

# ***The Role of African American Mentor Teachers in Preparing White Preservice Teachers for African American Student Populations***

**Jean Moule**

**Karen M. Higgins**

**Oregon State University**

**Oregon State University**

*How do we bridge the mismatch between teachers and students based on race and ethnicity currently in our nation's schools? The teaching force remains overwhelmingly White, while the percentage of K-12 students of color continues to rise. Because of cultural dissonance, teachers may not understand the needs of their students. This study shows evidence of bridging this preparation gap and confirms findings by others of the impact fieldwork among elementary students of color may quickly make on preservice teachers' perspectives and abilities to teach children of color. Additionally, the authors uncover evidence that African American mentor teachers are critical in helping to produce culturally competent and successful teachers of African American children, especially White preservice teachers with limited experiences in diversity.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

How do we bridge the mismatch between teachers and students based on race and ethnicity currently in our nation's schools? The teaching force remains overwhelmingly White while the percentage of K-12 students of color continues to rise. In one report, Finders (1992) stated, "As an Anglo teacher, I struggle to quiet voices from my own farm family, echoing as always from some unstated standard." She asked, "How can we untangle our own deeply entrenched assumptions?" (p. 60). Because of cultural dissonance, teachers may not understand the needs of their students, and being prepared to teach is not equivalent to being prepared to teach students of color (Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006).

This study shows evidence of bridging this preparation gap through lived and shared experiences, and confirms findings by others of the impact placement among elementary students of color may quickly make in preservice teachers' perspectives (Aaronsohn, Carter & Howell, 1995). This work has implications for helping to overcome the overwhelming presence of White perspectives in our nation's schools (Sleeter, 2001). Furthermore, evidence is shown that African American mentor teachers are critical in helping to produce culturally competent and successful teachers of African American children.

## **CONTEXT AND PURPOSE**

The University's Professional Teacher Education Program (PTEP) is a graduate-level program culminating in an initial teaching license, with requisites for completing a Master of Arts in Teaching degree. Although attempts have been made to bring a more diverse student population into the program, the reality is that the majority of the preservice teachers at the University are White and middle to upper-middle class. Because of supervision constraints, the majority of the preservice teachers also complete their student teaching within the University School District (pseudonym, USD) which surrounds the university. The student population within the USD, although somewhat linguistically and socioeconomically diverse, is lacking in cultural and racial diversity (of the 7,600 students, 9% of them are identified as minority at the time of the study).

As the proportion and number of children of color in the nation's schools increases, the need for teachers who have multicultural perspectives is heightened. Barry and Lechner (1995)

demonstrated that teaching about different cultural groups may actually increase or affirm preservice teachers' stereotypes. Other researchers (Asher, 2007; Furman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Middleton, 2002; Ramsey, 2004; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007) confirm the complexity of issues around teacher education in a pluralistic society. Preservice teachers realize they need preparation to teach in culturally diverse settings, yet, even after the best of programs, feel uncomfortable or under-prepared for the task (Sleeter, 2001).

As members of the elementary education faculty in the College of Education at the University the authors observed that the preservice teachers were gaining comfortability in their primary student teaching placement in the USD. Were they likely to seek future roles with children they could identify with? Could one enlarge their boundaries and their understanding by leading them to experience other ways to interact and other ways of knowing? Blair and Jones (1998) described how teacher-student interaction styles may severely hamper the learning process for a child whose cultural discourse style differs greatly from the teacher's style. No matter how bright and well-meaning preservice teachers are, could they break out of their set scripts for behavior?

Just getting to know people of color, increases preservice teachers' ability to work sensitively with children of color in the classroom (Duarte & Reed, 2004; Hinchey, 1994; Moule, 2007; Sleeter, 2001; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998). Such experiences replace preservice teachers' stereotypes with shared human connections. Aaronsohn, Carter, and Howell (1995) concluded that "Once inside the school . . . students experienced the shock that accompanies a contradiction between expectations and reality" (p. 8). Perhaps, the key to preparing preservice teachers for culturally pluralistic classrooms is not simply through reading and thinking about diversity, but a rich immersion experience in another culture. The researchers proposed an Eisenhower grant that would give the preservice teachers this immersion experience in an inner-city school. Would a program like this work as a way to increase sensitivity and desire to teach in urban contexts? It was idealistic. It was funded. Now what?

After months of planning and weeks of work, thirteen preservice teachers were placed on-site at Fannie Hamer Elementary School (pseudonym) in a large urban district in the northwestern part of town for three weeks. The population of Hamer was about 730 students and included 620 African American children.

