PRESERVICE TEACHERS' LEARNING ABOUT CULTURAL AND RACIAL DIVERSITY
Implications for Urban Education

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Several essential interactions or experiences that had an influence on preservice teachers' learning and understanding about urban education and diversity are described and discussed. In particular, the author introduces a developmental typology that was used to analyze the preservice teachers' learning and understanding as a result of a course designed to help preservice teachers develop the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes necessary to teach in highly diverse and urban school contexts. These developmental interactions that made a critical difference in the preservice teachers' learning included cultural and racial awareness and insight, critical reflection, and a bridge between theory and practice. Understanding the influence of courses in teacher education that endeavor to provide learning spaces for preservice teachers is especially important as we document the most salient ways to provide all prospective teachers with what they need to make meaningful and significant differences in P-12 urban classrooms.

Keywords: *urban education; diversity; learning to teach; preservice teachers; race/culture*

In this article, I discuss preservice teachers' learning about cultural and racial diversity in a course designed to help them develop competencies, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions necessary to teach in diverse and urban contexts. In particular, I introduce a developmental typology of necessary interactions that guided my analyses of the teachers' learning. I developed the typology from several theoretical, conceptual, and empirical assumptions. I describe three developmental interactions that seemed profoundly necessary to help preservice teachers become closer to a knowledge

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base and understanding essential to teach in urban and diverse settings. By *necessary*, I mean that these were interactions that seemed to make a difference in the preservice teachers' curricula and pedagogical decisions. I purposely use the term *interactions* rather than stages or phases because there seemed to be important connections and overlap between and among the developmental interactions as explained in more depth later in this article. These connections were not linear per se.

The course, developed by a colleague and me, involved a plethora of introspective processes that forced us as teacher educators to rethink our own perspectives, beliefs, and pedagogical decisions along with our students.[1] Elsewhere, my colleague and I have written about these matters, namely, the development of the curriculum as well as rationales in designing and implementing various dimensions of the course (see Milner & Smithey, 2003). In a subsequent study, I focused on the results of the course as evident in the stability and change of the preservice teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and actions (Milner, 2005). This research extends that earlier inquiry to focus centrally on the interactions that seemed paramount to the preservice teachers' learning and development about culturally and racially diverse students and their needs.

Never before have public school teachers in the United States been faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of so many diverse learners. The teaching force in the United States is increasingly White, monolingual, middle class, and female, whereas the student population is increasingly diverse (Banks & Banks, 2000; Gay & Howard, 2000). Analyzing statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, Gay and Howard (2000) explained that

> 86% of all elementary and secondary teachers are European Americans. The number of African American teachers has declined from a high of 12% in 1970 to 7% in 1998. The number of Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander American teachers is increasing slightly, but the percentages are still very small (approximately 5% and 1% respectively). Native Americans comprise less than 1% of the national teaching force. (pp. 1-2)

With the number of teachers of color decreasing in the teaching force and student diversity increasing, there is a great need to

focus on urban education and diversity in teacher education courses. Gay and Howard (2000) maintained that "large numbers of European Americans and students of color really do not attend school with each other; nor are different groups of color in the same schools" (p. 2). Thus, courses need to be developed to focus on the reality of these schools, the diversity as well as the homogeneity that are present within them, and on the knowledge and understanding necessary to meet the needs of all students. To be clear, teachers' learning is a life-long process. The teachers in the course were not encouraged to think about learning as a destination but as a continuous process.

Overall, the preservice teachers who seemed the most prepared and efficacious about teaching in urban schools and highly diverse settings had the most salient interactions and connections with the following: (a) cultural and racial awareness and insight, (b) critical reflection, and (c) the bridging of theory and practice. I begin the discussion with a look at characteristics of the urban classroom. I then turn to discuss the research methods used in this study. In the next section, I introduce the developmental interactions that seemed critical to the preservice teachers' learning and development. I also discuss the evidence from the study and link it to the model of interaction. The final section considers recommendations and conclusions based on this research.

A LOOK AT CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN CLASSROOMS

Communities can be categorized generally as suburban, rural, or urban. Although these contexts have similarities, there are many differences. For example, suburban schools tend to be relatively homogeneous[2] in terms of socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnic background. Compared with urban and rural communities, suburban communities are higher in SES and predominantly White. Compared with their counterparts in other communities, suburban students also tend to score higher on achievement and proficiency tests and tend to pursue postsecondary degrees more often than students from other contexts, teachers tend to have

higher educational credentials, and families tend to be nuclear and more educated.

In many respects, urban and rural schools have much in common, particularly with regard to SES. Both types of schools tend to have high concentrations of students living in poverty, high percentages of single-parent families, the least qualified or credentialed teachers, and the fewest school resources (new school buildings, curricular materials, and so forth). However, there is a noticeable difference between urban and rural schools in terms of student mobility, size, and diversity, with urban schools and communities being larger, having higher student transience, and greater ethnic and cultural diversity. These differences in school context—diversity, size, resources, teacher qualifications, and more—cannot be ignored, negated, minimized, or trivialized. School size matters in terms of students' learning opportunities and achievement. We know that more qualified and experienced teachers tend to have more effective classroom management skills and are better able to handle the complexities of their teaching (Milner, 2006). We also know that students whose basic needs are met—most often higher SES students—are better able to concentrate on learning and on managing their behaviors.

Thus, an urban context can be defined as one that is heavily populated with culturally and racially diverse learners and has a heavy concentration of English language learners, a large number of poorer students—particularly students of color, high attrition of teachers, heavy institutional and systemic barriers, and meager resources (Ennis & McCauley, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 1992; Weiner, 2003). Urban schools tend to be grossly underfunded, larger in size, and infiltrated with administrative bureaucracy.

