions amongst their group about culturally responsive teaching. Their reflections allowed the preservice teachers to focus on the individual students

Group A. The preservice teachers in Group A suggested the interviews influenced their reflection and self-awareness about culturally responsive teaching during the semester.

Katherine: All the questions certainly make...make it easier when I'm having to write on the wiki [group summary and reflection after each tutoring session] or write on, you know, go back on what I've learned and to focus on certain things in the classroom. 'Cause um...specially after the first interview, it was much easier to acknowledge the cultural responsive things that were going on in the classroom, where otherwise it's...you don't really...it's not something that comes to mind in shape of what you think of while you're working with the kids. You're working on...we need to get this done, like a checklist. It's not about the whole culture, and the... we're working on the surface, and we're not looking at the underneath, the different levels that were affecting these kids.

Katherine claimed the interview questions heightened her awareness of culturally responsive teaching because otherwise she thought she and her group members would just complete the necessary steps to fulfill the class requirements. In addition, the questions facilitated a more in-depth connection to the elementary students' instruction and increased Katherine's self-awareness as she learned about others and herself from the community center.

Kelly also believed the interaction with me and the questions I asked during the interviews influenced her understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Kelly: Oh definitely, just by sitting down um and asking questions. Like I know, Ms. [Maya] probably wouldn't have done that, sit down and talk about being culturally...like she mentioned cultural responsive teaching, but she didn't go into a lot of depth about it. It was kind of like, this is what it is. But sitting down with you, like I really enjoyed the experience because I can sit down, I can analyze what I do and reflect back upon it. And you know I feel like I'm more attuned to what the kids are doing, not just in their writing, but also in helping you know being more culturally involved and um you know the activities that they do and so forth.

Similar to Kelly, Rebecca thought culturally responsive pedagogy would not have been discussed or would have lacked depth if I had not conducted the interviews and observed them.

Rebecca: I don't think that we would have talked about cultural diversity at all. I don't think, I don't...I mean we do in ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages], but I haven't...I'd never talked it about in any of my reading classes.

And as far as multicultural literature last week, we went over it for fifteen minutes and then said we don't have time for this. So it's like you'll do it in ESOL. And it's like oh ESOL, you know how much of a mess sometimes ESOL is, so...

From my notes: The preservice teachers do not think Maya provided any information or at least an in-depth discussion about diversity. I agree Maya did not teach about culturally responsive teaching, but I do believe she provided some essential information on diversity. First, Maya spent almost an entire class session on cultural diversity, but it was in the beginning of the semester at the University before the tutoring experience. In particular, that class focused on ESOL strategies for their lesson plans and instruction. I believe they failed to remember because it was so early in the semester. Cultural diversity also was mentioned throughout the semester but not necessarily emphasized as Kelly and Rebecca state.

Second, Rebecca mentioned ESOL courses, but ESOL does not equal culturally responsive pedagogy because culture includes more than English Language Learners. Preservice teachers seem to automatically connect culture with language learners. Culture is more complex and includes race, socioeconomic status, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc... I really do not know much about how the ESOL classes work here at the University because it is in a different department. ESOL courses should not be the only source of culturally responsive pedagogy. I know all of the literacy courses have ESOL and diversity components included into the curriculum, but maybe because the focus is literacy, the preservice teachers overlook content about culture. Of course, it is quite possible minimal time is spent on the ESOL or diversity element. However, maybe as teacher educators we neglect to provide ample time dedicated to culturally

responsive pedagogy. Therefore, the courses in the College of Education fail to afford preservice teachers with sufficient understandings about culturally responsive teaching. If I reflect on my instruction of preservice teachers, I, who feel zealously about this topic, do not allocate a copious amount of time on culturally responsiveness. I too have not adequately incorporated culturally responsive pedagogy into my courses and need to reevaluate my content and implementation of lessons.

Lisa, the last member of Group A, suggested a distinct perspective about my influence on her and the group dynamics.

Lisa: Yeah, it kind of made us self-conscious or well not self-conscious but self-aware, so we would know what we were doing and kind of step up our game a little bit. I think, definitely.

Susan: Did it make you feel anything else besides self-conscious?

Lisa: No. I guess kind of part of something... 'cause like it's important about how we treat the kids and stuff.

From my notes: Lisa said self-conscious but changed it to self-aware. Did she really mean self-conscious? Maybe a little self-conscious and self-aware, but I think because they knew I would ask questions about culturally responsive teaching they were more likely to be self-aware and think about how and who they teach. How peculiar Lisa thought they "stepped up their game," because as an experienced teacher and intern supervisor, I thought they were beginning teachers who had no classroom management skills and had limited knowledge about maintaining engagement in lessons. Lisa's perspective was different than the other preservice teachers in her group. Although she mentioned self-awareness, Lisa thought their performance was influenced by my physical

presence. She also identified a bigger picture than the other preservice teachers because Lisa talked about “being part of something” and noted the students should be treated equally...I think she demonstrated insightful meaning as she connected the research to an expansive view of what it means for education and cultural responsiveness.

When Group A discussed the interviews during the focus group, they again revealed how I contributed to their understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy.

Kelly: Definitely it was you.

Rebecca: No I think that...Yeah, cause that would have been a different class. Because I really don't think that we would have focused at all on cultural responsive teaching.

Kelly: Like she talked about it, but she didn't explicitly say it. And just having these interviews with you...like you came out and ask questions and make us reflect back on it and analyze what we're doing. And the next time we go in, ok, I remember Susan talking about this, and now I can actually implement it while I'm teaching these kids.

Rebecca: I think that if you took somebody who hadn't done any of these interviews and asked them about cultural responsive teaching, their answers would be *extremely* different because...if they hadn't been focusing on it, as much as we have been...because I mean...I'm not sure because I didn't talk to anybody else that wasn't in one of these interviews, but I think their answers for their, you know, nine questions [critical task questions asked by the instructor] were probably not as focused...because they hadn't had the time to reflect...or

group discussion to reflect. I think it would have been much more vague. If you were just answering those questions...

Katherine: Like text book answers.

Rebecca: Yeah. Than sitting around here and having people come up with really great ideas about cultural responsive teaching and how they're going to implement it.

Katherine: And really look at yourself.

Rebecca: Yeah. That's true.

Katherine: Wow! The questions you asked...the...cause generally I would think of it more after, obviously, after the interview. And I remember just working with kids, and like wow, I didn't realize I was doing that. Or I should do that more. You know what I mean. So definitely, um you were a big part of affecting [change]. But I think anytime anyone is asked to analyze themselves, there's always going to be...um you just automatically start acknowledging things afterwards of things that you do and things that you don't do. Um, that's just natural, and the fact that you keep...you've continued...it wasn't just one group interview, then a second group interview. It was the individuals, and it was consistent throughout the whole time that really... made me continue to think of it. It wasn't like it went away. You know.

Lisa: Also, like it puts a little thought in the back of your head. So like well, I was like in my ESOL class and my other classes, the teacher would mention something, and it would trigger a little memory. Oh yeah that could be used like

you know...for cultural responsive teaching. So it kind of puts it in your head, so that way you have more time to think about it.

From my notes: The preservice teachers valued the time to reflect back on the questions I asked, and they actually discussed culturally responsive pedagogy with their group when I was not present. Lisa even connected what she learned in ESOL to this course. I disagree with Rebecca about other preservice teachers in the class who she thought might answer the critical task questions differently. It is quite possible the answers the other preservice teacher in the course might derive from their diverse background experiences and culture. For example, the other preservice teachers might have worked with students from different backgrounds. Or, maybe the preservice teachers in other groups might not have developed a greater understanding about culturally responsive teaching. I cannot answer if there was any change in other preservice teachers because they did not participate in my research.

After listening to the preservice teachers' (in my study) comments, I think they learned how to self-reflect more, increase their self-awareness, through the questions and the consistency of time to analyze and discuss culturally responsive teaching with their peers. They said I was the influence but it was not me because I never taught anything about culturally responsive pedagogy. I facilitated through the conversations and interviews.

Group B. The preservice teachers in Group B thought the questions I asked in the interview facilitated them to think and self-reflect about culturally responsive teaching and believed the course instructor did not focus on culturally responsive pedagogy.

Amy: Um... I mean...I think because like I said our writing teacher she didn't really focus too much on culture, but since I knew you like...you were asking about it in the interviews over and over, it made me think more about it when working with the kids then anything um writing did. You know what I mean, it made me think more about it because of your interviews then versus what I was being taught in class.

Amy also said, "And like some days we did the interview before working with the kids, and then I feel it was in my mind, oh we just talked about this, and now I'm going to like focus on it more."

Julie also mentioned the questions resulted in her reflection and connections to culturally responsive teaching.

Julie: Um...I think it made me more reflective about the class. It made me like... in class when we were like doing stuff, I would think about it or like...me and [Amy] probably would have never like picked up on the cellar thing if like you hadn't asked us about culturally responsive teaching so much. So...possibly for that. And it just made me like think of ways that I feel like the class could improve and what I like and dislike about it more, probably.

Julie referred to the 'cellar thing' that she and Amy had discussed. Cellar was one of the words on the spelling inventory they conducted with the elementary students.

Amy and Julie both grew up in a state where houses did not have basements or cellars and they thought as a child maybe they would not have known what a cellar was. Due to my conversations and questions, they became more aware and reflected about

background knowledge or schema and then connected to their students. They began to understand how vocabulary might be influenced by different cultural backgrounds.

Christy shared how I impacted her to contemplate more profoundly about culturally responsive teaching.

Christy: I think that you definitely forced me to like think about things (both laugh) a lot deeper than I probably would have, which is a good thing. Because it...I literally would have come here, work with them, and then probably not like have thought in much depth about it ever again, but like having the interviews and having you ask me like you know what is culturally responsive teaching to you? And just all the questions really like made me think, oh well what is it to me? Like what do I think it is? And how can I implement it, like in my teaching. So, I think it's definitely like a benefit to have like interviewed because I think that it's... you know... led me to think a lot more about it than just having been in the classroom.

In addition, Sam the final member of Group B noted her peers conferred about culturally responsive teaching after the interviews and suggested the questions supported incorporation of culturally responsiveness into their lessons.