The preservice teachers were placed in eight different classrooms. Five pairs of preservice teachers were placed with five mentor teachers and three lone preservice teachers were placed with other mentor teachers. Seven of the mentor teachers were teachers of color and five were African American. All preservice teachers taught a mathematics or science work sample that necessitated teaching a unit with a minimum of 10 lessons, a state requirement for receiving an initial teaching license. In addition, a series of workshops were held prior to and during the time the preservice teachers were at Hamer. Mentor teachers from Hamer came to the University to help support the diversity strand of the workshops, and on-site science lessons and workshops, were facilitated at Hamer for and with teachers, university faculty, and preservice teachers. University faculty provided on-site support during this experience.

The overall purpose of this study was to strengthen the classroom practices of preservice White teachers for a diverse student population while providing strong, on-site support in this diverse setting. The project aligned well with the PTEP mission statement: "The purpose of teacher education is to create caring, reflective professionals who are committed to building a democratic, multicultural society that enhances economic equity and cultural pluralism" (Winograd, 2001, p. 1).

The focus of this report was the White preservice teachers who were placed with African American mentors to answer, "Were there specific benefits from pairing the preservice teachers with African American mentor teachers?"

## **LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES, AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Of the studies reviewed related to preparing preservice teachers for teaching in or about diversity, approximately one-half looked only at preservice teacher attitudes. The others looked at some

aspects of teacher practice as well, but a number of these were through teacher self-reporting. Studies on actual field observations were rare. Although a lack of connection between theory and practice, or even of a theoretical base for field experiences, has been noted in the past by Guyton and McIntyre (1990), and Washington (1981), other studies have begun to make this connection to the impact of fieldwork (Duarte & Reed, 2004; Goodman & Fish, 1997; Goodwin, 2004; Higgins & Moule, in press; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2003; Parsons, 2005; Ramsey, 2004; Sleeter, 2001; Sobel & French, 1998; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004).

The authors did not find a large body of work connecting the college instruction of preservice teachers to the K-12 classroom performance of these preservice teachers in the area of cultural diversity, nor were well-established or clear directions found on how to best focus limited resources and energy to this effort. Many of the cited works have a component of fieldwork in the inner city, so that was a clear priority. The next step was to begin to understand the theory underlying both the current thinking and this study.

The researchers and the preservice teachers with whom they work use cultural lenses that form the basis of thinking about theory when engaging in multicultural education. Preservice teachers' thinking about multicultural issues in education, whether rooted in basic Eurocentric assumptions (Loewen, 1995), personal history-based beliefs (Ramsey, 2004), unexamined racial privilege (Marshall, 2002), or course work material, formulates the theory that they bring with them into the K-12 or college classroom.

Hinchey (1994) wrestled with the issue of deeply held assumptions about the world after watching her daughter deal with new information about others,

We all hold beliefs about the world born of our past experiences and shaped by the languages, customs, and assumptions of the cultures in which we are immersed from birth. Often, these beliefs are so embedded that we are unaware of them until some startling experience calls into question a deeply held conviction. (p. 28)

The dividing line between successful and unsuccessful multicultural educators may be those who are willing to challenge their assumptions with those who are not, regardless of their own background. This transformation is called becoming culturally competent, and is defined simply as being able to work effectively with children who come from cultures other than one's own. Furthermore it entails mastering a complex set of awarenesses and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a unique set of skills that underlie effective cross-cultural teaching (Diller & Moule, 2005). It means "broadening what you already know, gaining specific cultural knowledge and remaining vigilant as to the cultural appropriateness of various tasks, methods, and perspectives you might routinely take for granted" (p. 187). In their self-assessment of cultural competence, Diller and Moule (2005) used items such as recognizing biased language and media, the ability to address stereotypes, and understanding oppression and racial identity development as indicators of cultural competence.

One preservice teacher may clearly understand that she has much to learn in the area of diversity. She will listen openly in a course on multicultural issues in education, engaging the course content and her own biases. She has a willingness to recognize the possibility that her assumptions may be rooted in a worldview that is not shared and valued by others and vice versa. Through the self-assessment she may begin to understand, for example, how her membership in different groups influences the power she possesses, and how to use that power constructively.

Another preservice teacher may be intelligent and capable of critical analysis, yet sees the world through a singular lens. Not able to recognize and value other perspectives, he may not be able to engage the content during a course on multicultural issues; he may not recognize his limited perspective; and defending his position, he may be resistant to come to multicultural awareness and therefore, culturally competent teaching. These attitudes and lack of competencies will come out in both subtle and explicit ways in the classroom.

