

## Building a Community of Educators versus Effecting Conceptual Change in Individual Students: Multicultural Education for Preservice Teachers

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The purpose of this paper is to present a model of multicultural college education alternative to a traditional model. We will develop a critique of traditional education, using an example of a multicultural college course in teacher education, and outline an alternative that is based on CHAT principles. We argue that the traditional model, based on a philosophy of knowledge transmission and a theory of ‘deficit correction’, leads, in the context of preservice teacher education, to attempts to ‘purify’ the students of their cultural misconceptions, biases, ineptness, ignorance, and racism. In the light of the limitations of this approach, we provide an alternative model of teacher education stemming from a sociocultural approach to learning. According to this model, learning for preservice teachers involves building a learning community of educators. We will illustrate our model with the program called La Red Mágica (“Magic Web” in English) aimed at preparing preservice teachers for working with (largely Spanish-speaking) minority children.

### *Dissatisfaction with a traditional concept of multicultural college education*

Conventional education is mainly concerned with the transmission of knowledge. The essential goal of this model is to mold students according to a set of skills, attitudes, and body of knowledge pre-established by the instructor. Students are often viewed as starting out inept, deficient, or biased. In the case of multicultural education, these deficiencies often include: negative stereotyping of minority children, racial prejudices, insensitive guidance and ways of talking, lack of knowledge of diverse cultural communicative styles, and discriminatory practices (e.g., tracking). Multicultural courses are considered to be remedies for such student deficiencies. Figure 1 presents this educational model.

-----Insert Figure 1 about here-----

Palmer (1998) argues that this model enshrines “the objectivist myth”, the four major elements of which are:

1. There are *objects of knowledge* that reside "out there" somewhere, which are captured as the "facts" of a given field.
2. There are *knowledge experts*: people trained to know these objects in their pristine form without allowing their own subjectivity to sully the purity of the objects themselves. This training takes place in a remote places called graduate schools, whose purpose is so thoroughly to obliterate one's sense of self that one becomes a kind of ‘secular priest’, a safe bearer of the pure objects of knowledge.
3. Then there are a large number of *amateurs*, people without training and full of bias, who depend on the experts for objective or pure knowledge of the pristine objects in question.
4. And finally there are kinds of *baffles* at every point of transmission - between objects and experts, between experts and amateurs - that allow objective knowledge to flow ‘downstream’ (from the ‘pristine source’), while preventing subjectivity from flowing back up. (Palmer 1998, p.100-101)

Let us illustrate how this model is often applied to multicultural college education for preservice teachers. Researchers (experts) discover that minority children may have different patterns of communication (objects) than middle-class white teachers (amateurs) expect in their classrooms. For example, some Native American children take their eyes away from the teacher as a sign of respect to the elderly, while white middle-class teachers tend to expect all students to look directly at them when they are talking. To such teachers, therefore, averting the gaze is often interpreted as a sign of disrespect (which is

their misconception, Philips 1983). Tutors and textbooks on cultural diversity (such as Nieto 1996) report these findings to students (amateurs) and invite them to challenge their own assumptions about how they communicate with school students (baffles). The prevalence of the transmission/remediation model in US educational institutions is well documented (Cuban 1993; Tyack and Cuban 1995; Cuban 1999)

Palmer suggests that there are at least two problems with this model: 'it falsely portrays how we know, and it has profoundly deformed the way we educate'. With respect to the former problem, he goes on: 'I know a thousand classrooms where the relationships of teacher, students, and subject look exactly like this image. But I know of no field – from astronomy to literature to political science to theology – where the continuing quest to know truth even vaguely resembles this mythical objectivism' (Palmer 1998, p.101). In the context of professional biology research, for example, Latour and Woolgar (1979) have found different and much more complex processes than the objectivist transmission of knowledge model describes. Processes of knowledge generation are based on subtle discursive practices that operate both within the academic community and among wider constituencies such as politicians, industries, grant agencies.

From the standpoint of multicultural education for preservice teachers, the transmission of knowledge model leads to an unavoidable conflict of interests. On the one hand, multicultural education aims to prevent culturally biased teaching by inducing teachers to avoid imposing mainstream ways of communication and learning on minority children (and thus treating these children as culturally deficient, Rogoff 1990)). On the other hand, this model leads instructors of such courses to treat their preservice students as if they were in need of exactly analogous kinds of remediation. They are led to act as if their views are unquestionably superior, truer, and more advanced than those of their students. The students have to be "fixed", either by adding knowledge about some specific cultural aspects of minority children, or by putting them through some sort of "multicultural psychotherapy" to get rid of their own racist attitudes and ethnocentric biases.

A second educational problem concerns the role of 'cultural sensitivity'. In a traditional approach to multicultural education of preservice teachers, cultural sensitivity is often seen as rooted in the teacher's pedagogical actions. Teachers are supposed to infer accurately from each student's background and history what kind of instruction should be best applied. Their failure to guess such action correctly is interpreted as a mark of their cultural insensitivity. However, the very notion of sensitivity is a relational concept. The teacher's pedagogical action cannot be sensitive or insensitive by itself. Instructional sensitivity is an interactive process of seeking a mutual understanding between teachers and students regarding their joint activity, (how to define the activity, how to pursue it). This mutuality itself exists only as an ephemeral, dynamic process; it is certainly not a fixed 'state'. On this view, 'sensitivity' becomes a tool or a resource for dealing with temporarily broken teacher-student mutuality. Educational sensitivity is rooted in teacher-student interaction rather in the teacher's action itself. Depending on this interaction, any specific action of the teacher can become sensitive or insensitive. It is never enough to simply change the teacher's action to reach pedagogical sensitivity without changing the teacher-student interaction and relations.