To be clear, there are urban teachers and students who succeed despite negative conditions they encounter beyond their control; they understand and have mastered the "culture of power," and set the trend (Delpit, 1995; Morris, 2004; Suskind, 1998); however, in many instances, teachers and students in urban contexts are met with challenges that they find difficult to work through and master.

It is clear that courses must be developed to help preservice teachers develop the competencies and skills necessary to meet the needs of students in urban classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2001) maintained that teachers in urban classrooms

> not only [will encounter] . . . multiracial or multiethnic [students] but they [students] are also likely to be diverse along linguistic, religious, ability, and economic lines. . . . Today teachers walk into urban classrooms with children who represent an incredible range of diversity. Not only are [there] students of different races and ethnicities, but there are students whose parents are incarcerated or drug-addicted, whose parents have never held a steady job, whose parents are themselves children (at least chronologically), and who are bounced from one foster home to the next. And there are children who have no homes or parents. (p. 14)

Considering the needs in urban classrooms, an important question for teacher educators begs for an answer: How do teacher education courses structure learning opportunities for preservice teachers that enable their own and their students' success in urban classrooms across the United States? Moreover, what are the influences of courses in teacher education that endeavor to prepare teachers for P-12 urban classrooms?

METHODS

In this study, qualitative research methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) were used to gauge the preservice teachers' knowledge and understanding of cultural and racial diversity as a result of the course developed at a private institution in the southeastern part of the United States. The participants were intern teachers who worked with mentor teachers in public school classrooms.[3] Several data collection techniques were employed to understand, gauge, and represent the findings in this study: (a) class discussions, (b) class assignments, (c) interviews, and (d) an open-ended feedback questionnaire.

One data collection technique used was class discussions. The preservice teachers would discuss their views on issues of race, culture, gender, diversity, and SES, draw from theory-driven readings,

and discuss how they believed those issues related (or not) to their present and future teaching experiences. It is important to note that during the school day, the preservice teachers were teaching in public school classrooms under the guidance and supervision of mentor teachers. From the discussions, the teacher educators took informal notes as they observed and analyzed the discourse patterns among the preservice teachers throughout the discussions. After these class sessions, the professors talked about the discussions and thought about future assignments and/or directions for the discussions along with talking about other areas of concern.

A second data collection technique used was class assignments. At least six times during the semester, the students were assigned several sentence stems for possible completion in their semiweekly journal entries. Examples of sentence stems are as follows: (a) Insights I have had about my role as a White or Asian American teacher in a diverse classroom are. . . . (b) Issues of race/culture/gender that have emerged from the curriculum in my classroom are. . . . (c) Issues of race/culture/gender that have emerged from my students' learning needs are. . . . (d) I am or am not committed to issues of diversity in my classroom because. . . . (e) The students in my classroom do or do not recognize racial issues, and to me. . . . In addition, the preservice teachers were given the opportunity to conduct action research projects focusing on aspects of diversity, and some of the students chose to use their action research projects to explore their teaching around issues of diversity, race, culture, SES, and/or gender. The final paper, assigned at the end of the semester, challenged the preservice teachers to reflect on their growth about diversity and to reflect on how a classroom teacher can focus on the issues explored when making decisions that affect students' learning opportunities.

A third data collection technique employed was interviewing. All but one preservice teacher agreed to participate in the overall study. Of the 13 students who agreed to participate, 6 students were randomly selected to participate in an interview that I conducted, which lasted approximately 1 hour. The interviews were conducted at the end of the semester in an attempt to understand the influence of the course on the preservice teachers. Each interview participant

classified herself as White and was female. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

A final data collection technique was an open-ended feedback questionnaire, which was developed to determine the preservice teachers' perceptions about the usefulness, applicability, and relevance of the course in their program and as they learned to teach.

DATA ANALYSES

Analysis followed a recursive, thematic process; as interviews and observations in the class on diversity progressed, for instance, I used analytic induction and reasoning to develop thematic categories. Because findings, as revealed in this study, were based on multiple data sources or techniques, the patterns and findings resulted in triangulation. For example, when the preservice teachers repeated a point several times throughout the study in class discussions or in interviews, this became what I call a pattern. When what the preservice teachers articulated during interviews or in class also became evident in their assignments, this resulted in what I call a triangulational pattern. My colleague, with whom I developed the course, read versions of this article and "checked the data" to ensure the integrity of these analyses and findings.

GOALS AND PREMISES OF THE COURSE

Four central goals and premises shaped the course: (a) Preservice teachers need to recognize differences among perspectives, experiences, values, and beliefs of their own and others' races and cultures. (b) Preservice teachers need to see color and begin to recognize the political and historical issues that frame it. (c) Preservice teachers need to become researchers and learners in their teaching environments. (d) Preservice teachers need the skills to assess their growth and progress and to continue strengthening their knowledge where issues of diversity are concerned (see Milner & Smithey, 2003, for more on this).

THE PRESERVICE TEACHERS

There were 14 preservice teachers (interns) from across the United States enrolled in the course. Twelve of the students enrolled

in the course were from outside the state; there were 13 White students and 1 Asian. All but 2 students were female. Given the age range of 23 to 48 years, these master's level preservice teachers brought diverse experiences themselves to the course. For instance, 1 female student had taught microbiology in a university medical school for 16 years; another had 8 years of international business experience; 2 had taught previously in Europe or Asia; and 1 male had retired from the technology business sector. Because of the varied socioeconomic, educational, and professional experiences of these graduate students, there were varied beliefs, opinions, and convictions that emerged throughout the course.

In the next section, I share some of the central findings from the study. I introduce a developmental typology that I used to frame the analyses. Again, I describe these different conceptions as interactions rather than phases or stages. It is clear that the preservice teachers moved in and out of these experiences and interactions at various times. It would be misleading to suggest that there was some clearly defined sequence or progression that framed the growth and understanding of the preservice teachers as a result of the course.