Helms (1990) described the struggle European Americans have confronting their own transitions through stages of racial identity. Several researchers use Helm's model of racial identity for theorizing why White preservice teachers have barriers for understanding diversity

(Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Marshall, 2002; O'Donnell, 2002). Their findings support the authors' work with preservice teachers, and suggest that unless the identity development is directly addressed, other strategies may fail. The authors taught a modified version of Helms' theory in recent years and that group of preservice teachers had some familiarity with racial identity development as a means of helping them to negotiate their thinking through their changing perspectives.

Because of the commitments to fairness and equality, "Are our programs and courses safe places in which to change perspectives?" "Safe" is defined as an environment in which the feelings of each individual are considered. The authors agree with Burbules (1993) who believed that sensible and fair rules of participation are not enough to make a classroom feel safe for many students. Burbules noted, "It often will not be enough just to listen; one might have to work to create an environment in which a silenced voice feels the confidence or security to speak" (p. 33). Are there safe and supported contexts in which to learn and change thinking? Not only is this essential for the growth of the preservice teachers themselves, it is also important to model this atmosphere for their future classrooms. Another key question is: "Is this classroom safe for children of color?" This question of "is it safe?" was defined as a central teacher characteristic in the research of Gonsalves-Pinto (1997) and Moule (1998) and implied in the work of others (Jupp, 2004; Moule, 1991, 2004; Nieto, 1994; Noddings, 1997; Parsons, 2005). The mission was to provide opportunities with margins of safety for the preservice teachers in the study group. They need safe environments for their own growth as well as a model to follow so that they could provide safe and growing environments for their students of color and a solid foundation for understanding diversity for all of their students.

The recognition of societal and personal biases is not easy, especially among those whose isolation has allowed them the choice to ignore matters of race. The authors have made every attempt to structure the program and interactions so that the exchanges were open and honest. During the time in this large urban area, opportunities were included for each author to privately exchange verbally or in writing with each preservice teacher. Their personal journals indicated the importance they placed on this space and time to reflect.

This supported immersion in the culture of a predominantly African American school in an inner city should give the preservice teachers a unique perspective and opportunity to experience teaching in a different environment. Also having mentor teachers who were African American should enhance this placement and give the preservice teachers added perspectives. As other studies have been enlightening (Sleeter, 2001; Sobel & French, 1998), it is hoped that this experience would change the preservice teachers' thinking about diversity and be reflected in their classrooms.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants and Timeline***

**The Preservice Teachers.** The preservice teachers were part of a cohort of 60 students in the PTEP. In October and November of the research year, all members of the cohort were invited to two workshops, one on culturally responsive mathematics and one on culturally responsive science, in preparation for understanding and teaching in a diverse setting. During the mathematics workshop, two of the African American mentors came from a large urban area to the University. In March, a month before the placement began, the 13 students who were to take part in the three-week urban immersion met together for the first time as a subset of the cohort to discuss placement details.

**The Mentor Teachers.** The five African American mentor teachers in this study ranged from a first-year teacher to a teacher who planned to retire the following year. They taught in grades K through 5. All were female. Table 1 presents the preservice teachers and their placements with African American or White teachers.

**Table 1***Preservice Teachers Gender and Placement With African American Mentors*

<i>Preservice Teacher</i>		<i>Mentor</i>	
<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>White</b>
	X	x	
X		x	
	X	x	
	X	x	
	X	x	
	X	x	
X		x	
	X	x	
X		x	
	X		x
X			x
	X		x
	X		x

**The Researchers.** The researchers for this study are an African American female Assistant Professor and a European American female Associate Professor at a large Research I institution.

***Mode of Inquiry and Data Sources***

This study used qualitative methods of inquiry for its primary sources of data. University faculty members were participant observers who kept field notes during the three-week on-site teaching experience. Some descriptive statistics were also collected. The following data sources were obtained during the course of the school year and indicate the types of data used in the analysis:

- Applications from the preservice teachers at the beginning of this study
- Observations of preservice teachers' teaching by mentors and university faculty
- Task Analyses on both preservice teachers' and mentors' teaching
- Preservice teachers' work samples that included pre and post tests of student achievement and reflections on their teaching
- Preservice teachers' journals during their time at Hamer (these included interactive comments from us)
- Preservice teachers' reflections when they returned to their primary placement
- Researcher notes and self-study

***Data Analyses and Results***

Most of the material shared and quoted in this study was from the preservice teachers' journals. This body of material was analyzed using a constant comparative method. Items were coded by topic and new topics were added as they appeared in the journals. Both researchers conducted independent coding of the material and then compared their results.

