

Chapter 16

Designing Authentic Field– Based Experiences With Immigrant Students Through One University and Urban School Partnership

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to create a meaningful clinical experience for undergraduate pre-service teachers, this chapter explores how authentic interactions with English Language Learners (ELLs) within university-school partnerships work to foster pre-service teachers' feelings of multicultural efficacy. Qualitative data were collected through reflective journals, case study projects, and archival data. Analysis of data from participants' reactions to the clinical experience suggests that multiple factors intersected to create a positive, authentic field experience for participants. Emergent themes included the impact of sociological mindfulness and the power of students' stories and lived experiences on shaping teacher beliefs. The data suggests that establishing a partner school with strong leadership that embraces diversity and supports ELLs and creating structured field experience in which participants engage in mentoring/tutoring relationships with ELLs is critical to this process. Implications for teacher educators and teacher education programs are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Immigrant populations have grown at unprecedented rates in areas of the Southeast (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002; Wainer, 2004). Unlike historically identified primary immigrant destination states, these new growth areas¹ are populated by mostly Spanish-speaking newcomer immigrants (Fix & Passel, 2003). Currently, native Spanish speaking students make up the majority of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the U.S. These students often enter schools and classrooms with teachers who feel underprepared to meet their complex needs (Webster & Valeo, 2011). These changing demographics have transformed schools on multiple levels-diversifying school populations while creating new academic challenges in the classroom (Walker, Shafer, & Liam, 2004). Research shows that a teacher's ability to successfully meet the needs of students who are ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse can be influenced by their attitudes and prior experiences with different cultures (Irvine, 2003) and their level and effectiveness of teacher education training (Nieto, 2005). Given this change, we ask "How can university-school partnerships move beyond traditional methods of supporting the growth and development of pre-service teachers to better prepare them for the racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms?" The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the collaboration between one school and university program on the development of multicultural attitudes of pre-service teachers. To do this, we identified one school in critical need of support for their teachers and for their ELLs.

BACKGROUND

Educational scholars have long emphasized the value of strengthening university-school partnerships, yet specific frameworks that describe how partnerships are created and sustained are often more obscure (Baker, 2011). While much of the traditional university-school partnership literature viewed university partners as providing services to fulfill a need or deficit in P-12 schools, increasingly more prevalent are descriptions of universities' attempts to create mutually beneficial partnerships (Baker, 2011; Foote & Cook-Cottone, 2004; Sobel, Gutierrez, Zion, & Blanchett, 2011; Zeichner, 2010). Teacher education programs have often utilized school-university partnerships to facilitate clinical or field experiences for preservice teachers (Teitel, 2008). Studies suggest that clinical experiences represent one of the most crucial aspects of a teacher education program (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), yet the facilitation of the partnerships, experiences of teachers, and the time and quality of interactions are extremely varied (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Wilson, Flodan, and Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). In fact, educational researchers have criticized the "haphazard" nature of many clinical experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 40). Frequently mentioned issues related to field experiences include a lack of continuity between clinical experiences and university coursework (Wilson, Flodan, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001), incomplete understandings of sociopolitical and cultural factors that influence diverse communities (Sobel, Gutierrez, Zion, & Blanchett, 2011), and difficulties in convincing preservice teachers to shift previously held beliefs about teaching and learning (Sleeter, 2008; Wilson, Flodan, and Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

In order to provide rich learning environments for ELLs, teacher educators must insure that teachers are well equipped for increasingly diverse school settings. Among teachers with both high and low levels of self efficacy and feelings of preparedness, most still felt inadequately prepared to work with English Language Learners (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Siwatu, 2011). However, the issue of discomfort with diversity is multifaceted. Research indicates that many within the predominately white,

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