NECESSARY DEVELOPMENTAL INTERACTIONS

Several interactions seemed relevant to the preservice teachers' knowledge base and understandings of cultural and racial diversity.

Table 1 outlines a model I developed and used to analyze the preservice teachers' knowledge, understanding, and growth about teaching in urban and diverse settings. Drawing from a wealth of theory and research related to the goals of the course, the model describes three essential and necessary interactions among the preservice teachers that seemed to increase their knowledge base and understanding: (a) cultural and racial awareness and insight, (b) critical reflection, and (c) the bridging of theory and practice. To be clear, these interactions that are described in Table 1 are not linear or progressive. In other words, "a" does not necessarily precede "b" and so forth.

TABLE 1
A Developmental Typology

Interaction 1: Cultural and racial awareness and insight	Cultural and racial awareness and insight was an important and fundamental interaction or experience for the preservice teachers. In other words, many of the preservice teachers did not recognize the relevance or the importance of studying cultural and racial diversity before completing our course. A successful course that provides a learning environment where teachers develop the capacities to teach in urban schools must help teachers recognize the political and social realities of race, socioeconomic status, and culture in an urban context. Deliberate interaction with culture and race were quite important to the preservice teachers' learning and understanding.
Interaction 2: Critical reflection	The preservice teachers needed to think deeply about themselves as racial, gendered, and cultural individuals. They thought about others as racialized, gendered, and cultured individuals but did not see themselves in this light. The posing of tough questions was also necessary in this reflection. The preservice teachers needed to engage in what I call *relational reflection*; that is, they needed to focus on themselves and their own experiences, life worlds, privileges, struggles, and positions in relation to others (their students as racialized and cultural beings, their students' parents, their students' communities, and their students' ways of knowing).
Interaction 3: Theory and practice	The preservice teachers needed to be exposed to theoretical notions that help them think through their practice. On the most basic level, teachers must understand their own theories of experience (hooks, 1994) and understand that the curriculum is *the what* and pedagogy is *the how* of the what. Student teaching and/or practicum experiences need to be offered in conjunction with such courses to scaffold and bridge learning and to help teachers situate theory with practice. Moreover, theoretical notions need to be tested or more deeply understood in the actual practice of teaching and learning so teachers can build their repertoire to inform their practice.

INTERACTION 1: CULTURAL AND RACIAL AWARENESS AND INSIGHT

Cultural and racial awareness and insight were important to the development of the preservice teachers in the course. Preservice

teachers rarely enter teacher education courses with any conception of, interest in, or concern about cultural and racial diversity. They adopt color-blind (Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Milner, 2005) and culture-blind ideologies (Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005) wherein the preservice teachers deliberately and often subconsciously do not think about the enormous, central, and profound influences of color and culture in teaching and learning. Thus, courses that endeavor to provide preservice teachers with the knowledge base and understanding necessary to teach in highly diverse and urban classrooms must consider that many preservice teachers will enter the courses without any (or very limited) prior knowledge and understanding of diversity or of individuals quite different from them (Bennett, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001). This lack of knowledge and understanding inevitably leads to "ignored discriminatory institutional practices toward students of color such as high suspension rates for African American males" (Johnson, 2002, p. 154).

Perhaps fundamentally, effective courses that prepare preservice teachers for urban and diverse classrooms must begin by "making a case" for cultural and racial diversity, particularly (a) if there is not a conglomeration of courses focusing on urban education and/or diversity embedded in the teacher education program, (b) if programs have difficulty recruiting teacher candidates who have a desire to teach in these contexts, or (c) if students themselves do not come into the program with some understanding and affinity toward teaching in urban or diverse settings. As for the course in this study, much time was spent convincing many of the preservice teachers that such discussion and focus were necessary. This interaction—cultural and racial awareness and insight—through readings, assignments, and discussions was central to the course. A goal of this interaction was to avoid sustained resistance that often results from such courses when mostly White students are introduced to such topics. As Brown (2004) explained, many preservice teachers do not make progress in stand-alone courses that focus on diversity because of their "resentment and/or resistance to multicultural doctrine, instruction, application, and interaction" (pp. 325-326). And Brown's explanation of the lack of growth and understanding among

preservice teachers is consistent with the research of Banks (1995) and Irvine (1992). Brown (2004) insisted,

> Resentment is frequently reflected on teacher evaluations, whereas resistance is apparent in inadequate preclass preparation, reluctance to engage in class discussions and activities, and a lack of commitment to required cross-cultural interactions and research. (p. 326)

It is clear that the course attempted to get "buy-in" from the preservice teachers early on to avoid an entire semester of frustration, resentment, and lack of engagement.

The need to provide opportunities for awareness and insight among the preservice teachers also was critical because of "cultural and racial mismatches" that exist between teachers and students (Burke-Spero, 1999; Ford, 1996). These mismatches or inconsistencies bring about incongruence and influence the teaching and learning that takes place between teachers and students (Brown, 2004; Howard, 2001); there are few or no commonalities and points of reference to help students and teachers connect. These preservice teachers rely on stereotypes that they have learned from the media or their parents, for instance. Thus, the examples a teacher employs in a lesson, the nature of questions posed, how students are allowed to express themselves, and whose knowledge is validated (or not) in the classroom (Apple & King, 1990) point to mismatches that must be understood and overcome through cultural and racial interactions.

The preservice teachers in the course reported that they had become more aware and developed deeper insights as a result of the course. Many of them reported that they had not ever even thought about issues of diversity, particularly where race was concerned, before the course. In fact, one student wrote on the open-ended questionnaire:

> The articles were helpful and helped raise issues that I would not have thought of on my own. However, I feel that more discussion of the articles in class would have benefited me by broadening my opinions of the articles. . . . I began to see the relevance of these issues [around diversity] and also started to think about how they applied in the classroom.