Analysis of the data showed that the preservice teachers understanding and ability to work with diverse populations was greatly enhanced as indicated by several measures. The researchers first described the preservice teachers and the mentor teachers and then detailed the new perspectives of the preservice teachers as evidenced by self-report. Next they analyzed observations of their teaching efficacy in a culturally diverse setting. Finally, the authors

considered the impact of the mentor teachers and preservice teacher peers on the learning gains of the preservice teachers.

Narratives were highly valued as means of exploring and reporting research (Eisner, 1997; Higgins & Goodhue-Pierce, 1996; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Moule, 2005; Scheurich & Young, 1997); therefore extended excerpts from the data have been included. The authors also purport that this method of reporting is more likely to be remembered and transferred into practice by others (Schank, 1990).

### ***Changing Levels of Preservice Teachers' Engagement and Perspectives***

For most of this research, the data from the eight European American preservice teachers who were placed with five African American mentors were used. As an introduction, each preservice teacher was allowed to speak by answering questions posed to them on their applications in August: "Why are you interested in this project? What do you bring to this project? What do you hope to gain from participating in this project?"

JC. The area in which I want to move is very diverse and I would love to get this experience . . . I am open-minded and love new and exciting situations. I want to learn about new cultures.

LD. The reason that I am very interested in this project is because I have . . . very little experience with diverse, multicultural settings.

FH. I have not had any experience in a very diverse classroom. I am moving to California . . . after I graduate . . . it will be much different . . . I hope the children and teachers can help to broaden my mind and knowledge regarding meeting all children's needs.

AH. . . a great opportunity to . . . see how classroom management and curriculum works with a highly diverse population . . . I thrive and am interested in diverse classroom settings. I hope to gain a different perspective on teaching methods used in an urban area since in the future that is where I would like to teach.

JK. I have grown up in a rural area during my life and I have never been exposed to the city in an educational sense. Therefore, I am looking at this project in hopes of expanding my knowledge and experience of working with the children in this area. I will learn about the culture of the city and its children while learning about my strengths and weaknesses.

CL. A desire to work in urban elementary schools, a commitment to [the city] (my original home) . . . Experience in an urban elementary school, experience serving students of non-middle class and/or non-White backgrounds.

SM. I hope to gain an idea of what an underrepresented area is really like and how I respond to such an area.

DS. Desire to work with kids I can possibly relate more to (i.e., poor, single parent). A richer experience. Compare the large urban area community with the University town.

In February, when asked to share three words reflecting their fall walk-about days when they first visited Hamer School, they used words that indicated increasing emotional and psychological connections to the school and the children, such as, warm (3 times), energetic (twice), friendly, family, culture, welcoming, mutual-curiosity. This list revealed an increasing level of engagement, showing that the preservice teachers had moved from just observing their environment to participating in it.

The earlier list was compared to one at the end of placement in May with the following responses: lucky, thrilled, enlightened, enthusiastic, enriched, fortunate, tired, challenged, attached, care, learning, needs, and "sad to leave," and "expect the unexpected." While the first list is more descriptive, the second is more action-oriented, revealing that the preservice teachers are invested. They have moved from a detached outsider perspective to an emotional insider perspective.

It is not surprising that the preservice teachers began to feel that they were a part of the learning community. However, the words that they used to describe their original setting when they returned to their University town are even more revealing. Many preservice teachers

spontaneously compared their primary placement students with their students at Hamer. Those statements included: "Less contact, less eye contact," "too cool," "just going through the motions," "phony sweet . . . less connected." These terms expressed a new positive value for a culture they did not know before the placement.

### ***Profile of One African American Mentor Through a Preservice Teacher's Eyes***

This glimpse of one mentor teacher was used to begin to understand the mentor teachers as a group. One preservice teacher described feeling "overwhelmed, scared, and apprehensive" during her first week. After her African American mentor teacher spent long hours giving her strong, clear words on teaching, encouraging her personally, and supporting her in her placement, this same preservice teacher produced a work sample showing impressive student achievement. These interactions were foundations for the changes in engagement and subsequent effective teaching strategies.

The following excerpts were details from one preservice teacher's daily journal and showed not only the teacher's changing perspective, but also provided a vital picture of the passion and concern that seemed to be evident in many of the mentors at the school.

4/14 and 4/15—I see her [Mentor teacher] as a very strong nurturer and she knows the kids on many different levels . . . L takes on this amazing nurturer role . . . she reminds me of my grandmother who is very compassionate, loving, and WISE.

4/16—She lets them know when she is happy with them, but she has no hesitations to reveal to them when she is upset . . . I am just captivated watching her. She is truly in this for the kids and I know that I will learn very much from her.