Additionally, a traditional model of multicultural education can promote a split between the class curricula and "real life." This phenomenon of splitting between "school" and "real" worlds that run in parallel, never crossing, is especially troublesome when it demoralizes preservice teachers. To illustrate, we offer the following case, where a University professor describes a moment of conflict when a student (and practicing teacher) brought her "real world" concerns into the classroom]:

Last summer, we began a new program, preparing secondary teachers for urban schools. We carefully selected the texts and learning activities to focus on issues of urban schooling. We intended to talk about race, class, and gender and chose readings about these topics. Continually, I found myself torn between covering the structural (the how to teach) not the provocative (the context of teaching), as represented in the title of the textbook used in the class "The complex world of

teaching: Perspectives from theory and practice” (Mintz and Yun 1999). Here's an example of my struggle:

The class had read *"How Come There Are No Brothers on that List?" Hearing the Hard Questions All Children Ask* by Kathe Jervis. I assigned them to small groups to discuss the reading and develop a questioning strategy based upon the reading. In turn, each group would lead the class discussion the following day.

As we gathered to discuss the reading, I reminded the class that this was a microteaching session and asked that students respect each other throughout the lesson. As each group "performed" its questioning strategy, one student - an African American female - kept taking the class off task, I thought. I defined respect as, "Go along with the teacher (your classmate). Don't make it difficult for her. You know what she wants you to say and do, so just do it." But Kelley wouldn't cooperate - on my terms. She challenged each group with questions that were important to her - but not related to the group's curricular goals. During the last group's presentation, Kelley looked around the room full of 20 white faces and 3 African American female faces. She asked, "Just why are there no brothers here?" I glared at Kelley, focusing solely on the structural (the how to teach) and not on the provocative (the context of teaching - in this very room!). How ironic! Not until I retold this story did I realize I had not heard the hard question Kelley asked (Peterman, personal communication, January 29, 2000)

This case illustrates one teacher's discomfort and later regret as she reflects on the opportunity missed by maintaining this split. In a traditional classroom, real life (consisting of students' concerns, dilemmas and experiences) is often excluded from the classroom practices. When a living authentic practice bursts into the classroom, it is often expelled, suppressed, or severely narrowed because it distracts students from the instructor-defined course curriculum. Even when a teaching practicum is associated with the course, the instructor is often concerned that such 'hot issues' emerging in the practicum distract the students from the instructor's agenda. For example, Bonk and his colleagues (Bonk, Daytner et al. 1999) express their concern that their students in an educational psychology course often bring topics from their teaching practicum to class discussions that may not be seen by the instructor as a part of the course curriculum:

A unique topic that emerged from the [practicum] cases was the "hot topic" category. This category did not necessarily reflect any particular topic or concept from the field of educational psychology. Instead, this category encompassed global and controversial topics in education, which were of concern. Some examples of hot topics included: teacher burnout, parent-teacher relations, corporal punishment, drugs and alcohol, adolescent issues, teen suicide, violence in schools, and differences between home and school. The controversy and recency of these topics tended to generate a great deal of discussion among a wide variety of students. This area was so popular, in fact, that by the start of the second semester, a notation had to be made to use [them] only as a last resort.

#### *Sociocultural model of learning as building a community of practice*

The traditional notion of learning focuses on a desired change in an individual student as defined and guided by the instructor. An alternative approach to learning focuses on students' changing forms of participation in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). According to this sociocultural approach, what makes a person a scientist, for example, is not so much their mastery of a characteristic way of thinking (as the traditional approach might imply), but their kind and level of participation in a scientific community (recognized as such by other members of the community and by people outside of the community) (Latour 1987). Analogously, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) argue that in the case of learning in school, the most relevant community for the students is that of school itself. The learning curriculum for the students – what they learn – is school practice itself. Thus, learning is defined by what the students do in and for the class, what concerns them, how they relate to each other and the instructor, and the nature of their class-related communication.

The central process of the community is its practice – the recursive activities that shape the character and culture of the community. Where the community is aware of newcomers, the processes of negotiation and renegotiation of what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as ‘peripheral participation’ have a legitimate character. Newcomers’ needs and skills are anticipated and their induction organized by the community. "Legitimate peripheral participation" in the on-going business of the community becomes the main medium of learning and development. However, such learning, essential though it is, is often seen as implicit rather than explicit. Learning as a process of negotiation and renegotiation of participation in the community of practice is often not seen as prime-time community business; it tends to go on in the peripheral vision, as it were, of community activity.

Lave (Lave 1992) insists that learning is inherent to any activity. In school, every student is learning to engage, in one way or another, with the culture and community that surround them. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning is a communal process, situated in a community of practice. Learning is always a question about membership in the community and participation in the community practice. A novice is not simply a person who lacks some entities, called 'skills,' but rather a newcomer who needs to negotiate her or his participation in the community practice (Wenger 1998). *What* they are learning, however, may or may not accord with the expectations or intentions of teachers and others. They might actually be learning things that are quite different from those they were wanted or expected to (Eckert 1989). In order to make the multicultural teaching curriculum match (i.e., what the teacher “preaches”) the learning curriculum (i.e., what students do and learn in the class), the practice targeted for learning has to be recreated in the classroom.