Sam: Well...from you asking these questions that really did because after we would, like in our group, we'd talk about what we said in the interview, and then we're like yeah that was a good point. So, honestly the questions that you come up with, and then hey, let's keep in mind that we have to you know try to do this when we're doing the lessons and culturally responsive like... 'Cause it's not really our teacher, I forget her name...

From my notes. If preservice teachers do not know their instructor's name, what does this say about their learning the content? Will they learn their students' names and get to know them?

Sam continued to discuss how consistent reflection and thinking about culturally responsive teaching led to greater understandings.

Sam: Yes. She... You reiterated it like repeated... like talking about cultural responsive teaching and stuff, so whenever we talk to you. And then we go in the classroom and it's like let's work on this.

Susan: So it's kind of a combination. You know... She might have said something. I might have reiterated it, and then the dialogue and the self-reflection.

Sam: The self-reflection really helps.

Susan: And really the conversations, and then maybe even the self... the group dynamics, talking within the group.

Sam: Uh hmm.

From my notes: How interesting that I influenced them and I did nothing more than ask questions. I did not teach or provide any information to the preservice teachers about culturally responsive teaching.

In both Groups A and B, preservice teachers noted my influence on their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. They noted the questions I asked offered them opportunities to reflect and discuss their understandings in collaborative groups.

Writing methods course content. *From my notes: I cannot label course content as a theme, but I did inquire about how course content influenced the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching. As I listened and analyzed their answers, I realized they repeated what they said about the course instructor's influence: best practices. Therefore, to write about course content seems repetitive. I also thought the answers were insignificant because they were stretching to see how the content might have influenced their understandings. However, I do find a few answers that I believe to demonstrate new understandings certain preservice teachers developed.*

Most of the preservice teachers offered vagueness about how course content influenced their understanding about culturally responsive teaching (see Table 3). When asked directly in the focus groups whether course content influenced their understandings, two preservice teachers stated yes; two declared no; and the other four said not really, broadly, somewhat, or a little. They then proceeded to discuss content and how it relates to culturally responsive teaching without acknowledgement of the connection they made. The preservice teachers' did not demonstrate that they understood how to define course content such as Maya's, the instructor's, responsibility and input for the course content or activities provided, such as best practices.

Table 3. Course Content Influences on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

	Preservice Teacher (PST)	Did Course Content influence PST about CRT?	Influences
<i>Group A</i>	Amy	Yes	Draw and write
	Christy	Little	Garfield Survey
	Julie	Yes	Vocabulary
	Sam	Not Really	
<i>Group B</i>	Rebecca	No	Best Practices

Lisa Kelly	No Broadly	Field Experience Best Practices Accommodate
Katherine	Somewhat	Vocabulary, Adjust to connect to 6+1 traits

Best practices and field experiences overlapped with the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching that they thought Maya influenced. However, one influence of course content significantly illustrated preservice teachers' changes in their understandings, which was vocabulary. Vocabulary is an important aspect of writing content, and Julie and Amy realized a student's vocabulary is influenced by culture and geographical location. The example Julie and Amy utilized in their interviews was the word 'cellar.' 'Cellar' was one of the words in the *Spelling Inventory* from *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008). Amy and Julie grew up in a southern state where houses do not have basements or cellars. Julie said:

And me and Amy were talking about how we always lived in[this state], so really when we were in 5th grade, we probably never would have know[n] how to spell that word. So, it made me like think about like the words that they were using and how that might be more relative to their culture, and in this case it was more relative to where they live.

Julie and Amy both commented on this vocabulary word and demonstrated how course content influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

In Julie's final interview, she identified the practice of ESOL modifications and vocabulary as the aspect of writing content that influenced her understandings about

culturally responsive teaching. She continued to say, “but other than that,” she did not think the course content influenced her understandings.

Preservice teachers in both groups stated the writing methods course content did not identify course content as an influence in their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. The most noteworthy influence for two of the preservice teachers was vocabulary. However, preservice teachers commented on best practices and field experiences, which were themes from the study.

Changes in understandings about culturally responsive teaching. In the final interviews, preservice teachers provided their definition of culturally responsive pedagogy. Their initial understandings of culturally responsive teaching included an awareness of their students’ cultures and integrating their culture into the curriculum. Some of the preservice teachers suggested their definitions did not change.

Group A. Katherine’s definition of culturally responsive teaching no longer just included cultural awareness and integration. She said:

I think culturally responsive teaching is about a teacher’s ability to connect on a deeper level with each student and to have a better understanding of the student is as a person, um...not strictly based on personality, and whether they’re good at one subject or another subject. But, what makes them who they are based on their home life, Ahhh, based on their home life and the experiences they face.

Katherine increased her understanding and thought culturally responsive teaching incorporated the development of relationships, such as making personal connections with the students.

Rebecca noted her small change in her definition and understanding of culturally responsive teaching. She stated:

I think it's my idea of it has changed a little bit because before I thought it was like...and it still is that you do need to connect with your students in your classroom too, but I feel like more now that even if the students aren't of a different culture, it's still important to be culturally responsive because it effects how they view other people in the future and in different...I think in like different ways. I don't know if that makes sense. But, I think if you're concentrating on being culturally responsive, even if there aren't a lot of differences within the students I think that's going to be helpful to them at some point.

Rebecca also incorporated more than just cultural awareness and integration, and as Katherine suggested, making connections with the students.

Kelly thought her definition lost vigor, and she shared:

I mean like my definition is still going to be the same, just being available to recognize different cultures in the classroom and accommodate, you know for whatever it is. But, I definitely agree more so with [Rebecca] that... even if a person doesn't show a different culture by their skin or by their attitude, you know maybe they're... you know... they have something that's different you need to accommodate for and recognize in the classroom. Like, each student brings something unique. So you just need to be able to work with that and recognize what they have.

Like Kelly, Lisa believed her definitions remained stagnant. She said, "Nothing has really changed from my other, the way I thought before. Just be aware of the type of

cultures that are in your classroom and accommodate those the way you see fit.” Lisa and Kelly still offered cultural awareness and integration of the students’ culture as the definition of culturally responsive teaching.

Group B. Amy and Julie developed an increased understanding. They realized how language and vocabulary impacts students. When Julie and Amy conducted the spelling inventory, they reflected on their understandings of vocabulary when they were young. Due to their home state in the south, Julie and Amy realized ‘cellar’ would not have been in their schema. This observation provided Julie and Amy with a new understanding about how language plays a significant role for success in school.

Julie also demonstrated an increase in her understandings as she offered more than cultural awareness and integration. She said:

I think that’s why a teacher has to have like the right attitude and like be open and accepting to everyone. And then like, when they teach content, they have to like make accommodations for like all the students, like keep everyone in mind, and then like try to connect it to their like backgrounds. Like bring their backgrounds into the classroom as well, and then just try to like teach with like everyone in mind. And if like, students are like ESOL, they’re not that good at English, make sure like that you have accommodations, you do a whole bunch of activities that involve like movement and singing and just like try to do that.

Julie exclaimed culturally responsive teachers should show openness and acceptance while making connections to the elementary students. She augmented her original definition with accommodations as an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching, and Julie continued to believe cultural differences should be integrated into curriculum.

Christy supposed her definition of culturally responsive teaching had not altered.

She stated:

I don't really think my definition has changed, but let's even see if I can remember what I said before. I think its just like...going like as a teacher, like being in the classroom, and being like understanding and open and knowledgeable about all the different kids that are like in your classroom, and the fact that whatever happens to them at home like outside of school comes with them into the classroom. And you have to be like open and like teach to every kid, like no matter you know what their background is, or where they came from. And like just make sure everybody's learning, to like the best of their ability, like regardless of like you know outside things that they're dealing with too.

Sam shared how her understandings about culturally responsive teaching stretched beyond cultural awareness and integration. She noted:

Because like focusing on where everyone comes from, and like really considering like everyone's background, and what their situation is, and you always have to cater to like...if something goes wrong in the classroom with a certain student, you got to like be able to focus and figure out...like this is a stand out, but it's not normally like this. You have to be able to determine how to handle each kid, and I think over time in the classroom, like you can really learn about each kid, and then you'll be able do that as time goes on. But by doing activities and things like that to learn about your students, that's going to benefit you the most in your class.

Sam demonstrated a slight change in her understandings about culturally responsive teaching. She exemplified the importance of knowing her students in order to be culturally responsive.

From my notes: At different times, I had mixed reactions to the preservice teachers' comments. I have to admit I felt some anger when I thought they were being insensitive or offensive. I also felt excitement when I noticed the preservice teachers becoming more culturally responsive. I also just thought they were sharing surface level answers or what they thought they were supposed to say. After analyzing, I saw a deeper level of what they were really learning, even though they were small changes.

From the within-case analysis and after multiple readings of the data and conflating codes, five themes emerged from the data: cultural awareness and integration, student-teacher interaction, field experience, best practices, and questions I asked in the interviews. Preservice teachers claimed course content did not prove to provide influences on the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Preservice teachers illustrated some change in their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

Cross-Case Analysis

After I analyzed the preservice teachers as individual cases, I wanted to investigate more than one case in a context in order to gain deeper understanding of relevancy to other cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I employed a cross-case analysis. From this analysis, four interconnections occurred with all the preservice teachers (See Appendix F): initial understandings of cultural awareness and cultural

integration, questions I asked as a major influence, final understandings of student-teacher interaction, and final understandings of best practices for writing instruction.

Preservice teachers in both groups considered cultural awareness and integration of the students' culture as the main definition of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is "an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17). Although culturally responsive teaching includes integration of the students' culture into the curriculum, it also incorporates concepts such as high expectations of students, communities of learners, and scaffolding learning.

This initial understanding of the preservice teachers suggested teachers should know the elementary students' culture and integrate it into the academic content areas. For example, Kelly said, "Culturally responsive teaching uses the experiences and knowledge of diverse students in the classroom by integrating it into learning exercises, and Julie said, "Culturally responsive teaching to me is teaching that incorporates all cultures and doesn't leave out anyone." Every preservice teacher demonstrated similar understandings of cultural awareness and integration at the beginning of the semester.