4/17—L is brutally honest with the children, which I admire, yet this honesty could be perceived as harsh and very authoritarian. This honesty may not fly in a different setting and with a different culture. However, they know that she cares and respect and love her even when she is yelling at them or openly saying that she is mad and disappointed at them. She will raise her voice just as quick and she will soften it and soothe and nurture the children. Control and respect are very important in this environment. She knows that all of her students are very capable and she wants to see all of them succeed in school and in the game of life. I do believe that if L was too soft and non-responsive with the students, they would view it as "non-caring." Pretty crazy! Cultural differences are definitely shining through and this research is very interesting to me. It definitely changes the way I will plan my lessons and how my expectations will have to be stated very clearly and followed-up on. By no means could I ever manage the class the way L does, but I have to remember to be strong and firm and to not back down. I tend to be "too nice" sometimes. I am a little nervous about this.

### ***New Perspectives***

A train of thought that emerged from the above preservice teacher's journal showed a pattern of similar development among several preservice teachers: The preservice teachers found a more authoritarian discipline structure evident at this school. Preservice teachers said things like, "class management style takes getting used to," "assertive," "need to establish sense of authority," "[mentor] brutally honest with the students . . . harsh," and "the more strict I become, the better they get," even, "no more Mr. Nice Guy." The students found a more authoritarian discipline structure evident at Hamer compared to their primary placement in the University town.

At the same time, the preservice teachers noticed a balance to this more authoritarian structure and many felt their African American mentors, in particular, "cared more." Comments included: "[mentor and aide] care deeply," "compassionate, loving, wise, honest," "different teaching style connected to caring." These comments, again, were made in a comparison to their primary placement in the University town.

Examples of the preservice teachers' surprises about their new setting included their unexpected deep relationships with the students: "deep rapport," "never knew how exciting teaching could be," "treated like a long-lost friend," "warmth and compassion." Some developed a more accurate understanding of their students' environments: "surprised half of the class had computers at home," "I'd heard 'city kids weren't interested in learning' . . . found opposite,"

“very family oriented, watch out for each other,” “parent/teacher relationship stronger,” “comfortable walking in community.”

### ***New Perspectives Lead to Effective New Teaching Strategies***

As preservice teachers found the dichotomy that both strictness and caring increased, they moved to be both strict and more caring. The preservice teachers self-reported this change in their strategies. The authors also noted evidence of their teaching effectiveness as observed by others, and report two objective findings: the first is an analysis of on-task behavior; the second is a measure of student achievement.

**On-Task Behavior Analysis.** A measure of student engagement during the preservice teacher’s teaching time is one measure of the preservice teacher’s effectiveness. An example of such a measure would be a timed observation of on-task behavior for each student. As a baseline, preservice teachers were asked to measure student engagement during a similar lesson taught by the mentor teacher. The target performance measure was that student engagement during a preservice teacher’s lesson would be 80% of that observed during a mentor’s lesson. The actual results of this analysis are that student on-task behavior during the preservice teacher’s lesson was 95% of the on-task student behavior during the mentor teacher’s lesson. The result is 15% better than anticipated. The authors concluded that the preservice teachers were able to use classroom techniques that reflected best practices as measured by student on-task behavior.

**Student Achievement.** Pre-and post-assessment information on the students is the clearest way to report increase in student content knowledge, which shows the preservice teachers’ ability to use successful teaching strategies. Each preservice teacher’s pre-and post- tests were different depending on the subject areas chosen or assigned and the benchmarks used. All of the preservice teachers reported student achievement in the unit objectives which were tied to state benchmarks and common curriculum goals. An example from a 10-lesson work sample on measurement in a fourth grade classroom is provided: A pre-test showed that six students out of 21 had a good understanding of the material. A posttest showed that 16 of the 21 could successfully complete the material. This is an increase from 29% to 76% of the students knowing the content in this unit due to the preservice teacher’s efforts.

Another preservice teacher’s assessment at the kindergarten level showed 20 out of 23 students scoring the maximum points on the posttest. These students included two out of three students with learning disabilities for whom she successfully adapted the lesson. She concluded that the assessment showed, “direct evidence of student gains,” leaving her “ecstatic.”

The foundation for these learning gains in both the students in the classroom and the others involved in this project was often the relationship between mentor and preservice teacher. This is further explored in the next section.