Another student reported that she really benefited from the course and noted, "My eyes were opened to several things that I had not thought about in-depth before." Similarly, another student wrote, "Many ideas were discussed that I had not thought about especially concerning the African American point of view." In addition, another student explained in a journal assignment, "I now believe in establishing a multicultural and diverse learning environment that is acceptive [*sic*] of all cultures and races, and I will encourage the study and discussion of such issues."

Not only was this level of awareness made clear in the students' written comments, but such awareness became evident in some of the preservice teachers' teaching. For instance, the principal of an intern in the seminar asked for a copy of a lesson he observed her teaching because he wanted to use it as an example for his experienced teachers. He wanted to share this lesson that had the objective of addressing the similarities and differences between people from the North and the South during the Civil War and comparing those with thoughts today in America. The intern teacher used the book *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco (1994) for the basis of the lesson about similarities and differences in people from different races. The intern, in reporting her excitement with the principal's request, commented,

> My class was almost exactly half White students and half Black; our class discussions about race made me more aware of my students' perceptions and how the students might feel about the lesson or might react to the material. Our discussions helped me to try to think one step ahead of my students so that I was more prepared for issues that might arise.

Without exposure to the course, many of the students would have graduated and gone into their classrooms somewhat oblivious to diversity, issues of SES, gender, and race, in particular. Many had experienced differences in races and cultures in social settings they encountered in the "outside world," but most had never focused on the effect of those experiences on teaching and learning. A student reported,

> The articles brought to my attention issues that I did not know existed. The hard part about the articles was trying to change the

> view I have had my entire life. I am trying to see diversity issues that obviously exist in my classroom that I am unaware of for the most part.

More than anything, the preservice teachers seemed to think about issues of cultural and racial diversity in ways that they would not have otherwise, mainly because they were exposed to the areas in the course; new awareness and insight emerged. The teacher in the previous passage is now using her expanded knowledge to investigate or research the issues in her own classroom. That is, many of the preservice teachers had been taught neither to see race nor to recognize differences, for instance, and the course allowed them to think about such issues in a space that was supportive and constructive, not hostile or antagonistic.

Still, in an interview, another student explained,

> [The course] kind of opened my eyes. Some of the things that we talked about kind of opened my eyes, and I started looking for things. Not specifically making problems where they didn't exist, but looking for types of relationships between kids of different races or looking at how people treat each other and how people treat people of different races.

Thus, cultural and racial interactions (through the readings, assignments, and discussions) were quite necessary for the preservice teachers as they developed research lenses and deeper understandings of individuals different from themselves. In addition to the importance of the cultural and racial interactions, it was necessary for the students to engage in a deep level of critical reflection.

INTERACTION 2: CRITICAL REFLECTION

Critical reflection was also a necessary interaction for the preservice teachers enrolled in the course. Teacher reflection has been conceived in a number of important ways. Woolfolk (1998) wrote that "reflective teachers think back over situations to analyze what they did and why and to consider how they might improve learning for [all] their students" (p. 8). Valli (1997) explained that "reflective teaching emphasizes the importance of teacher inquiry and counteracts a more limited interest in teachers'

behavior without considering what is going on in their minds and hearts" (p. 67). Schon (1983) suggested that effective teaching concerned much more than applying techniques; effective teaching required that teachers be reflective and adaptive as a consequence of their situations. Researchers and theorists have attempted to bridge reflective thinking with that of race (Howard, 2001; Milner, 2003a, 2003b) and stressed the importance of the cultural context of learning (Milner, 2003b; Rios, 1996). Reflection has been stressed for all teachers, not just White teachers (Tatum, 2001).

Teacher reflection can help mediate learning and instruction for culturally and racially diverse students, and reflection must be an activity in which all teachers engage (Tatum, 2001):

> In a race-conscious society, the development of a positive sense of racial/ethnic identity not based on assumed superiority or inferiority is an important task for both White people and people of color. The development of this positive identity is a lifelong process that often requires unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but also about ourselves. (p. 53)

Accordingly, cultural and racial reflection is necessary for all teachers—even preservice teachers of color—because many preservice teachers of color have internalized, validated, and reified pervasive, counterproductive stereotypes about themselves and others. Accordingly, Freire (1998) contended that

> authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations, consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it. (p. 62)

The preservice teachers who made the most progress in terms of their knowledge, skills, and understanding about teaching and teachers in diverse and urban classrooms engaged in a deep level of reflection.

Figure 1 illustrates the cycle of reflection that seemed evident in the thinking among the preservice teachers. This reflection not only focused on them but also emerged in their thinking about their students in the classroom and the communities from which

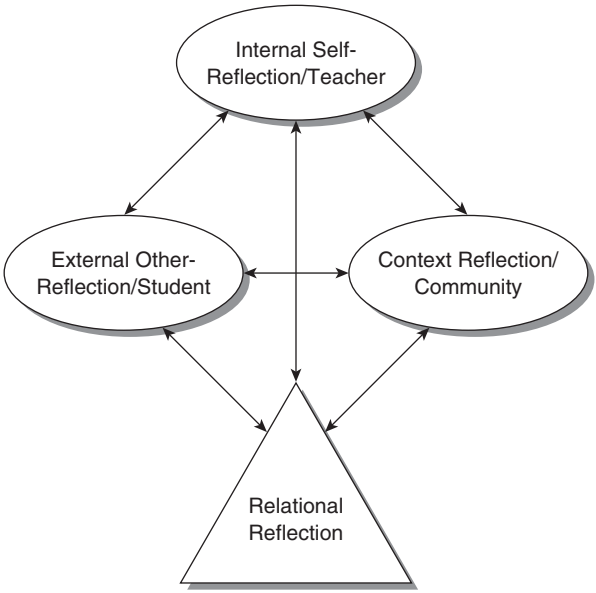

FIGURE 1 A Reflection Cycle for Urban Teachers

the students came. Moreover, the preservice teachers engaged in what I call *relational reflection* in that the preservice teachers thought intently about their own perspectives, beliefs, and life worlds in conjunction with, comparison with, and contrast to their students' and their students' communities. To explain, each of the preservice teachers was challenged to reflect on their specific backgrounds, the racial composition of their schools and communities, as well as when they first saw themselves as racialized beings. Through reflection papers and a paper designed to have the preservice teachers recall the first time they saw themselves as a racialized being, the preservice teachers shared some of their most private and meaningful reflections about themselves, their own families, and their communities (both past and present). In an interview, a female preservice teacher reflected,

> Well, I know that my . . . understanding of issues of diversity has changed because I think very early on I was confronted with

> [racism], particularly from my mother. . . . She was a very prejudiced lady, and I know that that influenced me early on.