A view of learning as a communal process embedded in communal practices has inspired many educational practitioners and researchers to explore and define new forms of guidance that can be used in schools. These include instructional conversations (Tharp and Gallimore 1988), reciprocal teaching (Brown and Palincsar 1987), cognitive apprenticeship (Rogoff 1990), community of learners (Brown and Campione 1994; Rogoff, Matusov et al. 1996), practice and problem based learning (Wilkerson and Gijsselaers 1996), and dialogic inquiry (Wells 1999). To sum up, this family of instructional and conceptual approaches (including CHAT) shares at least the following important principles:

- learning is a communal process;
- learning is embedded in the activities and practices in which it occurs;
- learning involves the development and negotiation of new communal identities;
- students’ guided initiation into the discourse and methods of defining problems and goals is crucial for becoming an active member of a community of practice;
- ownership for guidance and learning should be shared among students and between the students and the teacher;
- a community is based on practice and communication.

#### *La Red Mágica: Building a community of educators*

La Red Mágica is a University-Community partnership, which started in September 1998. The partnership has developed and sustained an after-school program based on voluntary, collaborative, and informal learning. The program brings together inner-city minority elementary school children at the Latin-American Community Center (LACC) in Wilmington and teacher education students at the University of Delaware (Newark, DE) who join the program as part of their teaching practicum. The LACC children are mainly from low-income Puerto Rican and African American families but some are recent immigrants from Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. Children participating range from 5 to 14 years in age.

During the 10-week practicum, undergraduate students, mainly young white middle-class females, help children who are engaged in educational activities (e.g., computer activities, telecommunication, readings, crafts, sport and board games). The program is open 4 days a week at LACC for 1.5 hours per day. Each undergraduate student is expected to come twice a week to work with the children. So far, the only course associated with the La Red Mágica project has been a section of “Cultural Diversity in Teaching and

Schooling”, which is a core (mandatory) class for the teacher education program for freshmen and sophomores. The class enrollment varies between 15 and 20 students, and is limited in practice by the number seats in a university van that transports the students from the University of Delaware located in Newark to LACC in Wilmington (about 30 minutes’ drive). Besides practicum requirements and classroom meetings, the education students are expected to participate in the class Internet discussions (“webtalks”), weekly mini-projects targeted on their work with the LACC children (e.g., interviews, focused field notes), and to read assigned literature. The class has a teaching assistant who helps the instructor in organizing class and web discussions, preparing material, and addressing class logistics, and a site coordinator who helps the students to run the site and work with the LACC children.

This initiative is based on about 15 years of research and teaching experience at the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC) at UC San Diego. Researchers at LCHC designed a program called the Fifth Dimension that successfully capitalized on computer-based activities during the after-school hours to promote reading acquisition among minority students who were failing to read in school (see the chapter by Brown and Cole, this volume, and also Cole 1996). Like the Fifth Dimension programs, the La Red Mágica project is based on the idea of children’s volunteer participation in an after school program and on undergraduate students helping children as a part of their teaching practicum. However, there are also important differences between the Fifth Dimension programs and the La Red Mágica project. In the latter, there is a strong emphasis on undergraduate students’ shared ownership in creating and running the program. The Fifth Dimension, by contrast, makes use of many well-established materials, activities and routines, such as task cards for children’ activities, a wizard that solves problems at the site, set ways of organizing and limiting children’s choices of the available activities, and so on. A great deal is thus predefined by the project leaders. In the La Red Mágica project the structure is intentionally open for students’ designing (Matusov, Pease-Alvarez et al. in press). Learning to design an effective learning environment is a core part of the curriculum for preservice teachers.

#### *A community of educators in action*

We believe that community is built through critical events. Bakhtin (Bakhtin, Holquist, & Emerson, 1986), Altman and Rogoff (Altman & Rogoff, 1987), and Pepper (Pepper, 1967) argue that event is a social and holistic process. Bakhtin (Bakhtin et al., 1986) reminded that the Russian word “sobytie” (i.e., event) literally means “collective being.” He insisted that event is a dramatic dialogic intersection and, sometimes, even a collision of somewhat incompatible voices, ideologies, and actors. We want to add to Bakhtin’s notion that event also involves a collective situation when the participants cannot talk, act, participate, relate, or be in a way they used to do that. In event, personal and communal identities have become changed (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The old, familiar ways of talking, acting, participating, relating, knowing, thinking, and being become impossible in the collision, Bakhtin referred. Critical events involve the shake-up the entire community when old ways of practicing and relating become impossible.