### ***Taking a Wider Lens: Further Investigations and Inferences***

Interpretations often have a holistic quality. The authors began to draw their conclusions from a constant comparative, detailed analysis; however, as they progressed, they took a wider angle lens to the material. Stake (1995) referred to such interpretations in this manner,

The logical path to assertions often is apparent neither to the reader nor to the researchers themselves. What we describe happening in the classroom and what we assert do not have to be closely tied together. For assertions, we draw from understandings deep within us, understandings whose derivations may be some hidden mix of personal experience, scholarship, assertions of other researchers... It is not uncommon for case study researchers to make assertions on a relatively small database. (p. 12)

Some of the connections reported should be noted about the preservice teachers and their placements (see Table 2). A unique feature of this project was the placement of each preservice teacher with a mentor of color and/or with a partner preservice teacher. Can we tease out any



difference between having an African American mentor or not? And what differences did the preservice teacher partner make? Although the database is small, a look at Table 2 reveals the matches with mentors and partners for each preservice teacher. One column is a measure of “large gains in working with diverse students.” As the authors analyzed the data they realized that the original 13 preservice teachers in this study had varying levels of “gains” in their perspectives toward and ability to work with African American children.

**Table 2**

*Preservice Teacher Placement With African American Mentors and Partner Pairs*

<b>Preservice Teacher</b>	<b>African American Mentors</b>	<b>Large Gains with African American Students</b>	<b>Partner or Solo Match: Positive or Questionable</b>
<i>Pair One</i>			
Female	X	X	Questionable match
Male	X	X	Questionable match
<i>Pair Two</i>			
Female <sup>a</sup>	X		Good match
Female <sup>a</sup>	X		Good match
<i>Pair Three</i>			
Female	X	X	Good match
Female	X		Good match
<i>Pair Four</i>			
Male <sup>a</sup>	X		Questionable match
Female	X	X	Questionable match
<i>Pair Five</i>			
Female			Good match
Female			Good match
<i>Solo</i>			
Male	X	X	Solo
Female			Solo
Male <sup>a</sup>			Solo

<sup>a</sup> Preservice teachers had prior experience in diversity.

The gain in cultural competence is based on the researchers’ summation of preservice teacher work and attitudes as evidenced by personal interaction (Moule, 1998), changes in their responses to a self-assessment of cultural competence, overall growth as shown in their journal entries, and self-report on the question, “What did you learn?” This global assessment is difficult to quantify. However, some research (Gladwell, 2005; Moule, in press) indicated that intuitive assessments often mirror and support more objective measures such as an analysis of written material. At this point, the authors are raising the questions and sharing their inferences from the data.

***The Presence of an African American Mentor***

Did the presence of an African American mentor help preservice teachers negotiate the racial/cultural differences more thoroughly than those preservice teachers who were placed with

other teachers? Again, Table 2 reveals that nine of the preservice teachers had African American mentors. Of these nine, five made strong positive gains in their perspectives toward and ability to work with African American children. This finding seems to support the conclusion that, of the preservice teachers who had the least prior experience with diversity, five out of the six who were in the room with an African American mentor had the largest gains from this placement.

It is interesting to note that three of the four preservice teachers who had African American mentors and did not have the same type of gains were also the ones who had prior evidence of intense experience in diversity. It is logical that this would be the case since these preservice teachers came into their placements at Hamer with acquired skills and attitudes based on their previous histories in this area. The researchers also found that preservice teachers who did not work with African American mentors did not make these same gains. Based on this limited study, the greatest impact occurred with the combination of White preservice teachers who had limited experiences in diversity with African American mentors.

### ***Partners May Make a Difference***

Although the experience itself was better supported when pairs were well-matched, Table 2 may suggest that the preservice teachers placed with a peer with whom they had good rapport were less likely to move out of their comfort zone for greater learning. In the six cases where partners had good to excellent rapport, only one who did not have prior experience with diversity seemed to make large global gains in working with this culturally diverse student population. (It could also be noted that the well-matched pairs in this study were all of the same gender and the pairs that did not seem well-matched were different genders, however, the authors offer no interpretation at this point.)

### **CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Exploring the new perspectives that resulted from this research has given insights into the complexities of preparing preservice teachers for culturally pluralistic classrooms through relevant field work in culturally diverse schools. This was a difficult undertaking, and many lessons were learned through investigating some of the issues, problems, and successes because all tried to make sense of and grow from the experiences.

Whether or not studies like this may be generalized is a matter of debate. The authors chose to rely on the resonance this report has for other teacher educators and researchers. Ellis (1998) wrote,

A story's 'validity' can be judged by whether it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is authentic and lifelike, believable and possible; the story's generalizability can be judged by whether it speaks to readers about their experience. (p. 29)

Schank (1990) stated, "Further, the more one communicates well, the more one's listeners may be able to respond with relevant experiences of their own that may aid in the generalization process" (p. 235).