Preservice teachers in both groups also recognized the questions I asked during the interviews as a major influence in their understandings about culturally responsive teaching because of the questions I posed that lead to further self-reflection. They suggested I asked questions to facilitate self-reflection on their instruction and conversations they initiated with each other. For instance, Rebecca noted, "I don't think that we would have talked about cultural diversity at all." Lisa thought the questions

facilitated her reflection; she commented, “So it kind of puts it in your head, so that way you have more time to think about it.” Amy also stated self-reflection evolved from the interviews; “Since I knew you like...you were asking about it in the interviews over and over, it made me think more about it when working with the kids then anything um writing did.” Preservice teachers believed the questions I asked offered an opportunity for them to reflect on their instruction and how to better meet the needs of their students.

Preservice teachers in each group discussed the importance of getting to know students and building relationships, a subcategory of the theme student-teacher interaction. Morton and Bennett (2010) found preservice teachers in field experience discovered social and emotional connections played a significant role in culturally responsive teaching (See Appendix A). In this study, preservice teachers also experienced this finding. For example, Christy said, “I just think that like getting to know them, more about them,” and as Rebecca shared, “The teacher just has to make a connection to each one of those students.” Additionally, Amy thought, “A teacher needs to be understanding and friendly.” Sam believed, “the kids got really excited because you wanted to learn about them.” All preservice teachers revealed how relationships are an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching.

The preservice teachers in Group A experienced greater understandings than Group B about culturally responsive teaching through the one-on-one student-teacher interaction. Group A interspersed among the elementary students whereas Group B huddled together, sometimes physically over the students. Group A engaged in more dialogue with the students as they sat next to them on their level. Even though all

preservice teachers valued the importance of student-teacher interaction in culturally responsive pedagogy, Group A made an effort to build relationships with the students.

Each preservice teacher developed an understanding about best practices for writing instruction and suggested writing should supply students with meaningful experience for the students, in particular the subtheme motivation and interest. For instance, Kelly said, “After listening to the students’ voices and their overall opinions about working with the tutors I have found that I need to make the writing process as enjoyable as possible.” Amy agreed with Kelly and stated, “One thing that we have learned is to give writing assignments that appeal to the students.” Julie declared, “So like if the teachers just like did fun stuff, like they would enjoy it a lot more, and they’d probably learn a lot more since they would actually participate and try harder.”

Preservice teachers discovered writing experiences should motivate and interest students.

The cross-case analysis made evident preservice teachers in this embedded case study displayed some interrelated understandings. Group A and Group B had similarities and differences with the changes in their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Each preservice teacher’s original understandings focused on cultural awareness and integration. Additionally, all preservice teachers proposed I influenced their understandings because I facilitated self-reflection and continued conversation about culturally responsive teaching. The preservice teachers extended their understandings to include student-teacher interaction through getting to know the students and the use of best practices for teaching writing in the role of learning. However, preservice teachers in Group A experienced cognitive dissonance as they took the initiative to intersperse among the elementary students and experience one-on-one student-teacher interaction.

This interaction facilitated Group A developing greater understandings than Group B about culturally responsive teaching.

Summary

All eight preservice teachers expanded their understandings of culturally responsive teaching. From the within-case analysis, five themes became apparent: cultural awareness and integration; student-teacher interaction; field experience; best practices; and questions and conversations. The preservice teachers claimed course content did not influence their understandings, yet they cited specific activities as extending culturally responsive pedagogy. After cross-case analysis, three interconnections materialized in the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching: cultural awareness and integration of students' culture; questions asked by the researcher; best practices for writing instruction; and student-teacher interaction.

Chapter Five: Discussion

“...I think the real life experience is what really teaches you more about [being] culturally responsive.” Rebecca, Preservice Teacher

“I think culturally responsive teaching is about a teacher’s ability to connect on a deeper level with each student and to have a better understanding of the student as a person...”

Katherine, Preservice Teacher

In the previous chapter, I presented significant discoveries from my study. I introduced and provided detailed examples of the following themes: 1) cultural awareness and integration, 2) student-teacher interaction, 3) influences of field experience, 4) questions and conversations, and 5) best practices for teaching writing. In this chapter, I explain the purpose of my research, review my methodology, and present a summary of my research. I then proceed with my interpretations of the data through a discussion of how previous literature informs my inquiry and how my research illuminates meaning about the preservice teachers’ novice understandings, and effective and ineffective facets in the process of attempts to advance preservice teachers’ understandings and behaviors toward the goal of culturally responsive teaching. Although I cannot generalize to all populations, I found significant discoveries that suggest implications and practical applications for teacher education as it pertains to culturally responsive pedagogy and writing instruction. I complete the discussion with

my reflections as a teacher educator, and offer recommendations and suggestions for teacher education and future research initiatives.

While the minority population increases in schools in the United States, without culturally responsive instruction, schools will continue to contribute to the marginalization of minority and lower socioeconomic populations (Kozol, 2005; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee 2003; Rosenberg, 2003). The teaching population is still predominately middle-class, English-speaking, and Caucasian and remains ill-equipped to meet the needs of their students (Castro, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001; Richards & Bennett, *In Progress*; Sleeter, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Many teachers lack experiences with students from ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds different than their own, yet they will instruct these students (Lazar, 2007; Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006; Ukpokodu, 2003). Therefore, teachers often fail to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, are not prepared to teach in lower socioeconomic areas, and fail to sustain their students' cultural heritage (Banks, 2001; Delpit, 2003; Irvine, 2003; Richards, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). These teachers often have low expectations for academic abilities, hold misconceptions, and have unconscious preconceptions about their students (Castro, 2010; Lazar, 2007; Song, 2006). As a teacher educator and researcher, I wanted to explore how to best prepare preservice teachers to meet the needs of diverse students. Therefore, I examined preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching as they tutored elementary students in writing at a local community center.

The following questions guided my inquiry:

- 1) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold prior to the semester field experience teaching diverse populations?
- 2) What understandings about culturally responsive teaching do preservice teachers matriculating in a required writing methods course hold after completion of a semester of teaching diverse populations in the field?
- 3) In what ways do eight preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum?
- 4) In what ways might course content influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?
- 5) In what ways might the instructor influence eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching?

Summary of My Methodology

I examined preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching as they tutored elementary students in writing at a local community center during the spring semester, 2009. In order to answer my research questions and gain insight into the preservice teachers' understandings, I utilized a qualitative design. I could not observe all aspects of the entire case and could not achieve in-depth insight into the whole case because of its vastness. I wanted to investigate the smaller part of the entire case, thus I chose an embedded case study (Stake, 2005). For this reason, I focused on two groups of four preservice teachers. I conducted three individual and two focus group interviews. Additional data included various course documents such as autobiographies, preservice teachers' reflections, written field notes, and my reflexive

journal, which I maintained throughout the research to triangulate data and explore deeper interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2004; Janesick, 1999). I utilized constant comparison methods of analysis to locate themes within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I then examined the data more extensively and employed a within-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then decided to investigate the relevancy of a single case (individual preservice teachers) to the other cases (eight preservice teachers) and utilized cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I wanted to contribute to improve teacher education and inform my instruction of preservice teachers.

Summary of My Research

I investigated eight preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy as they collaborated in groups to tutor elementary students at a community center. After multiple readings of the data, carefully analyzing the data through coding and categorizing themes, the following five themes emerged: 1) cultural awareness and integration, 2) student-teacher interaction, 3) influence of the field experience, 4) questions and conversations, and 5) best practices for teaching writing.

The eight preservice teachers' initial responses in the individual interviews demonstrated a modest understanding of culturally responsive teaching. They stated culturally responsive teachers integrate the culture of students into the academic curriculum and offered no elaboration of the definition. They gave examples they thought illustrated culturally responsive teaching: "using books printed in both Spanish and English," "using the students' experiences and heritage, such as studying Black and Latino scientists or inventors," or "read[ing] a multi-cultural book." I found these

definitions of culturally responsive teaching simplistic and wondered if they were repetitions of information learned in a class.

The preservice teachers said the elementary students had different cultures, which meant the preservice teachers had a cultural awareness of differences among the students. They shared how their students each had diverse background experiences. However, many times the preservice teachers failed to recognize differences among themselves and the students. They often omitted their “Whiteness” or otherness (Lea & Sims, 2008) from their discussion of culturally responsive teaching. The preservice teachers initially supplied incomplete definitions and understandings of the complex theory of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The eight preservice teachers gradually increased their understandings about culturally responsive teaching, but it remained superficial in the data I presented in Chapter Four.

An example of this superficiality is when preservice teachers proposed student-teacher interaction in which they built relationships and got to know the students as an important element of culturally responsive teaching. Even though this relationship was reported as valuable, preservice teachers revealed some assumptions and misconceptions about the elementary students they tutored at the community center. Preservice teachers mentioned their surprise that students at-risk were well-behaved or enjoyed learning. However, they never acknowledged the elementary students were at-risk after they met them, and at least one preservice teacher thought one fifth grade girl came from a privileged family. It is quite possible the preservice teachers did not believe these students were at-risk because the elementary students enjoyed learning, listened to the preservice teachers, and stayed on task. Therefore, they continued to make assumptions

and have misconceptions about the elementary students. Preservice teachers altered some assumptions they previously held. They assumed people, such as in the college of education, who looked like them (also Caucasian) held similar ideas.

The preservice teachers developed an understanding of the role “best practices” (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998) plays on culturally responsive teaching and writing instruction. They professed students’ motivation and interest or meaningful writing experiences impacts students’ success in writing. In addition, preservice teachers identified that meaningful writing experiences and writing for a variety of purposes, characterized as best practices (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998), were important aspects of culturally responsive teaching because they kept the students engaged and interested.

I interviewed the preservice teachers individually three times and in a focus group twice throughout the semester. Preservice teachers indicated the questions I asked influenced their understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy the most (See Appendices B & C for examples of the questions). The preservice teachers noted the questions I raised provided an opportunity for them to reflect on how they might have demonstrated culturally responsive teaching in their writing instruction. On the other hand, some of the preservice teachers thought the course instructor and content did not influence their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

The preservice teachers compartmentalized different aspects of the course limiting transference of pedagogy to their tutoring situations. For example, they did not apply the course instructor’s lectures and discussions about the 6 + 1 traits (Culhan, 2003; 2005) in tutoring lessons. The preservice teachers discussed how the field experience

influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching. They also mentioned how the elementary students' interest in the writing experiences changed their writing philosophy. They did not directly state that the field experience provided opportunities for them to learn to teach writing. Consequently, the preservice teachers neglected the interrelated concepts and experiences of writing instruction and culturally responsive teaching within this course.