To illustrate how a class functions as a flexible community of practice, we selected a dramatic episode in the life of the Fall Semester 1999 class when one of the young women students was disrespected by one of the LACC preadolescent boys who used sexually exploitative language in Spanish. (The boy in question was not actually part of the program at the time). We selected this case for the two following reasons. First, what emerged was clearly a key issue for the students. Each semester, there are few main issues that for some reason recursively appear through the class and which constitute the major foci and emerging learning curricula of the class. In the fall 1999 semester, one of the major issues we had was about rough and sexually loaded language that a few LACC boys used. Despite a LACC policy prohibiting cursing, they sometimes openly cursed, especially in situations when something did not work in their activities. Our students were very upset with children using foul language. Their initial reaction was to demonize the boys. They did not know how to react or stop the children. Second, the case exemplifies a broader multicultural issue. Minority children tend to be either demonized or romanticized in educational books and movies. The example we selected shows students’ hard work and the complexity of the learning involved in discovering how to work with minority children without using the ‘heroes-villains’ mythology.

The prototypical case below shows how a private issue that a student initially struggled with on her own became a public issue, and the focus of the class discussion. It also illustrates how other students contributed to the communal process of meaning making; how the instructor mediated this process, and what professional tools he offered to the community for attacking the problem; how a resolution of the public discussion led to students' experimentation in their practice; and how reflection on students' experimentation was a recursive process. We cannot describe all the details of the event, and will mainly focus on one class discussion based on in-class notes made by the teaching assistant, and reflective notes made by the instructor.

*Instructor's account of the event*

I was ready to go to my Friday 50-minute class, when I decided to check the class web to see recent students' discussion. One discussion thread captured my attention by an unusual subject:

**Subject:** "Kiss my balls"

**From:** NG

**Date:** Wednesday, 03 November 1999, 8:34PM [the students arrived back from LACC at 7:40pm that day]

Today I was greatly disrespected at the LACC. One boy in the art room, about 11 years old said to me in Spanish that he wanted his balls in my mouth. Too shocked to respond, I gave him a dirty look and he smiled and walked away. He obviously knew what he was saying. K., Ch. [classmates] and I had a long discussion about this and I felt very uncomfortable in this situation. I go to the LACC, like everyone else, to help those kids. But the experience that I had today made the time I spend there horrible. I wanted to leave early just to get out of the situation. Cursing and sexual jokes should not be allowed in the LACC. I think we should make rules about this. I don't want to deal with the same thing again and I don't think anyone else should either. Please tell me what you guys think should be done!!!

**From:** ChH (reply to NG)

**Date:** Wednesday, 03 November 1999, 9:01PM

I was with N. in the art room and I heard what the kids were saying and I felt very uncomfortable in that situation, just as uncomfortable as I had felt when the comments were directed at me in the past. I really felt bad for N., b/c she was so surprised and shocked by what they said. We did not know what to do. We did not want to shut down the art room b/c there were children in there that were working nicely. So we told the boys that they needed to stop that way of talking or they would have to leave. The younger boy said back "It's just a joke," to which we replied that it was not funny, and we would have to ask them to stop it or leave. I don't know what was exactly the correct thing to do in this situation. What do you all think?

*Instructor's account of the event (continued)*

I was very surprised to read these postings for two reasons. First, I did not know about this disturbing event, even though I was with my students at LACC that evening. I probably was in the computer room with other students when the incident happened. The students did not mention the incident on our way back, even though we discussed our experiences as usual. I wondered that it might take some time before NG could publicly discuss what happened with her. Second, I was surprised that NG, being a rather quiet and withdrawn person, felt comfortable to bring this painful topic for the entire class.

For this class meeting, I had planned to discuss the Japanese educational system and culture. However, I felt that I could not ignore the incident at LACC. It seemed to me that it was a critical moment for NG and probably many other students. Either we could find together an approach how to address the situation, or they might develop insecurities of working with some minority children.

*Class meeting (notes by the teaching assistant)*

After 15 minutes of discussion about Japanese culture, the instructor announced his interest in addressing the issue of foul language brought up that week on the class discussion web. The instructor distributed a copy of NG’s web posting. The students talked about the chaos in the art room that day. For some reason, while the atmosphere in the other program areas, the computer room and gym, were calm and cooperative, the atmosphere of the art room in particular seemed complex and tense. The instructor mentioned that that day there was a visit from the state governor and all the personnel was stressed out.

Many students expressed their opinions about the event and reasons for it. The instructor summarized the discussion by referring to the table on the blackboard that he made during the students’ discussion:

<b>Issue: Do we want all the kids to stay in and not kick anybody out?</b>	
PROs	CONs
We care about all the kids Everybody should be able to come in The program is open Volunteer participation for the kids Kids’ choice of activities and place to be at LACC Sensitivity to troubled kids Sensitivity to kids’ culture Talking dirty is normal for preadolescent boys They might not understand what they said We should serve especially those kids, who demonstrate troubled behavior	We’re not helping kids who disrespect students by letting them stay in We feel prisoners in the art room We are not used to it
<b>Teaching Dilemma: How can we access and help all the kids without collapsing ourselves?</b>	

In the follow-up discussion, the instructor noticed that they developed “a big list of PROs and a short list of CONs.” He praised the students for not trying to demonize the children. However, he suggested that they are in a “pendulum swing” of trying to be nice with the children at the expense of their own well-being. He said:

For how long can we be “nice” to all kids before quitting, before becoming mean, before becoming burnout? Is being always “nice” helpful for the kids? Can slaves of kids teach the kids how to be free people?!