As evident from this quote, the preservice teacher reflected on and shared some of her most private and difficult family history. Through the course, many of the preservice teachers were guided to pose and to respond to some tough questions.

Another student explained in a journal entry assignment that her mother was racist when she was growing up: "I [have been] worried by what I learned and understood about racial injustice and equally so by my own mother's racial prejudice." In essence, this particular student, similar to the previous student, engaged in introspection that forced her to think about her own mother's prejudices, and this "worried" her. Engaging in the course allowed the student to reflect on herself and her family, which allowed her to fight against such prejudice in her own teaching and life. She wanted to expose her own biological children to other racial and ethnic groups as they grew up. She wrote in the same assignment, "I want my children to grow up in an integrated environment rather than the racial isolation I experienced growing up."

Table 2 outlines a set of questions that I developed to help guide preservice and practicing teachers into deeper levels of reflection, particularly where race was concerned. I published the chart first in the journal *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* (Milner, 2003a) and then in *Theory into Practice* (Milner, 2003b). As Brown (2004) explained, teachers who make the most profound and meaningful improvements in their knowledge and understanding of cultural and racial diversity from their teacher education courses "have explored their personal histories and value systems; developed an understanding, respect, and value for other cultures; and expanded their reference group membership to include others" (p. 327). The posing of tough introspective questions was very important in the preservice teachers' development and learning—it pushed them to explore areas that were difficult to contemplate, yet centrally necessary for their learning, development, and growth.

Through reflection, another female preservice teacher explained how the course allowed her to think back to an experience where

TABLE 2
A Critically Reflective Chart About Race

Critical Question	*Reflective Purpose and Significance*
How will my race influence my work as a teacher with students of color?	This question challenges preservice teachers to reflect on the privileges and/or the lack thereof that have enabled their work and/or hindered it based on race. In this way, teachers come to understand past experiences and instances that they are able to directly link to race in pursuit of consciousness.
How will my students' race influence their work with me as the teacher?	This question requires preservice teachers to reflect on the way students might perceive them as the teacher whose race may or may not be different from theirs. Teachers may start to become more sensitive to the issues that students have (not guessing or speculating per se) but may become cognizant of the fact that they may need to be sensitive to race-based differences.
What is the effect of race on my thinking, beliefs, and actions?	This question challenges preservice teachers to reflect about issues that may have been hidden previously. As a consequence, these beliefs may become more overt through their deliberation, and teachers may be brought to realities that allow them to either deal with them by changing themselves or not (decision making).
How do I, as a teacher, situate myself in the education of others, and how do I negotiate the power structure in my class to allow students to feel a sense of worth?	With these questions comes awareness that guides the manners in which preservice teachers think about planning lessons and enacting them for students. Preservice teachers may decide that, considering their personal race and that of their students, a different approach is best suited. In addition, these questions challenge preservice teachers to negotiate the power structure in the learning environment.
What may be the issues most important to my students and me? What may be the nature of race on these issues?	These questions challenge preservice teachers to think about becoming (re)searchers in their environment with race as a focus.

(continued)

TABLE 2 (continued)

Critical Question	*Reflective Purpose and Significance*
To what degree are my role as teacher and my experiences superior to the experiences and expertise of students, and is there knowledge to be learned from my constituents?	This critical question allows preservice teachers to reflect on coming to terms with intellectual and social negotiations that likely should exist in the classroom.
How do I situate and negotiate the students' knowledge, experiences, expertise, and race with my own?	This question challenges preservice teachers to begin deciding if they are willing to negotiate expertise and ways of knowing with their students. In addition, it allows teachers to pursue comfortable balances in the learning environments with race as a focus.
Am I willing to speak about race on behalf of those who might not be present in the conversation both inside and outside of school, and am I willing to express the injustices of race and racism in conservative spaces?	This question challenges preservice teachers to not separate their personal and professional philosophies. If they believe that oppression is wrong and display this belief at school, then they are challenged to think about how they would portray this with their discourse and actions outside of school. Consistency both in and out of school is important.

she had been in the minority—a time when she was in the Peace Corps:

> And I had never thought about it [cultural and racial diversity]. I'd never really thought much about that until we talked about it in class. And then that caused me to reflect back on the Peace Corp [*sic*] and really sit down and think: "how did I feel back then" . . . "what was going on?" I hadn't really put a name or a thought to any of those emotions prior to class.

The preservice teachers who seemed to improve in their knowledge and understanding of cultural and racial diversity also were able to reflect on the important connections between the social context (the community) from which their students were reared and the students themselves. The preservice teachers, through the reflective activities from the course, seemed to automatically connect the community experiences and injustices inherent in them with how students experienced education in the classroom and school. For example, during discussions, the preservice teachers were quick to situate a student's misbehavior or aggressive behavior with that of his or her community expectations and needs for survival. For instance, the preservice teachers began to understand that some students believe that they must fistfight to survive in their neighborhoods, and this thinking emerges in the classroom when conflicts develop between themselves and another student. Thus, understanding the community was essential to considering the student.