Discussion and Implications

In this section, I begin with the preservice teachers' novice understandings and how these understandings produce a deficient model of culturally responsive teaching. I then proceed to discuss the effective and ineffective facets that contributed to the increased understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy of the preservice teachers. I inform my inquiry with previous literature and guide my query with the theoretical frameworks of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and sociocultural and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995).

Novice understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995) contends one principle to become a culturally responsive teacher is conception of self and others in which she suggests culturally responsive teachers believe all students are capable of academic success. In addition, Ladson-Billings asserts culturally responsive teachers identify the role they play as a member of the community and facilitate connections to students' cultural identities whether they are local community, global, or national. To align with this principle, a teacher must recognize how culture impacts students' learning.

The preservice teachers displayed novice understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy prior to a semester of tutoring diverse populations of elementary students at the community center, yet they demonstrated some aspects of this tenet, conceptions of self and others (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995). In the beginning of the semester, preservice teachers replied to critical task questions posed by the instructor, Maya, that asked about their definition of culturally responsive teaching (See Appendix D). I then followed with interviews of these preservice teachers and queried about their understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy (See Appendix B). Based on these questions, I attempted to answer my research question that addressed the preservice teachers' understandings prior to tutoring diverse populations at the community center.

The preservice teachers initially described culturally responsive teaching in a superficial way and stated teachers should be aware of their students' culture and integrate it into the academic curriculum. For example, Kelly said, "Culturally responsive teaching uses the experiences and knowledge of diverse students in the classroom by integrating it into learning exercises."

Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994), Villegas and Lucas (2002), and Banks (2001) contend this awareness and integration of the students' cultures are significant aspects of culturally responsive teaching, yet they also incorporate other important features of this complex theory such as building a community of learners and maintaining high expectations of students. Additionally, the preservice teachers also presented the notion that all students should be treated equally. Although they asserted these values, preservice teachers' good intentions and cultural awareness are not sufficient to demonstrate cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2000). The preservice teachers did not exhibit

a thorough understanding of the students, which is needed in order for them to design and implement instruction (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Prior to the semester, Maya and Naomi described the elementary students and explained how they are at-risk. The preservice teachers' conceptions of the students revealed that they held inadequate definitions of students at-risk, which further characterizes their novice understandings. An example of lack of understanding of what it means to be at risk was demonstrated when preservice teachers revealed astonishment of their assumptions about the elementary students at the community center. They thought the elementary students would display disruptive behavior, disinterest in learning, and come from disadvantaged homes. Once they met the students, the preservice teachers expressed their surprise that behavior was not a problem and the students were actually interested in the learning activities.

The preservice teachers experienced cognitive dissonance because the elementary students differed from their prior assumptions and expectations (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). For example, Kelly stated, "When I heard that these children were 'at-risk,' I assumed that they would have tons of negative attitudes about teachers and that they would be hard-core anti-learning." Lisa commented, "The children that I met seem to be very sweet kids." However, even though the preservice teachers experienced this dissonance, they never explicitly stated that they considered these elementary students at-risk. For instance, Julie said:

At first, she [Maya] made it sound like they were all like underprivileged children, but then one of the girls like... isn't at all. Her mom drives a nice car; she has a nice house; she has like a great family.

The preservice teachers must have concluded such information from statements made by the students as they never met the family or saw the house or car, but they still assumed the girl was not at-risk.

Through intercultural connections, preservice teachers developed and learned about their students (Dewey, 1963; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). The preservice teachers noticed the elementary students failed to meet their expectations of students at-risk. It was not the dissonance needed to understand the ramifications of social issues or assumptions and expectations that impact students from different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Castro, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Delpit, 2003). Therefore, these preservice teachers formed deficient understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

As the semester progressed some preservice teachers increased awareness of assumptions and biases of their own cultural identity (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lucas & Villegas, 2002; Mitchell, 2009; Santamaria, 2009) and experienced more cognitive dissonance, conflict with preservice teachers' previous beliefs (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). The preservice teachers began to recognize how people who look like them do not necessarily have the same beliefs and values. In the last focus group interview, the preservice teachers shared their realization of how their perceptions changed. For example, in an interview Katherine stated, "But I think of wow, they're [peers at the university] in education, so they must have the same kind of morals that I do," and then, "there are so many other things that you have to look into um with each individual person to see them as a person." Similar to Katherine, Kelly noted during an interview, "I can relate to everyone in my group because I kind of fit their profile in one

way. Like you know, we're all female. We're all white. We're all Caucasian." Kelly also said, "And just because they look the same as me, they could be Jewish, and I would never know it." These preservice teachers developed some sociocultural consciousness through the shared social interactions with their peers (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995).

Sociocultural consciousness increased in the preservice teachers to some degree because they recognized how they made assumptions about students at-risk and people who looked like them (Lucas & Villegas, 2001). They admitted to their incorrect assumptions, but the preservice teachers still maintained some misconceptions and assumptions about students from diverse populations. They refused to leave original notions that at-risk meant bad behavior and lack of interest in learning. Preservice teachers only made gradual, plausible changes in their understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy.

Effective facets of the field experience. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002) sociocultural consciousness contributes to becoming culturally responsive. It is not only necessary to raise awareness in the preservice teachers but to challenge their unconscious and conscious beliefs and biases (Alquist & Milner, 2008; Berlak, 2008; McGarry, 2008). In this section, I recommend effective aspects of the field experience, which facilitated preservice teachers' development of deeper understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy as they confronted their conscious and unconscious beliefs. The effective facets in the field experience include one-on-one student teacher interaction, scaffolding critical reflection, and best practices. Through the discussion of these facets I attend to my research question, which asks what the preservice teachers' understandings

about culturally responsive teaching after a semester of teaching diverse populations at the community center.

One-on-one student-teacher interaction. The principle, significance of social interaction and engagement, of Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995) culturally responsive teaching theory includes teachers' facilitation of a community of learners where students are encouraged to work collaboratively and teachers and students have connected and built flexible relationships. In close alignment to this idea, situated learning and sociocultural theorists contend the acquisition of knowledge and understanding transpires through shared problem-solving and social interaction within a community of learners (Dewey, 1963; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Rogoff, 1995; Richards, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). These preservice teachers experienced learning through social interactions in small tutoring groups and my focus groups.

Several researchers assert field experiences foster an increase in affirmative beliefs toward students from diverse backgrounds and an improved definition of diversity (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Castro, 2010; Conaway, Browning, & Purdum-Cassidy, 2007; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). However, the research fails to address specific components of field experience that nourish the development of cultural responsiveness (Castro, 2010). In my research, I propose the one-on-one interaction produced a greater impact on the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

In this research, preservice teachers collaborated in groups to tutor the elementary students at the community center. Collaboration within authentic contexts provides opportunities for the preservice teachers to participate in valuable social interactions that promote learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Richards, 2010; Richards, Bennett, & Shea,

2007). Previous research suggests preservice teachers become more aware of their biases and prejudices as they tutor students who differ culturally from them (Barton, 1999; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). Additional studies revealed the field experience of one-on-one tutoring benefited preservice teachers as they adapted their instruction to meet the needs of students cognitively, physically, and affectively (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Morton & Bennett, 2010). As I observed the preservice teachers, I noticed Group A enacted more one-on-one tutoring experiences than Group B. Group A interspersed among the elementary students and always physically positioned themselves at the same level as the elementary students. Whereas, Group B stood and huddled with each other rather than placing themselves near the students.

Group A demonstrated greater understandings about culturally responsive teaching than Group B in the answers to the questions I asked and in field observations I made. As I discussed in their novice understandings, Group A reflected more about their cultural identities (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). For example, the preservice teachers in Group A noticed their Caucasian peers did not necessarily experience the same culture as they did, even though they were also Caucasian. Kelly discussed an experience she had in one of her classes with a peer who was also Caucasian: "I knew her the like the entire semester, and at the end she told us she was Wicca[n]. I had no clue about any of that." Katherine applied her realization about physical appearances to the classroom and declared she cannot assume "just because I'm Caucasian that if I have, you know, fifty percent of my class are Caucasian that they are all going to be just like me."

These preservice teachers in Group A began to develop awareness that the students were different from them (Barton, 1999; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Sleeter, 2001).

Katherine stated:

Some of them [students at the community center] haven't had the best experiences at home, and some of them have had wonderful experiences as well, but still different from my own. So, I've learned um...t...t...to understand and to acknowledge their differences and understand they're not always going to have to understand my perspective, and I'm not always going to understand theirs. But I need to work hard on trying to understand their perspective.

This increased awareness facilitated deeper understandings about culturally responsive teaching. Rebecca in an interview provided a profound grasp of cultural responsiveness and shared, "You just have to be really careful about what you say and really careful about what you think. You just can't ever assume." In my reflexive notes, I wrote:

I think Rebecca hit an important idea, "careful about what you think." She not only thought of what you say, but what you think. I perceive this point as conscious self-awareness of your thoughts, a metacognition about cultural awareness. Is this the missing link to becoming a culturally responsive teacher? It is not just self-awareness but recognizing your thoughts. It is being able to have an awareness of assumptions and biases you might have.

Group A appeared to have more genuine conversations with the elementary students one-on-one (Athanasas & Martin, 2006). They moved closer to the students and divided into preservice teacher/student pairings, whereas Group B preservice teachers stood clustered together while one preservice teacher tutored the group of three to four

fifth grade girls. I wrote in my reflexive journal, “*The teachers in Group A interspersed among the third grade students, made eye contact, and talked with them.*” I wrote the following about Group B:

I noticed Group B would sit or stand on one side of the table during the first sessions of the tutoring at the community center. It almost appeared as if they [fifth grade girls] were in control of the group not the preservice teachers [in Group B], like they were just hanging out with their older buddies. The preservice teachers also would huddle together while one teacher worked with the fifth graders.