Teaching is very relational. We teach relations. If we are uncomfortable going to the art room, we won’t be able to create a safe learning environment that promotes freedom and creativity in the kids. If we’re collapsing and emotionally overwhelmed, we can’t do quality teaching, and we will become useless for the kids – the only thing we will teach is how to be victims. Remember flight attendant’s safety instruction, “In case of emergency, help yourself first and then dependent other.” We should help ourselves first. We should prioritize our well-being.

He suggested that the students might want to share their emotions with the children, “Talk with the kids about how upset you are. Share your emotions. Cry if it helps you and you feel comfortable. Share your pain. The kids will understand. They’re very compassionate. They like us.” He said that, in his view, it would have been appropriate to close the art room to avoid the feeling of being trapped by the children, “Move to the computer room and recoup by having a good teaching experience with kids. Restore yourself emotionally. Regain your willingness to come back to LACC. Have fun with kids.”

Students kept discussing the issues that the instructor defined as sexism at LACC. The instructor suggested inviting the LACC youth director who, like the students, is a young white middle-class female and a graduate of the University of Delaware, to the class to talk about how she deals with sexism at LACC. He also suggested asking the teaching assistant, who is a female from Panama and has had experience working at LACC. The instructor acknowledged that as a white male, he had limitations of how much insights and

guidance he could provide on this important issue. He promised to check academic and educational literature on this topic for next class meeting.

*Afterwards: Instructor's account of the event (continued)*

After the class, NG told me that she again felt excited going to LACC because she wanted to try some new ideas of how to be more assertive. We continued looking for practical solutions of this problem. In another class meeting, we had a dramatic play of simulating a situation when two children, played by our students, cursed while playing a computer game. The students split into small groups had to come to a strategy how to stop "children's" cursing because cursing was unpleasant for the students. The students playing "children" were from other groups and did not know the strategy that the "teacher" used. The groups tried different approaches from trying to be "nice" with the "children" to trying to be adversarial. After each demonstration and its discussion by the whole classroom, next group tried to take into account the consequences of the previous groups' strategies. The most successful group was the last one that tried to be "honest" with "children" in communication their discomfort with "children's" cursing and to provide the "children" alternative language to express their frustration with the game.

The students continued trying new ideas to deal with the issue. For example one of the students suggested on the class discussion web using teasing common in Japanese culture to stop cursing at LACC.

**Subject:** Laughing to Discipline

After class today, we discussed the video and the different approaches used by the different cultures. I thought the example of a Japanese child stealing a toy and then being laughed at by the teacher was really strange but when you think about it, it actually kind of makes sense. Nobody likes to be laughed at in a mean way, which is what the Japanese teachers were referring to. I know if I were teased badly enough I would stop whatever it was that caused the teasing.

Knowing this now, do you guys think we should tease the students at the LACC when they curse at us or when they do something we don't want them to do? I wonder what would happen if we tried that one day. I know it's an extreme idea but I wonder what their reactions would be. It probably wouldn't work though because it's not like they had been brought up that way from the beginning like the Japanese kids had been. Just a thought.

During our discussions, we often tried to provide alternative views, foresee desired and undesired consequences, and make an evaluation of a suggested pedagogical action. Below is one such evaluation. posted on the discussion web as a response to the above suggestion:

I personally do not like teasing, especially to put people down. I would much rather ignore the behavior because I feel the kids are looking for a reaction and by ignoring the misbehavior it will stop. However, I realize in different countries teasing is looked at in a different way - just as LE [the teaching assistant] mentioned the other day. So...I would be willing to try teasing to see if it has any effect on the kids. What do you think?

The instructor warned the students to be careful with their experimenting with teasing, worrying that some children and students might be hurt. He wrote on the web:

This is a very interesting idea. However, I want to caution that laughing at kids may be rather harmful and even dangerous. The Japanese way of laughing is based on strong ideas of dependency between the child and the parents and the teachers. Laughing in these circumstances is a way of shaming a child who jeopardizes the standing of the community or family that gives him/her emotional and other supports and comfort. It is shame of not fulfilling high expectations that family and community place on each member. Please, do not forget that both Japanese teachers and parents indulge kids a lot (by American standards). In my view, we should be very careful about borrowing cultural strategies because they may be supported by other elements of cultural practices. What do you think?

Despite the instructor's warning, some students tried the strategy and reported the results to the class via the discussion web:

On our way home Wednesday night [in the van], we were talking a lot about the idea of teasing as part of Latin American culture. Eugene [the instructor] brought up a very good point. He pointed out that K., the LACC worker that is usually near the front desk, has a really strong and positive relationship with the kids. He is constantly teasing them, often about things that our culture would usually find over the limit such as weight or calling someone ugly, but at the same time, he can silence the entire group of kids in two seconds when he needs to. Because they love and respect him, he is their friend and their disciplinarian. Inspired by this, I decided to see if I could successfully make myself part of that group of rowdier boys (Jose, Pablo<sup>1</sup>, etc). When we were waiting in the TV room on Thursday night before everything got started, I walked over to where they were sitting. As I approached them, Jose said to me, "You can't sit near me!" I quickly responded, by walking around him to a seat on the other side of the group and saying, "Why would I want to sit next to you?! You smell!" All the boys thought this was hysterical. They even brought one of the older teenage boys in to tell him how I "dissed" Jose. Jose was a little put out at first, but he bounced right back. I know that these kids get teased a lot worse than that all of the time. He was a really good sport about it. The boys were even more surprised when I understood some of their conversations and joking in Spanish right after. So, I was successful. "Una gringa" made it into their group! (even if it was only for a second!)