In short, the preservice teachers who showed the most promise for teaching in urban schools were able to engage in relational reflection where they thought about themselves in conjunction with, comparison with, and contrast to others (or their students) and their students' communities. A female student explained in an interview,

> It's a skill to look at a student or different person and kind of set yourself back [and forth with that person] and be able to think—"well is something I'm saying or doing going to affect [him or her], or how would they feel about this certain situation?" Actually kind of getting into their head. . . . That's kind of where I am now [after being in the course]. I think that I've become a lot more

> aware of how other people would think or react. I guess before I was just more self-centered in my opinion.

The preservice teachers who demonstrated some competencies necessary to teach in urban classrooms seemed to understand themselves in relation to others. These individuals realized that it was not enough to focus on themselves or, as the passage above explained, to be "self-centered." It was absolutely necessary that preservice teachers gained new, perhaps more relevant, insights about their own racial and cultural heritage; yet, it was equally necessary that they understood themselves in relation to others (or their students whom they would teach).

In a journal assignment, another student reported that she became concerned about the lack of African American role models for her African American students in her school. She explained that before our course, which guided her into thinking about herself in relation to others, for instance, she had not considered the enormous void of same ethnic mentors available to African American students in her school. She wrote,

> I worry that my African American students see so few positive role models that are their race in school. After our discussions in seminar, I have really begun to wonder what kind of message it is sending to our African American students. . . . Growing up, I never had an African American teacher or principal. Actually all of my principals and teachers were White. I never had an Asian or Hispanic teacher or principal either.

It is clear in this passage from her journal assignment that the student thought about herself as well as the students she was teaching. In short, she put herself in her students' shoes. In many ways, she began to empathize with her students; it became their issue, not just her students'. McAllister and Irvine (2002), in their study of 34 practicing teachers' beliefs about empathy and working with culturally diverse students, found that the teachers' practices were enhanced when they had empathic dispositions. Empathetic teachers, according to McAllister and Irvine, "take on the perspective of another culture," and empathy involves "cognitive, affective, and behavioral components" (p. 433). An important

finding of this study was that the teachers empathized *with* their students and did not pity them. There was a level of social justice and activism that connected the teachers and the students—it was not about those "poor" students' problems but about *our* (teachers' and students') problems that all involved had to solve-together. As a result of participating in a support program to assist the teachers in working with culturally diverse students, the teachers in McAllister and Irvine's (2002) study developed empathetic dispositions that resulted in more caring, supportive, and responsive learning environments. Norris (2003) explained that a central skill in developing empathy is through listening to others well, paying attention to their emotions, and understanding others' "perspectives, points of view, and feelings" (p. 315). Still, it was also important for the preservice teachers to make meaningful connections and to bridge theory with practice and practice with theory.

INTERACTION 3: A BRIDGING OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

It was necessary that the preservice teachers read theory, developed their own theory of experience (hooks, 1994), as well as experienced teaching contexts that introduced them to students racially and culturally different from themselves. It is important to note that an emphasis on theory is not only concerned about theoretical perspectives in the research and academic literature that other academics typically read. Although interacting with such theory was insightful for the preservice teachers, I also want to make it clear that I consider the preservice teachers' theory of experience (hooks, 1994) to serve as legitimate theoretical notions and perspectives that needed to be examined in the college and public school classrooms. Accordingly, the examples explored through the final theme of the findings, a bridging of theory and practice, were concerned not only with theoretical notions such as color-blindness or stereotype threat but also with the theoretical positioning of the preservice teachers based significantly on their personal experience. These personal experiences are considered theoretical notions in my analyses; indeed, they were what the preservice teachers knew and came to know—their theories.

Wiest (1998) insisted that preservice teachers "should learn to act upon this information [theory] rather than merely amass generalized cultural content" (p. 358). Thus, it was very important for the preservice teachers in the study to have opportunities to bridge theory with practice and practice with theory. Where experience, voice, lived experience, and perspective are concerned, hooks (1994) wrote,

> As a teacher, I recognize that students . . . enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed, whether these students discuss fact—those that any of us might know—or personal experience. My pedagogy has been shaped to respond to this reality. If I do not wish to see these students use the "authority of experience" as a means of asserting voice, I can circumvent this possible misuse of power by bringing to the classroom pedagogical strategies that affirm their presence, their right to speak, in multiple ways on diverse topics. (p. 84)

Moreover, the preservice teachers reported that it was also necessary for them to hear my perspectives (as an African American faculty member) as well as the perspectives of the one student of color in the classroom (who happened to be Asian American). The sharing of our experiences—our stories and theories—seemed to make the theory reading and even their practice more meaningful and relevant. The preservice teachers were able to draw from the theory and bridge it with that of their practice.

One female student explained in an interview, "She [the Asian student] shared how she felt. . . . And I think that's what has helped me the most, just taking that stance [or perspective from the Asian student]." She found the Asian student's perspectives especially insightful, and she was able to link it to what she described as a "tangible reality." Furthermore, another female student explained that my sharing of racialized experiences seemed to contribute to her new perspectives on "others." During a class discussion, this preservice teacher kept questioning me to discuss whether I always perceived myself as a Black male; that is, the student queried whether there were times when I forgot that I was Black. She referenced this class discussion episode in our interview and explained that this interchange made a powerful

difference in how she thought about others, particularly African Americans, and linked it to her practice. As noted,

> I kept pushing you to speak whether . . . there were times when you could forget who you are in the sense that you didn't wonder, worry, it wasn't in the back of your mind that someone was seeing you as a Black man. . . . To me the greatest impact was you being [*sic*] able to just state without any wavering on it at all that [you always] see yourself as Black.

It is clear that having individuals of color in the course had a meaningful influence on this preservice teacher, as was the case for other preservice teachers in the course. Our experiences of theory (hooks, 1994) helped bring a reality to the preservice teacher that seemed to make a difference. It was imperative that the preservice teachers had some form of interactions or immersion into an environment inconsistent with where most of them had gone to school, lived, and for the most part, still remained. The preservice teachers pointed to the value of such practice-oriented experiences in their student teaching and beyond and how rich and meaningful the experiences were for their own development.