Group B observed and hovered over the elementary students more than Group A, who interacted, sat with the students, asked questions about the students’ writing, and became part of the community. Group A emphasized the importance of conversations such as when Katherine in an interview said, “Most students want to talk about themselves and their experiences.” Through these conversations with the elementary students, the preservice teachers developed relationships and learned more about them. O’Connor and McCartney (2007) report when teachers build relationships with their students, students display greater engagement. In an interview with Kelly (Group A), she stated, “So you really have to work hard in getting to know the kid as a person and who they are,” and “when you sit down and you work with them a little bit, you ask them questions and find out about them.” Kelly also shared the significance of the one-on-one interactions:

I think it would better help facilitate with the kids here because each child comes in with a different perspective than what I normally see...so just interacting with

them and working with them one on one it kind...it showed me something different than what my little world.

These preservice teachers in Group A recognized how a teacher needs to make connections with their students. Another example, in an interview Rebecca shared, “the teacher just has to make a connection to each one of those students.”

Group A shared other specific examples of how they learned about the elementary students and made personal connections. One preservice teacher illustrated how one student loved music and played the keyboard. Another preservice teacher discussed a student who liked Kung Pao chicken. Rebecca showed empathy toward a student and his parent who did not have a car and had twelve children. Rebecca stated:

So he had to walk to the doctor’s office last week for a check-up, which is why he missed out on the community center. It puts a lot of what we are doing in perspective when we are able to see what else is going on in their lives.

Rebecca experienced this cognitive dissonance as she could not imagine being without a car, especially with twelve children. This one-on-one tutoring assisted Rebecca’s development of empathy.

Although Group B mentioned similar ideas of ‘getting to know the students’ and identified relationships with the elementary students as significant within culturally responsive pedagogy, they were not able to provide specific examples related to the elementary students. They would share that all of the girls liked peace signs or talked about hippies. They rarely mentioned explicit cases of individual personal connections with the elementary students. For example, Christy stated, “I just kind of picked up” information about the elementary students’ home life as compared to engagement of

conversations to find out more about the elementary students. Group B disclosed information such as “the one girl was shy,” but they never shared anything detailed about her. One particular instance illustrates their judgment of an elementary student. Group B made assumptions based on family structures and socioeconomic status. Julie commented, “At first, she [Maya] made it sound like they were all like underprivileged children, but then one of the girls like... isn’t at all.” Christy commented about divorced families, “So, like you see that’s the type, not that there’s anything wrong with that.” In my reflexive journal notes, I wrote:

Christy emphasized certain words when she answered this question [about her understandings of the students]. Examples in this answer were ‘type,’ ‘different,’ and ‘oh, okay.’ I thought her words were derogatory because of the emphasis on these words. It was as if she demonstrated prejudice toward people from non-traditional families.

Even though preservice teachers in Group B detached themselves from the community of learners, they discussed how teachers need practice and have to consider the situations of the students. Sam stated, “I think you really just have to, as far as cultural responsive teaching goes, I think you just really have to consider what their situations are.” Julie shared:

I just think like just more practice with students and like being more aware of it has helped me like become probably a better teacher at that and just like being around more students of different cultures. Just like it’s easier to be more culturally responsive. So, the more I’m around it, the better, I think.

These preservice teachers in Group B suggest culturally responsive teaching requires as if it were a practical skill, not a complex, multifaceted theory with deeper meanings. In addition, preservice teachers view the students as coming from situations and not as individuals with agency.

Preservice teachers in Group A, through more one-on-one interaction, formed deeper relationships with the elementary students and began to recognize how getting to know the elementary students helped form a community of learners (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995). Preservice teachers in both groups revealed that the elementary students became more comfortable and shared further information about themselves. However, preservice teachers in Group A discovered more specific individual information about the elementary students. Preservice teachers in Group B still did not totally grasp the theoretical framework for culturally responsive pedagogy because they still made assumptions about students and lacked in-depth understanding in their responses during interviews and illustrated limited connections with the elementary students. Group A demonstrated an enhanced understanding because they experienced cognitive dissonance and expressed deeper understandings.

Scaffolding critical reflection. Since Dewey (1933), it has been implied that critical reflection should be applied to teaching practices. Adams, Bondy, and Kuhel (2005) and Sleeter (2001) assert preservice teachers must reflect critically about experiences with students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Scaffolding critical reflection seemed to be another effective facet of the field experience in the development of culturally responsive teachers. During the final interviews, the preservice teachers in both groups claimed the questions I posed during the interviews

significantly impacted their understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, Katherine (Group A) shared:

Wow! The questions you asked...the...cause generally I would think of it more after, obviously, after the interview. And I remember just working with kids, and like wow, I didn't realize I was doing that [culturally responsive teaching]. Or I should do that more.

Christy also stated, "And just all the questions really like made me think." My questions facilitated the preservice teachers to contemplate more deeply about culturally responsive pedagogy.

The preservice teachers also considered my discussion questions helped to improve their self-reflection and self-awareness. For example, Kelly remarked:

But sitting down with you, like I really enjoyed the experience because I can sit down, I can analyze what I do and reflect back upon it. And you know I feel like I'm more attuned to what the kids are doing, not just in their writing, but also in helping you know being more culturally involved and um you know the activities that they do and so forth.

Lisa mentioned, "Yeah, it kind of made us self-conscious or well not self-conscious but self-aware, so we would know what we were doing and kind of step up our game a little bit." The implication of these comments is that without my prodding, the students may not have thought deeply about what they were doing or how their behaviors may or may not be culturally responsive. We would expect this type of experience to occur when teaching young children, for instance as Vygotsky's (1978) ideas of social learning would

explain to us. What students can do with others, they can eventually do on their own. This appears to be what was happening with my questioning.

The preservice teachers reported the questions promoted an extension of the conversation with their group members. For instance, Sam (Group B) said, “from you asking these questions that really did [influence the group] because after we would, like in our group, we’d talk about what we said in the interview, and then we’re like yeah that was a good point.” Additionally, Rebecca (Group A) noted other preservice teachers in the course might not have developed culturally responsive pedagogy because they did not participate in the interviews, and “they [other preservice teachers] hadn’t had the time to reflect...or group discussion to reflect.” The preservice teachers appeared to need explicit scaffolding to facilitate critical reflection about field experience and the cognitive dissonance the preservice teachers’ experienced and to apply it to their understandings about culturally responsive teaching.

The preservice teachers deemed the questions were valuable because the questions created opportunities for them to deliberate implementation of culturally responsive teaching into the writing curriculum. For example, Rebecca (Group A) stated the questions helped her group in “sitting around here and having people come up with really great ideas about cultural responsive teaching and how they’re going to implement it. Kelly (Group A) believed they would reflect back on the questions: “And the next time we go in, ok, I remember Susan talking about this, and now I can actually implement it while I’m teaching these kids.” Sam (Group B) shared, “So, honestly the questions that you come up with, and then hey, let’s keep in mind that we have to you know try to do this when we’re doing the lessons and [be] culturally responsive.” The

questions I asked during the interviews presented opportunities and time for the preservice teachers to critically reflect about the elementary students, themselves, and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy.

The preservice teachers learned through collaborative discussions that originated from the interview questions I raised throughout the semester. Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995) tenet, conception of knowledge, involves knowledge as shared and constructed and teachers scaffold to facilitate students' learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This principle also mirrors sociocultural and situated learning theories as knowledge is socially constructed, shared, and recreated within a community of learners (Dewey, 1963; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978).

Reflective practice plays a significant role in teaching and learning processes as Dewey (1933) emphasized the importance of integration of experiences with problem-solving, reflection, and theory connected with practice (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008). Pithers and Soden (2000) found preservice teachers demonstrated limited initiatives to critically think or reflect because they had not been taught how to think critically. However, critical thinking and reflection are necessary for teaching, in particular for culturally responsive teaching because one must possess an awareness of oneself and move beyond one's own subjectivity to enhance students' learning (Harford & MacRuairic, 2008; Howard, 2003). The development of culturally responsiveness stems from various experiences as it is multi-dimensional and complex. Some scholars encourage critical self-reflection and analysis to further generate sociocultural consciousness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002),

and additional researchers emphasize cognitive dissonance (Lea & Sims, 2008; McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001) as a way to promote increased understandings.

As I analyzed the preservice teachers' developing understandings, I believe this lack of cognitive dissonance and superficial self-reflection early in the semester contributed to their nominal growth. The preservice teachers in Group A slowly progressed because they began to notice some assumptions they made about people who had similar appearances as them. The preservice teachers then experienced cognitive dissonance (Berlak, 2008; Lea & Sims, 2008; McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001) but still failed to recognize other assumptions they possessed about the elementary students. The preservice teachers in Group B continued to make assumptions with minimal change. These assumptions could cause the preservice teachers to focus on students' weaknesses instead of their strengths, and therefore, not practice cultural responsiveness. Both groups mentioned how the interview questions impacted their understandings about culturally responsive teaching, but Group A with the cognitive dissonance that occurred during one-on-one student-teacher interaction and the scaffolding of the critical reflection generated deeper growth.

Mezirow (2000) stressed that dissonance is a vital event for learning and for transformation to occur. According to Mezirow, transformation occurs through critical reflection and dialogue in a safe and comfortable environment. Another vital aspect of the critical reflection, to extend beyond existing competences, became apparent with the peer and social interaction of collaborative efforts (Athanasas & Martin, 2006; Harford & MacRuairic, 2008; Richards, 2006). However, these experiences were not enough to cause dissonance for Group B in which their beliefs and understandings of culture might

be challenged. This group continued to keep themselves removed from the students and viewed them as different, which leads me to conclude preservice teachers need valuable experiences with one-on-one student-teacher interactions to produce this dissonance while receiving explicit scaffolding for critical self-reflection.

Best Practices. In addition to scaffolding critical reflection, an effective facet of the field experience that appeared to further influence the development of culturally responsive teaching was best practices. Best practices for writing might consist of 1) positive environments, 2) organization of writing, 3) meaningful writing experiences to students, 4) writing for a variety of purposes, 5) collaborative writing, and 6) critical reflection (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2007; Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). The preservice teachers described the meaningful writing and writing for a variety of purposes that Maya provided as “activities and ideas.” They considered these best practices as aspects of Maya’s instruction that resonated with the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. I, therefore, address my research question about how the preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum.