Another student assessed the success and wanted to apply it to broader circumstances:

That's so funny L. [she referred to the author of the previous posting cited above]...maybe we should all try it. I know I'll be giving it a shot. Maybe that might even curb some of the sexual comments towards some of us too. Maybe if we tease them right back and they accept us as their friends, they will just treat us as they treat their other friends at the LACC. I would MUCH rather them tease me jokingly about little things like what L. was talking about than be the object of sexual jokes from 7 year olds. Maybe L. is on to something!

Finally, it is interesting to note what NG wrote in her final mini-project about what she learned in the class, because she was reflecting on the whole process of learning in a community of educators, "In this class, we were given a once in a lifetime opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them in a situation like a classroom where, in the future, we may not be able to make mistakes. Even from the "I want my balls in your mouth" experience, I learned that children just want to get a rise out of you. In class discussions, I have heard other people's opinions and views that I never thought of..."

#### *Model of multicultural learning through building a community of educators*

In the preceding example, the critical event, the name-calling incident, strained the existing community until it had to change. The students' difficulties are treated not as evidence of their dysfunctional beliefs, which have to be corrected, but as opportunities for collective inquiry emerging in their engagement with children. This incident illustrates the process where a critical incident effects change in the community, initially emerging through the community's purposeful engagement in practice, then brought into the public space for discussion (in this case entering first the class discussion web and then into the classroom), being scrutinized and evaluated by the group in the classroom discourse, and finally yielding new, experimental practice in the form of a tentative response to the event.

-----Insert Figure 2 about here-----

It is important to note that at any given moment during the class, there were many issues in emerging and developing consecutively, at any given time some of these were foreshadowed while others faded temporarily into the background.

The critical event we discuss in the paper is one of many such events that occurred during the semester. Other issues included institutional disorganization, pornography on the internet, and teachers' negative attitudes towards the children, among many others, all of which emerged as critical events during our practice, but which embodied issues broadly recognized as relevant within the field of education. Thus, there should actually be many circles in Figure 2 "rotating" simultaneously, with different "speeds" and "phases."

#### Purposeful engagement with minority children in safe learning environment with an open structure

In order to learn through building a professional community, the students have to have an opportunity to be involved in a professional activity of this type. In the present case, where preservice teachers are learning how to provide sensitive guidance in culturally diverse classrooms, engagement with minority children is crucial. This engagement has to be safe for the participants in the sense that preservice teachers' professional mistakes should not lead to irreversible deterioration of relations between the teachers and the children. In addition, the structure of the engagement should be 'open', in order to provide a sense of shared ownership and encourage creative input by the students.

In the La Red Mágica project, the LACC children have always opportunity to get away from the university students when the students are insensitive to the children's needs by physically moving to another game or by ignoring the students. This is less possible in traditional classrooms where children are expected and even forced to do whatever the adult (e.g., a preservice teacher) asks them to do. The open structure of the La Red Mágica project design of the learning environment at the LACC allows preservice teachers (and children) to develop ownership for and experience consequences of their own pedagogical actions.

#### Public space for discussing hot issues emerging from participation in the professional practice

Another key ingredient of a learning community of educators is the availability of a public space for sharing experiences, and for recognizing, discussing, and addressing hot issues as they emerge. Publicizing personal discomfort, concerns, dilemmas, and issues in this way provides opportunities for the students' reflection on their actions and for the development of critical thinking about practice. It also helps to develop a professional language to talk about the practice. It creates possibilities to recursively consider and polish learning activities and pedagogical strategies (e.g., why and how to react to children's foul language). In sum, it creates a genuinely collaborative learning and teaching culture (Stigler and Hiebert 1998). Communication with and about LACC children was constantly moved from private or semi-public spaces to the formal public space of web-based and class discussions. For example, student web postings were often references to conversations outside of official classroom space, such as dormitories or student's homes, with other students or even with family members and friends completely outside the University community. Thus, issues brought up in the class frequently traveled out into the "real" world and then back in again, effecting a cross-fertilization of ideas across public and private spheres of the students' lives with a central shared focus: to provide sensitive guidance for all children.

#### Discourse in a learning community of educators

The major focus of the discourse in a learning community of educators is on the evaluation of educational actions enacted or being considered by the participants (see Figure 2). Participants in the discourse try either to add their support or to provide counterarguments to other participants' statements and suggestions. Latour (1987) describes similar processes in the context of a scientific discourse as "changing the modalities" of other scholars' statements - either by elevating them to the status of scientific fact, or by lowering them to the status of 'wrong hypothesis'. As a result of this kind of discourse between education students, a putative educational action can be either elevated to the status of 'sound practice', or lowered, in the eyes of the community, to become an educational 'mistake'. For example, teasing as a pedagogical reaction to LACC children's misbehavior was elevated by some members of the community to the status of a pedagogically valid practice, despite the concerns that some other students, as well as the instructor,

expressed (and who were thus trying to lower the modality of this strategy to that of a potential pedagogical mistake). However, trying to be “nice” with the children at expense of the students’ own well-being did not survive scrutiny of the communal discourse as the above example illustrates. Through this discourse, the participants often could begin to see underlying priorities and goals of the considered pedagogical actions initially hidden from them.