Another female preservice teacher drew from Steele's (1997) notion of stereotype threat as she discussed how she suspected many of her students felt about their academic performance and potential. The student was introduced to the theory in one of the assigned readings, Milner and Woolfolk Hoy's (2003). According to the theory, stereotype threat occurs when stereotyped individuals are in situations where the stereotype could apply in that they have to cope with the possibility of confirming the negative stereotype in either their own or others' eyes. The students wrote in a journal assignment,

> I see all of this [students' not achieving] and wonder just how prevalent stereotype threat is at [Reid High], among the students and faculty alike, and wonder how many students and faculty members are being eaten away by it [stereotype threat].

Another student explained how powerful her learning about colorblind theories and ideologies were for her understanding and growth. She wrote in her journal assignment,

> I wanted to think that I was colorblind, but I know that I am not entirely so. The very fact that I am aware of differences, fascinating though they may be, means that race (or ethnic background) does matter.

The students were able to make meaningful connections with the theoretical perspectives presented in class and in readings. They were able to apply those theoretical perspectives both in their future thinking and understanding as well as their practice in the schools.

A female student described an experience that had a powerful influence on her thinking about culturally and racially diverse individuals:

> Right before I came to this program I was with the Peace Corp [*sic*] for awhile, and that was my first opportunity of being a minority. And that probably was the main push to where I feel that I am today. Without that experience I would probably be a lot closer to the way I was raised, my background. . . . So I think that that helped me to where I am today.

To be clear, the preservice teacher's experience in the Peace Corps was critical to her new knowledge about diversity but the format of the course was even more important because it helped the preservice teacher process—to think through—the experience in the Peace Corps and to make connections to her teaching. The structure of such courses is very important to breakdown stereotypes, prejudice, and racism, not reify them. Thus, courses in teacher education can help guide students to more appropriate insights, whereas unexamined and unsupported experiences like she had in the Peace Corps could cause her to develop inaccurate and harmful perceptions of culturally and racially diverse individuals.

Other preservice teachers reported the necessity to have student teaching experiences in culturally and racially diverse contexts:

> [One of my teaching experiences] had English Language Learners from nine different countries. So, I've really had the opportunity to test out a lot of things we've been talking about in class and try and formulate my own opinions on them.

Another student who was initially not convinced of the need to focus on cultural and racial diversity declared,

> But now my current placement, my fifth grade placement at [Jonesboro], it's about 50/50. So it really is much more evident to me—the different cultures that are in my classroom. And I have thought about it.

Many of the preservice teachers transformed their curriculum and pedagogies to perhaps better reflect the students whom they taught. The preservice teachers actually discussed how they were (re)thinking and (re)developing their own practices to better reflect the cultural and racial compositions that they encountered in the classroom. Where assessment was concerned, a female student explained in an interview,

> I learned in my last teaching placement with a majority of African American students [that] they're very much more towards verbal learning. A couple of times I gave them [the African American students] a choice of assessments, written or verbal, and they almost always chose to tell me verbally. And just little differences like that—I think it has a big implication on my teaching because if you're not paying attention to those things then you're short changing that student if you're not looking at how they learn the best.

In an interview, a female student declared,

> I just recently did this project with my kids. It was like Cinderella stories from different countries, and one of the stories was a Mexican Cinderella, and my girls from Mexico really wanted to have that story. So it was something that they could relate to. They had a bunch of other people in their group as well. . . . Part of the book was written in Spanish and so they [the students from other ethnic backgrounds] said they liked learning in Spanish along with the book too. So that kind of opened my eyes as well. It was something that the girls from Mexico could relate to. It made them feel a little bit more comfortable I think. It was also kind of an eye-opening experience for other people [too]. . . . And we talked a lot about how they're similar to the story that they know and how they're different. And we also talked about why those differences are there.

Finally, many of the preservice teachers were not intimidated by the idea of teaching in a diverse or urban setting. Some even welcomed "the challenge." For example, one student insisted,

> I think that's more of a challenge, but I like it [teaching in a very diverse context]. . . . I think it causes more challenges, more obstacles, but I like it. I don't know why I like it. I just think it's kind of interesting . . . everybody has a different idea . . . it leaves a discussion so much better.

The vast majority of the preservice teachers reported their confidence and desires to teach in a highly diverse setting but not necessarily an urban one. A female student explained,

> Maybe not prepared but I'm definitely not afraid of the challenge. I definitely . . . I will say before starting teaching this year I grew up in private school, grew up in an all girl's private school in the South, and I had no intention of teaching public [school] anyway, not even [Concord] which is all but private. . . . I see myself being much more happier [*sic*] in the diverse setting . . . because it's a different . . . it's more challenging. It's a different challenge. I feel like I can almost work with the students more than with the culture of the parents on top. It's a different culture. When there's a lot of diversity you have a different variety of cultures and so the mix of it is so much more interesting than the monotony of where I grew up. So yeah, I can definitely see myself working . . . I mean I'll just tell you the honest truth—I'm not going to go back to "South Central L.A." and work in [she stops here, and concludes] . . . but diverse, yes.

This preservice teacher admits that some contexts might be too "different" or urban such as "South Central L.A." but welcomes the challenge of teaching in other diverse settings. Even after the course and her student teaching experience, another student expressed her dismay and concerns about teaching in an urban school:

> So I think I'm very well prepared to go into your average suburban city school, but I would say I'm not with your urban. And that's probably why I'm scared. I guess I feel like it would just be me out there trying to make things work because I don't have very many tools.