Six of the eight preservice teachers acknowledged Maya influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching through the implementation of best practices. In Kelly’s (Group A) interview, she discussed how best practices related to culture. She commented, “I think there’s [are] a lot of activities that she’s given us that are very representational for different cultures.” Katherine (Group A) also in an interview commented on the connection to culture:

She's [Maya] taught me a lot about different activities that you can do that can be correlated to different cultural backgrounds, and there are ways that you can bring different kids or have kids explore their own cultural backgrounds or talk about their cultural background.

Sam (Group B) mentioned best practices as a way to learn more about the students. She said:

I think using the activities that our teacher did give us to do. I thought they were good activities. Like two or three of them. Like the My Face was a really good one. That's when I found out her parents were divorced, and then the dad had a girlfriend and stuff like that.

Julie (Group B) also in her interview thought the best practices provided opportunities to gain information about the elementary students, and she commented, "We learned more about them and like their family, and everyone in the group learned about that too." A crucial aspect of Ladson-Billings's culturally responsive teaching (1994; 1995).

As part of best practices, teachers provide a meaningful approach to writing when he/she utilizes various writing experiences such as genres or multimedia, which are chosen with an understanding of the students in mind (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2007; Whitaker, 2007). Preservice teachers developed a greater understanding of how important motivation and interest are to writing instruction. In addition, they began to recognize writing transcends beyond traditional ways of writing: five paragraph essays, only writing with pencils on paper, lack of creative techniques, and writing prompts. For example, in an interview Amy (Group B) said:

She [Maya] encouraged us to let them draw and then write about what they draw or drew. Or like if they draw it, then they can tell us what it's supposed to be and we can write it for them, which I think will work really well culturally if we have an ESOL student, or anything like that because maybe they aren't able to write, but she [Maya] opened us up to things to do if this student can't write or something like that...

On their wiki, Group B expressed how motivation influences how well students write.

They wrote:

One thing that we [Group B] have learned is to give writing assignments that appeal to the students. Writing doesn't always have to be expository; it can be fun and interesting to the child. We have discovered that the more the students enjoy what they are writing about the better they will write and the more they will want to write.

Lisa (Group A) shared that best practices interests the students. She noted, "I think that would be more fun for students you know than just sitting at the desk by themselves writing."

The preservice teachers began to recognize how meaningful writing experiences, writing for different purposes, and positive environments contribute to more effective writing instruction (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2007; Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). It is important to note writing instruction must allow for student choice, which creates authentic and meaningful experiences to the student (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2007; Tatum, 2008). Preservice teacher paid attention to the elementary students as they wrote, talked with them, and heard how the elementary

students enjoyed writing with the preservice teachers at the community center. The preservice teachers also listened to the podcast of these elementary students, in which Maya interviewed the elementary students about what they liked and disliked about writing. Most of the elementary students shared how they preferred writing with their tutors at the community center because school had limitations and too much structure on their writing. Through these conversations with the elementary students and the podcast, preservice teachers heard how the writing experiences validated and empowered the students via their culture. This expanded preservice teachers' understanding of best practices for writing instruction and culturally responsive teaching (Santamaria, 2009). For example, Katherine shared:

There are ways that you can bring different kids or have kids explore their own cultural backgrounds or talk about their cultural background by using...doing different activities [such as *MyFace* or *Our Space*] and having kids talk to each other and learn about each others' backgrounds and stuff.

With this choice, the preservice teacher displays less authoritarian style and emancipates the elementary student (Santamaria, 2009). For instance, Sam said, "I think what I really noticed was doing activities [best practices], so they [elementary students] didn't feel pressure."

Ineffective facets. In this segment of the discussion, I present what I consider ineffective facets of the field experience that did not contribute to the development of the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy. I categorize these dimensions into lack of explicit instruction and limited student-teacher interaction.

Lack of explicit instruction. Five out of the eight preservice teachers thought the course instructor influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching, while four replied, “No,” or “Not directly.” Amy (Group B) in her last interview stated, “It was mainly about writing, not necessarily writing culturally.” Christy (Group B) also said:

I don’t think that the instructor has at all...but I think that working with the kids that we did work with...the kids we had came from I think definitely came from a lot of different backgrounds and types of households.

Even though the preservice teachers did not think Maya influenced their understandings about culturally responsive teaching, they noticed best practices as discussed earlier and the field experience of tutoring at the community center as an impact on their understandings. Katherine (Group A) in her interview thought, “just working with a very diverse group of kids and their personalities, and their cultural background and their home life,” increased her understandings. Rebecca (Group A) shared a similar connection: “Well, I think that’s [being at the Community center] helped a lot because before this I really didn’t have any consistency with culturally different students.”

Maya was not obligated to teach culturally responsive pedagogy as it was not part of the writing methods course curriculum. However, Maya’s goal of the semester was to “expose new people because we may find really good teachers that can work within this environment.” Maya thought “immersion” into this field experience at the community center was the “best way of learning” how to teach students from diverse populations.

The preservice teachers believed the best practices that Maya provided during the field experience helped them implement culturally responsive teaching into the writing

curriculum. However, four of the preservice teachers commented she did not “directly” or explicitly discuss culturally responsive teaching. For example, Amy said, “I think because like I said our writing teacher she didn’t really focus too much on culture.” Kelly thought Maya “probably wouldn’t have done that [asked questions], sit down and talk about being culturally...like she mentioned cultural responsive teaching, but she didn’t go into a lot of depth about it.” The preservice teachers valued the questions I asked during interviews because it provided opportunities for them to reflect. Although preservice teachers noticed culturally responsive pedagogy within the curriculum, they did not identify how the course instructor facilitated their increased understandings. For this reason, I think some of the preservice teachers might have developed even deeper understandings about culturally responsive teaching if there had been more explicit instruction and connections to the writing methods course content.

Scholars have previously noted the significant impact of field experience on preservice teachers’ understandings about diversity but omitted specific aspects of field experience that produce more affirmative beliefs (Castro, 2010). Sleeter (2001) contends field experience needs to be connected to university coursework, and additional scholars suggested university course content does not always become implemented into the field experience (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Fang & Ashley, 2004; Grant & Koskela, 1986). Other researchers stress that preservice teachers, who engage in field experience in diverse settings, participate in conversations and work one-on-one with students, experience cognitive dissonance, and benefit from self-reflection as they develop more affirmative beliefs about students from different backgrounds (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001; Powell, Zehm, & Garcia, 1996; Wiggins,

Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Field experience offers advantages for culturally responsive teaching, but preservice teachers cannot reach their full potential with field experience alone. Therefore, it is necessary to make direct connections from the course material to the field experience and scaffold critical reflection in attempt to achieve deeper understandings about culturally responsive teaching in preservice teachers (Grant & Koskela, 1986; Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Tang, 2003).

Limited student-teacher interaction. Another ineffective facet of this field experience in attempt to develop culturally responsive teachers was limited student-teacher interaction. During my study, preservice teachers in Group B participated in limited interaction with the elementary students. They did not take initiative to intersperse with the elementary students as Group A did. Group A maintained eye contact, sat or stood at the students' physical level, and engaged in authentic conversations with the elementary students at the community center. I wrote in my reflexive journal, "*The preservice teachers in Group A interspersed among the third grade students,*" whereas I noted about Group B:

The preservice teachers also would huddle together while one teacher worked with the fifth graders. The preservice teachers laughed with the girls and talked with them. Amy even commented that the fifth grade girls were into similar things as she was when she was in fifth grade. However, the preservice teachers seemed hesitant and dubious.

I return to Julie in Group B, who said, "At first, she [Maya] made it sound like they were all like underprivileged children, but then one of the girls like... isn't at all." She never made an attempt to learn more about this student through conversation and

continued to think the girl was not “at-risk.” Sam (Group B) shared, “they got very comfortable with us and kind of weren’t staying focused on the work that we were trying to accomplish.” She thought the fifth grade girls were not listening to the preservice teachers. Amy stated, “It’s just so funny because they are older, and you can joke with them.” It appeared that the elementary students dominated the structure of the tutoring sessions, not the preservice teachers in Group B. It might be the lack of maturity from the preservice teachers as professional teachers and adults, the limited teaching experiences, or possibly the preservice teachers enjoyed the social aspect of the experience and that inhibited their ability to critically reflect about and enact culturally responsive instruction.

Purnel, Ali, Begum, and Carter (2007) contend the affective needs of students are important to consider in helping students succeed academically. Morton and Bennett (2010) discovered preservice teachers during a field experience noted social and emotional connections to culturally responsive teaching (Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000). Ladson-Billings’ (1992; 1994; 1995) principle in which teachers understand the significance of social interaction and promote social engagement among the students supports the idea of a safe and comfortable environment, where there is a community of learners (Kaplan, 2004; Trumbull & Fluet, 2008; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In this environment, the students learn through shared experiences and social interactions in authentic contexts, and the teacher makes personal and meaningful connections with the students (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Richards, 2006; Richards, Bennett, & Shea, 2007; Rogoff, 1995; Taylor & Whitaker, 2009).

In my estimation, the preservice teachers in my study remained unprepared to teach the diverse populations in the schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Yet, I observed these preservice teachers gradually advance in their understandings about culturally responsive teaching as they tutored in an authentic context. I attribute their increased understandings to the effective facets of the field experience during this course and research that included one-on-one student-teacher interaction, scaffolding critical reflection, and use of best practices. These effective facets provided opportunities for these preservice teachers to develop relationships and understandings about students from different ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds from themselves. Through dialogue and collaboration, these preservice teachers cultivated new understandings about culturally responsive teaching and writing instruction, which is supported by sociocultural and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995). Ineffective facets of the field experience include lack of explicit instruction and limited student-teacher interactions.

My reflection as a teacher educator. As a teacher educator, I think it is important that I remember to practice critical reflection and the significant role it plays in teaching and learning processes (Dewey, 1933) and connect theory and research with my teaching practice (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008). As I reflected on my teaching of preservice teachers prior to this research, I recognized I was not doing enough to prepare preservice teachers to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Although I knew I incorporated culture, discussed English language learners, and conducted lessons about stereotypes in my teaching, I was not explicitly or sufficiently teaching culturally

responsive pedagogy. If I am passionate about culturally responsive pedagogy, then what are the other teacher educators who are not passionate about it doing in their courses?