### Trying new actions in practice to experience their pedagogical consequences

The discourse in a learning community of educators is not just about rhetoric – how to convince other participants to accept a pedagogical action to which one is committed – but also about experiencing and considering the practical consequences of this action. Practical consequences of pedagogical actions are the criteria by which their pedagogical soundness is judged. The communal discourse helps to define, reflect, analyze, and critique pedagogical actions. However, their final test, as well as final application, belongs to practice rather than to rhetoric (though ultimately practice and rhetoric are of course interrelated aspects of pedagogy). For example, as we saw above, different participants raised their voices for and against the use of teasing at LACC. However, it was the practical problem involving students’ discomfort about LACC boys using sexual language that demanded a solution and guided the class discourse, not students’ detached curiosity about the pedagogical appropriateness of teasing.

### *Conclusion*

The model of multicultural education for preservice teachers based on building a community of educators treats the instructor and the students as both learners and educators (i.e., practitioners) at the same time but at different degree. The class instructor is a practitioner-learner because his primary responsibility to educate preservice teachers and secondary responsibility is to learn how to do it better. The students are learner-practitioners because their primary responsibility is learning how to teach and secondary responsibility is to educate the LACC children. Thus, the class functions as a community of both learners and educators.

This model of becoming a new practitioner based on developing an innovative community of educators is different from two classical models of becoming: 1) traditional schooling, where events subordinated to teaching skills (Haan, 1999), and 2) apprenticeship, where apprentice is placed on the periphery of the practice (Coy, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the model of building an innovative community of educators, events are embedded in the main practice (like in apprenticeship); however, students are in the center of defining and carrying on the main practice rather than are placed on its periphery by old-timers. Production of a new practice, rather than reproduction of an old established practice, is emphasized and prioritized in the model.

The illustrations in this chapter have shown how we may avoid some of the pitfalls associated with ‘deficit/remediation’ model of teacher education. In focusing on education students’ emerging issues and concerns in a responsive, collaborative and genuinely inquisitive way, students are allowed both to own and to question and explore their current reactions, and the beliefs that underlie them. There is greater unity between the content and the method of the class and between classroom curriculum and studied practice. Students learn how to manage their relations with culturally diverse children in a mutually sensitive and responsive fashion, rather than to accumulate “silver bullet” teacher tricks. The worlds of school and targeted practice are united.

This approach does not require instructors to deny their own values. Do we, as leaders of the La Red Mágica project, want to have our students challenge and change their attitudes, their ways of working with children different from them, their views on education? Yes, we do. Both students themselves and instructors expect and seek such changes. However, we do not set this as an explicit goal of our pedagogical actions because we, like Lave and Wenger (1991), see learning as accruing – often incidentally and sometimes

unconsciously – in the course of getting things done and collectively solving real-life problems. To make learning itself the goal of education is, in this view, to put the cart before the horse.

It is interesting to note, that psychotherapists such as Viktor Frankl have made similar points in relation to the relative highlighting of ‘means’ and ‘ends’ in psychotherapy (Frankl 1976; Frankl, Fairchild et al. 1986). In studying and treating disorders such as insomnia, impotence, incontinence, and so forth, Frankl noticed that sometimes the more a patient focuses his or her deliberate efforts to fight the disorder (e.g., insomnia), the stronger the disorder becomes (e.g., the more awake the patient is). Frankl emphasized that in these cases, to treat psychological problems causing the disorder, the patient should find goals and activities for which the desired psychological state and transformation is a spin-off, a by product, rather than the direct goal. Similarly, in the learning community of educators that we try to create in the La Red Mágica project, we want to focus our deliberate pedagogical efforts on identifying and addressing hot issues and problems emerging in the students’ working with the LACC children. During these processes, learning emerges as a peripheral but inevitable process.