Even with all the efforts from the seminar, this preservice teacher still did not feel prepared to teach in an urban school. The preservice teacher's lack of confidence points to a weakness of the course. However, even this teacher reported just "how helpful and insightful" the course was for her. Without the course, she probably would not be prepared to, as she explained, "teach very many minority children well." Thus, many (the vast majority) of the preservice teachers reported that they were prepared to teach in urban and highly diverse settings whereas a few did not. Either way, the interactions from the course likely brought the vast majority to new levels of skills, awareness, and consciousness, and they were one step closer to being successful teachers with students who attend urban schools. Moreover, this teacher and the other teachers in the course were provided with skills to figure out how to teach in any context. They were challenged to pose inquiry-oriented questions—tough questions—that they would not have posed without having taken the course.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Teacher education courses that study and focus on urban education and diversity are critical to the understanding and knowledge development of preservice teachers. The preservice teachers in this study reported new levels of enlightenment, awareness, and knowledge as a result of the course. This new and expanded knowledge also was demonstrated, on some level, in their teaching with students in public schools.

We (teachers in P-12 and teacher educators) cannot teach in a color-blind or culture-blind (Ford et al., 2005) fashion if we wish to affirm the students under our charge. Our students have changed—so must the curriculum from prekindergarten through graduate school. Teacher education programs must play a central role in helping preservice teachers develop the pedagogical and content knowledge necessary to meet the needs of all students. However, I also recognize the complexities of studying and understanding race and racism in teaching and learning. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained, race is grossly undertheorized

in education. Thus, much more attention on race is needed in studying teacher education.

It is surely in education courses that preservice (and practicing) teachers can develop into more successful teachers of students in urban schools. In fact, as James (2004) explained, courses that focus on urban education can afford us "the opportunity to broaden our awareness and arrive at deeper, informed and more complex understandings of the issues facing students in the community" (p. 20). Moreover, because colleges of education are under such scrutiny to provide evidence of their effectiveness, we must begin to document our successes (and struggles) in helping teachers develop the competencies and skills necessary to be successful in classrooms, particularly in urban schools. Furthermore, we must document the effects of our courses on the teaching of our teacher candidates and the learning of students whom they teach. As our nation's schools become increasingly diverse with students, and as the teaching force remains relatively White and middle class, teacher education programs are faced with the arduous task of preparing teachers to provide optimal learning opportunities for all students in public schools.

Courses must be developed and structured to help ensure that all students are provided access to what Delpit (1995) called the "culture of power." Delpit described five aspects to power:

> (a) Issues of power are enacted in classrooms; (b) there are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a "culture of power;" (c) the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power; (d) if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; and (e) those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 24)

In this article, I have introduced a developmental typology used to analyze the learning and growth among the preservice teachers as a result of our course together. Essentially, certain interactions or experiences are gravely important for preservice teachers to

develop the knowledge and understanding necessary to teach in urban and diverse schools.

Preservice teachers must gain insights and awareness about cultural and racial diversity to build new knowledge and also to tear down so many stereotypes that they have internalized and acted on for years because of the privileges (McIntosh, 1990) they have enjoyed—not having to think about the complexities of race, culture, and SES. As Gordon (1990) explained, however, "critiquing your own assumptions about the world—especially if you believe the world works for you" (p. 88) is indeed a difficult and complex task. And developing and structuring teacher education courses in ways that provide spaces for critique and, at the same time, agency are not easy.

Thus, critical reflection is a necessary interaction for preservice teachers. It was not enough for the preservice teachers to reflect on various entities, situations, and contexts; rather, reflection needed to be couched in critique of such phenomena. Such reflection needed to focus on the preservice teachers (themselves), their students, and their students' experiences and communities. In short, preservice teachers needed to have interactions that allowed for relational reflection; that is, the preservice teachers needed to focus on themselves, their own experiences, life worlds, privileges, struggles, and positions *in relation* to others (their students, their students' parents, their students' communities, and their students' ways of knowing, for example). Critical reflection was needed to guide the preservice teachers through the posing of and answering of tough questions beyond our course and into their classrooms.

Finally, a focus on theory and practice was necessary. Spaces are needed to help preservice teachers think through and connect conceptual learning and knowledge to practice. Ideally, courses should introduce theoretical notions around urban education and some of the real endemic and ingrained realities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) inherent to those contexts, such as racism and sexism. In addition, student teaching and/or practicum experiences need to be offered in conjunction with such courses to scaffold and bridge learning.

NOTES

1. Several selected readings guided our conversations and thinking as we developed the course. These readings were selected for a number of reasons. Initially, we discussed readings that each of us had read that focused on issues of diversity and (preservice) teaching. Later, we used suggestions and works cited within the bibliographies of the articles, books, and book chapters and incorporated those. In a few instances, colleagues and graduate students suggested additional readings. The readings included the following: Johnson (2002), Ford (1996), Milner and Woolfolk (2003), Tatum (1992), Ellsworth (1989), Freire (1998), Gay (2000), McIntosh (1990), Paley (2000), Richardson and Placier (2001), Jackson and Davis (2000), hooks (1994), Gordon (2001), Darling-Hammond (1995), Foster (1997), and Howard (1999).

2. I use the term *homogeneous* loosely here to refer to the reality that suburban schools tend to have less variance than urban schools in terms of socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnic diversity. That is, students tend to come from similar SES levels and to be disproportionately White. I acknowledge that there is no such thing as a homogeneous classroom—even in classrooms where students come from the same SES group and share the same ethnic background, the students will have different learning styles, values, beliefs, and behaviors.

3. As preservice teachers seeking teaching certification, the interns/participating preservice teachers shared a classroom with a mentor teacher, an experienced teacher working in a school. The interns teach approximately 8 to 10 weeks during both semesters of their graduate programs. The interns' teaching is well monitored by the mentor teachers, other faculty in the school, the school principal, as well as university supervisors. After completing the internship program, students enter the teaching profession as 2nd-year teachers, having had 1 year of intensive student teaching.

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