My reflection initiated my speculation about higher education, and I became concerned about those who are culturally insensitive in higher education and teacher educators. Professors and teacher educators in higher education are also predominately White, similar to the teaching profession overall, and are considered to have expertise in the area they teach (Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009; Melnick & Zeichner, 1998; Vescio, Bondy, & Poekert, 2009). If these teacher educators prepare future teachers and have insufficient understanding of how to enact culturally relevant pedagogy, then a deficient model exists in the preparation of these teachers. It is necessary not only to provide faculty professional development in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy and of how to prepare teachers but also how to put it into practice in their classrooms (Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009). Teacher educators must critically reflect on their pedagogy to determine if they are practicing culturally responsive teaching and preparing teachers to be culturally responsive (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Vescio, Bondy, & Poekert, 2009).

My reflection as a researcher. It is not an easy endeavor to explore oneself, as a teacher educator or researcher, with a critical eye because one might experience unpleasant sentiments. My reflexive journal afforded me the opportunity to enhance my understanding of a researcher's role and to develop greater insight into the preservice teachers' understandings about culturally responsive teaching (Janesick, 1999). With the reflexive journal, I had the chance to interpret throughout the research process from the data collection and analysis to the final written text (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2004). I

include the journal as an important piece of the triangulation of my data, which improves rigor and trustworthiness of my study (Janesick, 1999).

In my reflexive journal, I captured moments and images of my experiences and the preservice teachers' experiences. At times during my research, I questioned my biases. For example, I wrote, "*However, I need to put my bias in check as I become disgusted sometimes with the limited understandings of people in our society.*" At another instant, I reflected:

I had to check my bias here. I felt offended by Christy's comment. She stressed the word 'another.' I thought she was implying that divorce was the worst thing in the world. I came from divorced parents, and I am successful and stronger because of the obstacles I faced.

In addition, I sometimes recorded my emotions and feelings, such as "*I become upset and disappointed when I hear teachers or preservice teachers who have preconceptions of students.*" The journal also awarded me a space to explore and interpret my data. I jotted down, "*I perceive this point as conscious awareness of your thoughts, a metacognition about cultural awareness. Is this the missing link to becoming a culturally responsive teacher?*"

At the beginning, I feared my emotions would possibly distort my research discoveries. However, I realized how significant my reflexive journal was throughout the research process. It allowed me to take a step back and refine my ideas and beliefs (Janesick, 1999) in order to notice a more genuine account of the experiences. It enabled me to be more aware of my thoughts in order to better study what I was observing in my research.

Recommendations for Teacher Education

Culturally responsive teaching. Teacher educators must know the attributes of a culturally responsive teaching. Teacher educators should demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the literature and research, attend conference sessions, and participate in professional development that will broaden their understandings of culturally relevant teaching. Teacher educators need to be dedicated and committed to culturally responsive teaching. As Villegas and Lucas (2002) note:

the extent to which those involved in preparing teachers at a given institution come to share the vision of culturally responsive teaching inherent in that framework. Such a vision cannot be imposed from the outside. It must grow out of ongoing dialogue and negotiation among colleagues. (p. 21)

Teacher educators must share the commitment and dedication to continue their education.

It is quite possible teacher educators lack the complex understanding of culturally responsive teaching and also believe as these preservice teachers that cultural awareness and integration of students' culture is a sufficient definition of culturally responsive teaching. The majority of professors and teacher educators in colleges of education also might come from limited experiences because they also are predominately from white, middle to higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, teacher educators need to enhance their understandings of diverse populations and how to meet their needs.

Multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy should become intertwined into curriculum throughout teacher education programs (Grant, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). In the future, I believe colleges of education should connect all courses offered to preservice teachers for several reasons.

Preservice teachers progressively transform from experiences, and their understandings do not occur in one instance or during one semester long course but gradually over time, as ascertained in my research. One course does not provide an adequate amount of time for a person to cultivate an in-depth understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

Field experience needs to be connected to coursework along with explicit modeling of instruction about culturally responsive teaching (Sleeter, 2001). In my study, the interview questions and field experiences contributed to growth in the preservice teachers' understandings. Even though the preservice teachers recognized the questions I provided in the interviews facilitated self-reflection, the preservice teachers needed more in-depth conversations and discussion to increase their understandings; they needed scaffolding to assist in their critical reflection. Howard (2006) noted that teachers must first know the self before they can teach. Teachers must first develop self-awareness because this awareness affects the interactions and interpretations of the students (Trumbull & Fluet, 2008). In order to recognize unconscious and conscious biases and prejudices toward their students, preservice teachers need to become self-aware (Hale, Snow-Gerono, & Morales, 2008). Discussions, collaboration, and social interactions are instructional practices to achieve the self-reflection necessary to become culturally responsive.

I think college of education courses should include various strategies and interventions, such as film, to assist the preservice teachers' developing understandings of culturally responsive pedagogies. In the last decade, researchers noted instructional practices facilitated change in beliefs about diversity (Castro, 2010). Instructional practices and interventions might include one-on-one social interactions, literature,

teaching cases, film, and collaboration. In previous studies, some teacher educators utilized different films such as *Crash* (Hagis, 2004), *The Couple in the Cage* (Heredia, 1997), or *The Color of Fear* (Wah, 1994) (Ahlquist & Milner, 2008; Aminy & Neophytos-Richardson, 2002; McGarry, 2008; Villaba & Redmond, 2008); these films facilitate in some people a sociocultural and cognitive dissonance in which the viewer experiences friction with previous understandings about culture.

Additional researchers utilized preservice teachers writing autobiographies and biographies about their students or community members in attempt to recognize similarities and differences and to develop better understandings about people from backgrounds different from their own (Schmidt & Finkbeiner, 2006; Wake & Modla, 2008). Athanases and Martin (2006) and Richards and Bennett (In Progress) suggested modeled instruction helped in-service and preservice teachers develop an advanced understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Teacher educators must connect the practical aspects of instruction with the field experience in which preservice teachers learn how to teach students from diverse backgrounds in an authentic context (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Sleeter, 2001; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Teacher education programs should continue to utilize these instructional practices and interventions to better prepare preservice teachers to become culturally responsive.

Writing methods courses. Teacher education programs should incorporate culturally responsive teaching within writing methods courses because teachers have limited knowledge that connects writing with students' cultural backgrounds (Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). The preservice teachers in my study steadily increased their understandings

about culturally responsive teaching, but the writing methods course did not include many interventions or discussions. As a result, education programs should integrate culturally responsive pedagogy throughout the coursework. The education program should be infused with discussions and interventions about social justice and cultural issues.

The preservice teachers did not make connections between the text (*6+1 Traits: The Complete Guide for the Primary Grades* and *6+1 Traits: The Complete Guide for Grades 3 and Up*, Culhan, 2005, 2003), course lectures and discussions, and tutoring of the elementary students. Teacher educators must explicitly inform preservice teachers and ask reflective questions that promote them making these connections. These preservice teachers consistently connected writing instruction to how they were taught and suggested writing could be more motivational through best practices. Preservice teachers' prior writing experiences influence their instruction and attitudes toward writing (Berry, 2006; Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000; Norman & Spencer, 2005). Through best practices, preservice teachers recognized how writing should be meaningful to students and relate to the students' interests (McIntyre & Leroy, 2003). Therefore, writing methods courses should address cultural backgrounds, accentuate the significance of motivation on writing, and explicitly emphasize balanced instruction for students or best practices (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Whitaker, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Teacher educators must provide opportunities for the preservice teachers to engage in writing and to teach writing in authentic contexts (Colby & Stapleton, 2006; Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990).

As a final recommendation for writing methods courses and the connection to culturally responsive teaching, I suggest writing courses include a self-reflective piece in addition to the field experience, discussion, and interventions. Writing promotes critical self-reflection and facilitates preservice teachers' development of understandings about themselves and their students (Wold, 2002). Writing provides preservice teachers opportunities to discover identities and to explore and find their voice (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000; Pattnaik, 2006; Schmidt & Izzo, 2003; Vicars, 2007). Through writing, preservice teachers connect the professional with personal (Richards & Miller, 2005). Therefore, writing courses should integrate field experience, course content, and self-reflection through preservice teachers' writing in order to gain deeper understandings about writing instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy (Colby & Stapleton, 2006; Putman & Borko, 2000; Wold, 2002).

Recommendations for Future Research

Culturally responsive teaching. Continued research about culturally responsive pedagogy is necessary in order to gain insight and understandings on how to better prepare teachers to teach students from diverse cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds. I only investigated eight preservice teachers, who were middle-class, Caucasian women, and English-speaking, for only one semester. My study was limited with this small number of participants and time. Consequently, my discoveries could not be further generalized.

Therefore, I suggest a larger number of participants with various linguistic, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. I also recommend in more longitudinal studies that examine preservice teachers throughout an education program (e.g., Ladson-

Billings, 1994; 2001) and then follow them as they begin their first years of teaching. I believe research should investigate in-depth the relationships of teachers and students in the classroom and the instruction of those students (Castro, 2010). I think it is important to investigate preservice teachers' prior experiences with people from different linguistic, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Castro, 2010; Richards & Bennett, In Progress).

I recommend research that focuses on the teacher educators and their understandings, beliefs, and attitudes about multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, researchers should not only examine how teacher educators promote and facilitate positive views towards diversity, but how teacher educators use preservice teachers' prior experiences with diversity to create not only awareness but critical reflection and discussion (Castro, 2010; Howard & Aleman, 2008).

Writing methods courses. Writing has not been in the forefront to school reform and continued research is needed on how to better prepare preservice teachers to teach writing (Cutler & Graham, 2008). I propose researchers focus on how preservice teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching in the writing curriculum because limited research exists on this connection (Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). Additionally, more research is needed to examine motivation and interest of not only the elementary students but with preservice and in-service teachers and how motivation and interest interrelates to culturally responsive pedagogy (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Schmidt & Izzo, 2003). The current literature does not address adequately the relationship between motivation and students from diverse backgrounds or between motivation and writing (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009). I suggest researchers examine motivation and writing,

utilize observational techniques to explore effective instructional practices, and investigate the connections between motivation and culturally responsive teaching.