The desire to return to Fannie Hamer School in this large urban area is a burning one. Beyond the shared results, the authors contend that this type of placement is the only way one can begin to ensure cultural competency among preservice teachers that come to teacher preparation with little or no multicultural background or understanding. They increasingly read literature that supports the necessity of fieldwork, and more importantly, moderated fieldwork with sensitive faculty and mentor teachers onsite (Bradfield-Kreider, 1999; Duarte & Reed, 2004; Higgins & Moule, in press; Sleeter, 2001; Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szcesniul, & Gordon, 2006).

The authors are driven by the preservice teachers' comments such as "I feel like I was given some sort of prize or reward," "otherwise unattainable memories and experiences," "one of the best teaching experiences I have ever had," "experience gave me a fresh new perspective, energy

and excitement,” “I learned that I value, respect, and need diversity,” “I miss the diversity, energy, spirit, and overall feeling of Hamer . . . Unless you have been there, it is hard to describe to an outsider.”

Following this study, the authors initiated an immersion program that placed preservice teachers for a full year in linguistically and culturally diverse settings. As part of the immersion program, preservice teachers are required to more directly study and apply cultural competencies and to study White racial identity development. They have begun to weave their stories of their identity development into their papers and discussions. The authors are using the results from this study to support the inclusion of White racial identity development as an important focus for teacher preparation, in accordance with other studies (Burke, 2007; Harris, 2006; Johnson, 2002; Marshall, 2002; O'Donnell, 2002; Ottavi, Pope-Davis & Dings, 1994; Tatum, 1992), because identity development must be an integral competency for teaching in a racially diverse community.

## REFERENCES

- Aaronsohn, E., Carter, C. J., & Howell, M. (1995). Preparing monocultural teachers for a multicultural world: Attitudes toward inner-city schools. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 28, 5-9.
- Asher, N. (2007). Made in the (multicultural) U. S. A.: Unpacking tensions of race, culture, gender, and sexuality in education. *Educational Researcher*, 36, 65-73.
- Barry, N. H., & Lechner, J. V. (1995). Preservice teachers' attitudes about and awareness of multicultural teaching and learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11, 149-161.
- Blair, T. R., & Jones, D. L. (1998). *Preparing for student teaching in a pluralistic classroom*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bollin, G. G., & Finkel, J. (1995). White racial identity as a barrier to understanding diversity: A study of preservice teachers. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 28, 25-30.
- Bradfield-Kreider, P. (1999). Mediated cultural immersion and antiracism; An opportunity for monocultural preservice teachers to begin the dialogue. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 1, 29-32.
- Burbules, N. C. (1993). *Dialogue in teaching: Theory and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Burke, D. (2007). *An autoethnography of Whiteness*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oregon State University, Corvallis.
- Diller, J. V., & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Duarte, V., & Reed, T. (2004). Learning to teach in urban settings. *Childhood Education*, 80, 245-250.
- Eisner, E. (1997). The promises and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher*, 26, 4-10.
- Ellis, C. (1998). Evocative autoethnography: Writing emotionally about our lives. In W. Tierney & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Representation and the text: Reframing the narrative voice* (pp. 116-139). New York: SUNY.
- Finders, M. (1992). Looking at lives through ethnography. *Educational Leadership*, 50, 60-65.
- Furman, J. (2007, April). *Preparing (and not preparing) teachers for diverse classrooms: A review of reviews on multicultural teacher education*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Chicago.
- Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Gonsalves-Pinto, L. (1997). Voices from the trenches: Students' insights regarding multicultural teaching/learning. *Multicultural Education*, 5, 44-48.
- Goodman, J., & Fish, D. R. (1997). Against-the-grain teacher education: A study of coursework, field experience, and perspectives. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 48, 96-107.