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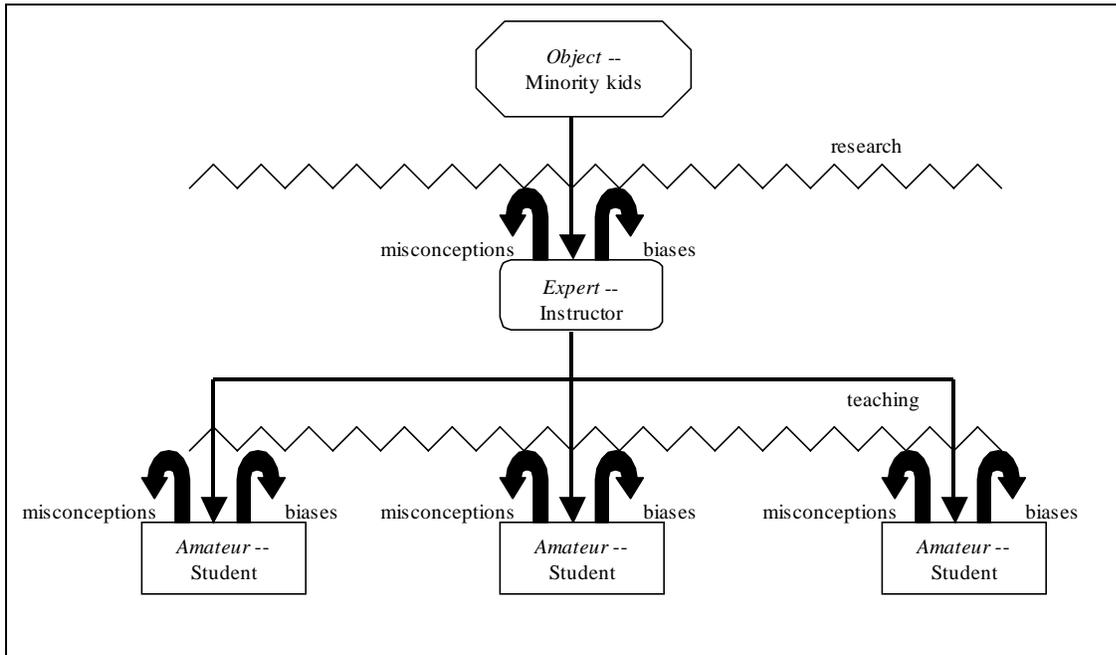
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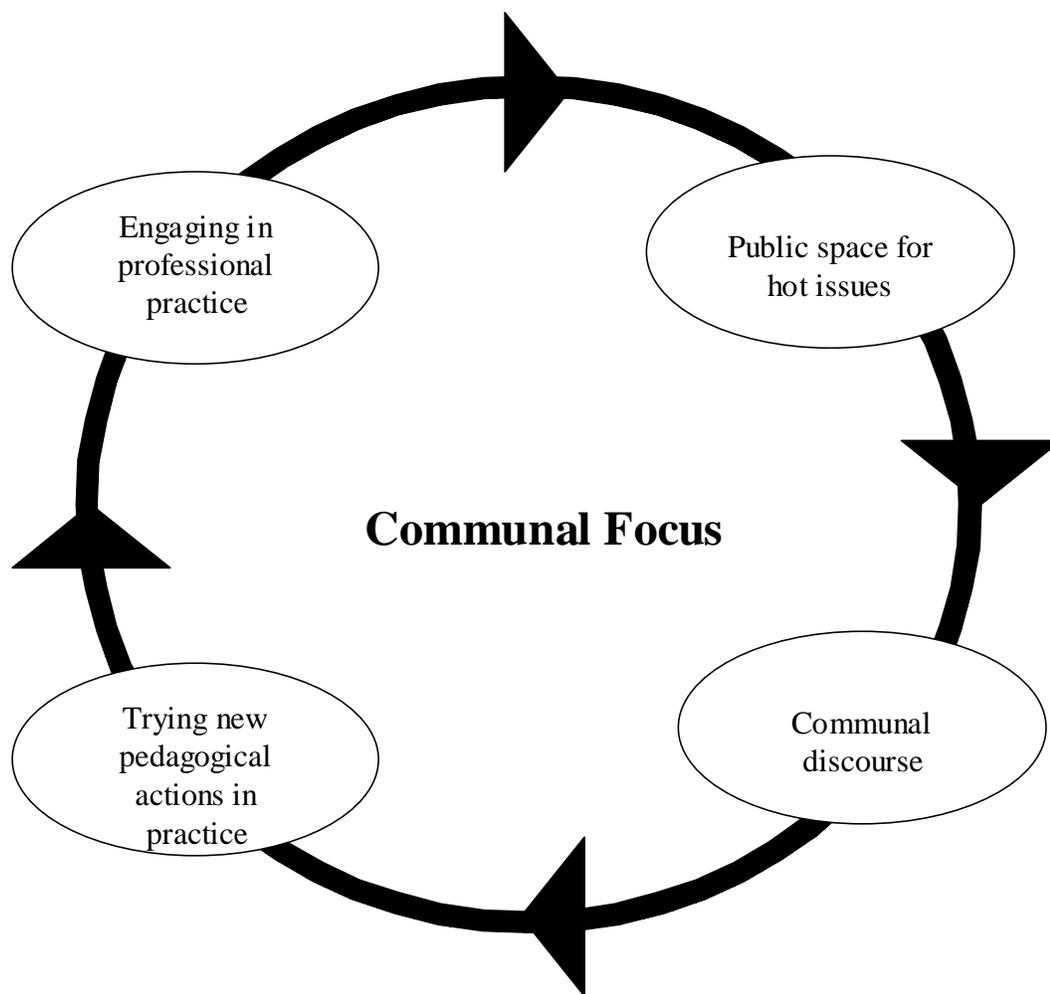
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Figures

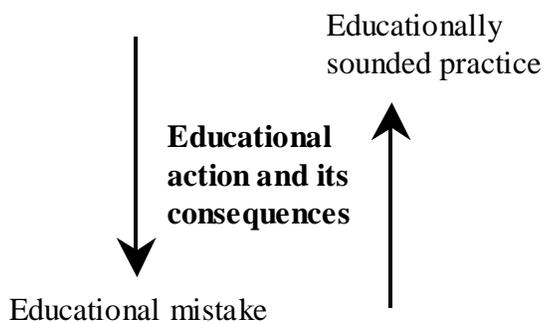


**Figure 1. Transmission of knowledge model of multicultural education (modified after (Palmer 1998, p.100))**





**Community of educators discourse**



**Figure 2. Model of a learning community of educators**

*Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> All children's name used in the paper are pseudonyms.