Summary

In this chapter, I began with the purpose of my research and a review of my methodology. I proceeded to a summary of my research. I then presented a discussion of my interpretations of the data through literature that informed my inquiry and through research that provided insight into meaning about preservice teachers' developing understandings about culturally responsive teaching. I suggested effective and ineffective facets in the effort to further develop preservice teachers' understandings and behaviors toward culturally responsive teaching. I cannot generalize to all populations, but I complete the chapter with significant discoveries that offer implications and recommendations for teacher education and future research about culturally responsive teaching and writing methods courses.

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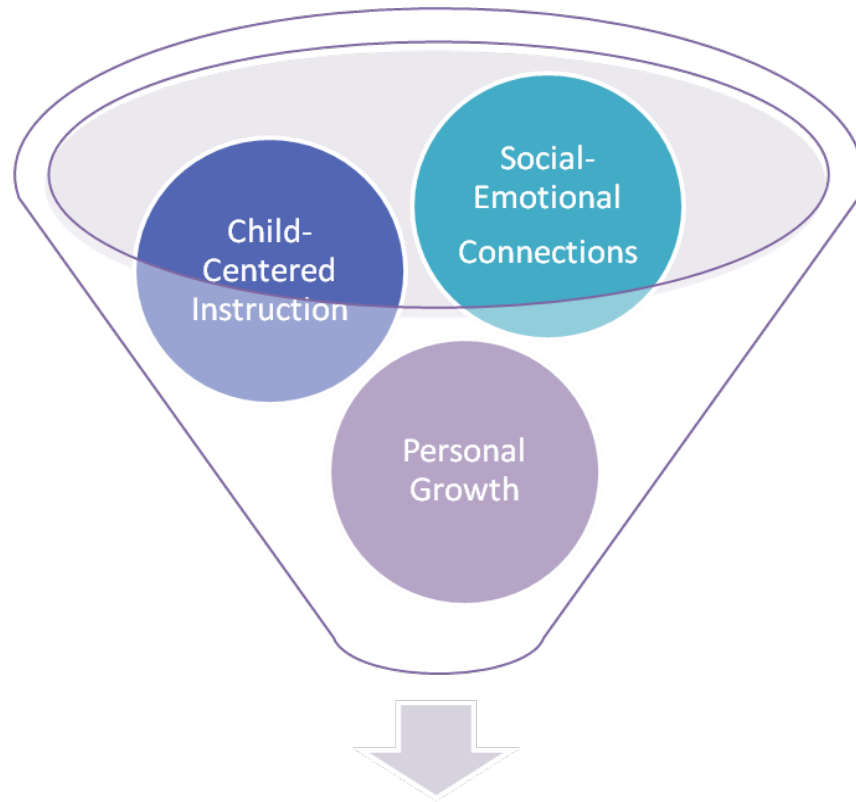
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Appendices

Appendix A.

Culturally Relevant Teaching



Culturally Relevant Teaching

(Morton & Bennett, 2010)

Appendix B.
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Name
2. Age
3. Race/ethnicity
4. Gender
5. Describe in what ways, if any, your family experiences have influenced your thinking about diversity.
6. Describe how and why you chose to become an educator.
7. Describe and explain what you think your strengths are as an educator.
8. Describe what you think your challenges are as an educator.
9. Part a) Explain your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.
Part b) What will guide you in the future in your approach to teaching?
10. Discuss your understandings of your students at this point.
11. Discuss your tutoring experiences at the community center.
12. How do you feel about yourself as a writer? Explain.

After first/second week of tutoring

- 1) Describe how you would define culture. How about diversity?
- 2) Explain how your understanding of your students have changed since you began tutoring at the Community center.
- 3) Describe in what ways you have changed.
- 4) How do you practice culturally responsive pedagogy?
- 5) Has your instruction changed as a result of this tutoring experience? Explain.

Final Interview

- 1) Describe how your experiences tutoring facilitated your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.
- 2) Has this course instructor influenced your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy? Explain.
- 3) Has the course content influenced your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy? Explain.
- 4) Has the course content or instructor influenced your writing instruction/philosophy?
- 5) Explain how I might have influenced your instruction at the community center.

Appendix C.
Final Focus Group Interview

Welcome: I would like to welcome you and thank you for your time. I truly appreciate it, especially now I know your time is even more valuable due to exam week. I have enjoyed our time together; I value your opinions and ideas.

Purpose: The purpose of this focus group interview is to gain more understandings about culturally responsive teaching in particular as it relates your writing instruction and philosophy.

Guidelines: We are going to conduct this interview slightly different than the last focus group interview. I will ask a question then everyone will answer it individually and then open it up for further discussion. You have been working in group, so I know you will respect each other as you speak.

- 1) a) To begin with, define culturally responsive teaching...
b) In particular, have you noticed any changes in your understandings and thinking about culturally responsive teaching?
- 2) How has course content or instructor influence your understanding or thinking about culturally responsive teaching?
- 3) How has the researcher influenced your understanding or thinking about culturally responsive teaching?
- 4) Explain how your own culture impacted your teaching at the Community center.
- 5) Explain how your own culture impacted your understandings and demonstrations of culturally responsive teaching.
- 6) How have your assumptions impacted your understandings of culturally responsive teaching?
- 7) In what ways do you feel you demonstrated culturally responsive teaching within the writing curriculum?
- 8) Describe how the tutoring experiences and course influenced your writing philosophy.

From other interviews self-reflection, conversations, working with students, and activities

Wrap-Up: Unfortunately, we are almost out of time. Let me repeat the main point you gave in your responses.

Appendix D
Critical Task Questions

February 3, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #1

1. How do you feel about going to the community center to work with children?
2. What is your definition (now) of an "at risk" child?

February 09, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #2

1. What were your impressions now that you have been here and met the children?
2. Describe your strengths and weaknesses as an educator.
3. Explain your understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Discuss some activities or literature you could use in your group here.
4. Discuss your expectations of the students, including academic, social, and behavioral.

February 16, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #3

1. Based on your past writing experiences in school, what are some things you will and won't do with the students.
2. At this point, what do you think is the most important aspect of teaching that will help you meet the needs of your students?

February 23, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #4

1. Describe how creating your own MyFace pages helped you or will help you instruct your students' creation of their own MyFace page.
2. Explain how the activities you did with your students today (Garfield, Spelling Inventory and My Face) relate to culturally responsive teaching.

March 02, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #5

1. After working with the students for a few weeks, have you noticed any changes in your ideas of teaching?
2. Think about the MyFace pages you created for yourself and the pages your students created. What types of "bling" were used? How did the students represent themselves through words and images?

March 09, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #6

1. Give your definition of the "Ideas" trait. How did you work with kids so far to help them think of or develop ideas?
2. In the OUR Space photograph activity, what did you learn about the community center?

March 23, 2009 -- Critical Task Questions #7

1. How is planning a script different from other types of writing you have done with the children?
2. How did drawing and writing help with ideas?

3. Define the writing trait organization. How did you help your students organize the script today?
4. Explain how individualized instruction is different from culturally responsive teaching.

March 30, 2009 -- *Critical Task questions #8*

1. Describe how you helped the children develop voice and word choice while writing and filming.
2. Describe how scriptwriting and digital video could be beneficial in a writing class.
3. How might digital video, voice, or word choice play a part in being a culturally responsive teacher?

April 05, 2009 -- *Critical Task Questions #9*

This week, we listened to the podcast and answered this question - How do the student voices (in the podcast) influence your teaching writing philosophy?

Appendix E
My Face

MyFace Home Profile Friends InBox Name:

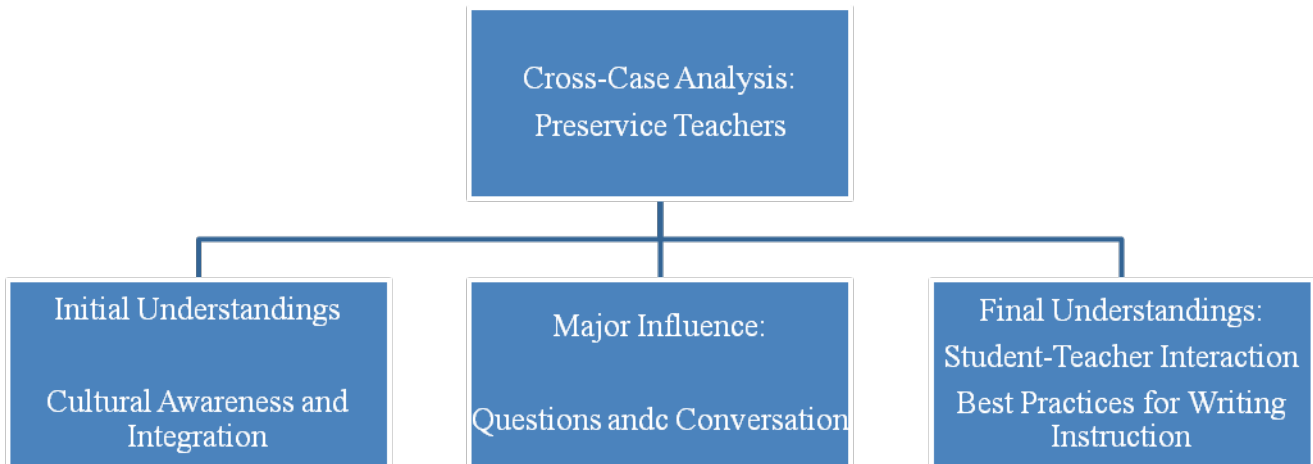
- Add photos or movies
or creative work here

Information
Favorite Foods:
Favorite Movie:
Hobbies:
Favorite Subject in School:

Write a story about yourself.

Appendix F

Cross-Case Analysis



About the Author

Susan V. Bennett graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Women's Studies from the Ohio State University in 1992 and in Elementary Education from Northern Kentucky University in 1998. She completed her Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Cincinnati in 2003.

Susan taught elementary school for a little over six years on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico and at urban schools in Ohio and Florida. While she completed her Ph.D. at the University of South Florida, Susan taught undergraduate courses in literacy and creative arts and also supervised Level I and Level III interns in elementary education. During her doctoral program, Susan participated in several literacy research projects and presented at state, national, and international levels and has published four articles in refereed journals and two book chapters. She is now an assistant professor in literacy education at the University of Mississippi.