- Goodwin, A. (2004). Exploring the perspectives of teacher educators of color: What to they bring to teacher education? *Issues in Teacher Education*, 13, 7-24.
- Guyton, E., & McIntyre, D. J. (1990). Student teaching and school experience. In W. R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education*, (pp. 514-534). New York: Macmillan.
- Harris, G. (2006). *A story of White racial identity development*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Helms, J. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice* (Vol. 129). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Higgins, K. M., & Goodhue-Pierce, L. (1996). The role of stories in the formation of a university/public school collaborative identity. *Educational Action Research*, 4, 297-306.
- Higgins, K., & Moule, J. (in press). "No more Mr. Nice Guy": Preservice teachers' conflict with classroom management in an African American elementary school. *Multicultural Perspectives*.
- Hill, L. (2000). What does it take to change minds? Intellectual development of preservice teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51, 50-62.
- Hinchey, P. H. (1994). Introducing diversity: We don't have to wait for a program. *Action in Teacher Education*, 16, 28-36.
- Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (Eds.). (1994). *Data management and analysis methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Johnson, L. (2002). "My eyes have been opened": White teachers and racial awareness. *Journal of Teacher Education* 53, 153-167.
- Jupp, J. (2004, Spring). Culturally relevant teaching. *Multicultural Review*, 13, 33-40.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lewis, A. E. (2003). *Race in the schoolyard: Negotiating the color line in classrooms and communities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.
- Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York: New Press.
- Marshall, P. L. (2002). Racial identity and challenges of educating White youths for cultural diversity. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4, 9-14.
- Middleton, V. A. (2002). Increasing preservice teachers' diversity beliefs and commitment. *The Urban Review* 34, 343-361.
- Moule, J. (1991). Consultant teacher model: A means of providing inservice to regular classroom teachers. *A Different Drummer*, 7, 9-14.
- Moule, J. (1998). *My journey with preservice teachers: Reflecting on teacher characteristics that bridge multicultural education theory and classroom practice*. Unpublished dissertation, Oregon State University, Corvallis.
- Moule, J. (2004). Safe and growing out of the box: Immersion for social change. In J. J. Romo, P. Bradfield, & R. Serrano (Eds.), *Reclaiming democracy: Multicultural educators journeys toward transformative teaching* (pp. 147-171). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill.
- Moule, J. (2005). Implementing a social justice perspective in teacher education: Invisible burden for faculty of color. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 32, 23-42.
- Moule, J (2007, April). *Immersion for cultural competency: Growing activist educators*. Poster session presented at annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Chicago.
- Moule, J. (in press). Understanding unconscious bias and unintentional racism. *Phi Delta Kappan*.
- Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural educator* (3rd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Nieto, S. (1994). Affirmation, solidarity, and critique: Moving beyond tolerance in multicultural education. *Multicultural Education*, 1, 9-12, 35-38.
- Noddings, N. (1997). Accident, awareness, and actualization. In A. Neumann & P. L. Peterson (Eds.), *Learning from our lives: Women, research, and autobiography in education*, (pp. 166-182). New York: Teachers College Press.

- O'Donnell, J. (2002). Talking about race: The role of racial identity development models in antiracist pedagogy. *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education*, 1. Retrieved January 28, 2008, from <http://www.utpjournals.com/simile>
- Ottavi, T. M., Pope-Davis, D. B., & Dings, J. G. (1994). Relationship between White racial identity attitudes and self-reported multicultural counseling competencies. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 41, 149-154.
- Parsons, E. (2005). From caring as a relation to culturally relevant caring: A White teacher's bridge to Black students. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 38, 25-34.
- Ramsey, S. J. (2004). Autobiography of a teacher: A journey toward critical multiculturalism. *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly* 2, 45-52.
- Schank, R. C. (1990). *Tell me a story: A new look at real and artificial memory*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M. D. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Researcher*, 26, 4-16.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of Whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52, 94-106.
- Sobel, D., & French, N. (1998). A partnership to promote teacher preparation for inclusive, urban schools: Four voices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14, 793-806.
- Stachowski, L. L., & Mahan, J. M. (1998). Cross-cultural field placements: Student teachers learning from schools and communities. *Theory into Practice*, 37, 155-162.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62, 1-24.
- Washington, V. (1981). Impact of antiracism/multicultural education training on elementary teachers' attitudes and classroom behavior. *Elementary School Journal*, 81, 186-192.
- Watson, D., Charner-Laird, M., Kirkpatrick, C. L., Szczesiul, S. A., & Gordon, P. J. (2006). Effective teaching/effective urban teaching: Grappling with definitions, grappling with difference. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57, 395-409.
- Webb-Johnson, G., & Carter, N. P. (2007). Culturally responsive urban school leadership: Partnering to improve outcome for African American learners. *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*, 1, 77-98.
- Weinstein, C., Tomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55, 25-38.
- Winograd, K. (2001). *Professional teacher education program: Early childhood/elementary education*. Corvallis: Oregon State University.

#### **AUTHORS**

JEAN MOULE is Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher and Counselor Education College of Education, Oregon State University in Corvallis. She is co-author of the book, *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*.

KAREN M. HIGGINS is Associate Professor, Department of Teacher and Counselor Education, College of Education, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

All comments and queries regarding this article should be addressed to [moulej@oregonstate.edu](mailto:moulej@oregonstate.edu)