



Teaching imaginary children: University students' narratives about their Latino practicum children

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...a teacher cannot know or describe her relation with students using her consistent monological voice; there can be no truth in such knowledge. However, the teacher can present a dialogue between the students and herself, which presents different but engaged and dynamic opinions about the relations. The polyphonic knowledge is one where the other is made present (Sidorkin, 2002, pp. 98–99). Evil is objectifying the other, taking an utterly monological stance toward the other (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 186) [Sidorkin, A.M. (2002). Learning relations: Impure education, deschooled schools, & dialogue with evil. New York: P. Lang].

Abstract

This study investigates the dialogic processes involved in how teachers talk about their students and what consequences their ways of talking (i.e., “narratives”) may have for their guidance. We take a sociocultural perspective on learning as transformation of students’ subjectivity. Teaching, as a process of guiding and facilitating learning, cannot be effective if the teacher does not actively seek how the student perceives and understands reality. We borrow and adapt from Bakhtin (1999) four narrative ways of talking about others: objectivizing, subjectivizing, problematizing and finalizing. The presence of these narratives in web discussion postings of our pre-service teachers about the Latino children they worked with in a community center are analyzed. We then compare their ways of talking about children with print- and web-based discussions about children made by in-service teachers, model teachers and our pre-service teachers in a school-based practicum. Using mixed quantitative and qualitative methodologies, we found an overwhelming predominance of objectivizing and finalizing in our pre-service teachers’ narratives about the children with whom they work that seems to define a certain pedagogical regime that we call here “teaching imaginary children/students.” This “way of talking” about children seems to be characterized by unchecked speculations guiding instruction that are not tested by finding out from the children themselves how they understand the instruction and the world. These speculations, in turn, can lead to a dogmatic approach towards children.

We found another model of teaching/learning in ways that model teachers talk about their students based on a “community of learners” approach to instruction. This approach prioritizes subjectivizing and problematizing of students that can help to recursively correct the assumptions and preconceptions teachers may have of their students. Our own pre-service teachers were increasingly likely to subjectivize the Latino children over the course of the 9-week practicum. We suggest that the promotion of subjectivizing and problematizing of students should become a central part of the curriculum of pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher professional development programs. Without talking and listening

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to their students, teachers cannot know how the students think, feel, and perceive the world and themselves; in turn, it is very difficult for teachers to engage in collaboration with their students about learning.

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1. Setting the problem

A year ago, I (the first author) was teaching an undergraduate class on cultural diversity for pre-service elementary school teachers. As a part of the class, my students attended a teaching practicum in a multiage afterschool program at the Latin-American Community Center (LACC) in urban Wilmington, DE, USA. My students, mainly white middle-class females in their late teens and early 20s, got acquainted with 14-year old Puerto Rican girl, named Charisma.¹ Charisma attracted their attention, and they discussed Charisma a lot in class and on our class website. Several of the students developed lasting relations with Charisma after the class was over. Once during the class term, my students learned that along with a few other children, Charisma was suspended from school for a week for drinking alcohol in school. Charisma and her mother wanted her to spend this time away from school at the University with our students. Because of the logistics, we could bring Charisma twice during the week and Charisma spent all her time in those 2 days attending classes with our students and spending time in their dormitories. She liked the University experiences a lot and it boosted her desire for education. What was surprising for me was that although my students had intense in-class and on-line discussions about Charisma and her visit to the University, nobody asked Charisma what actually happened to her and why she was drinking alcohol at school. This was in spite of the fact that I suggested they do so several times (I did talk with Charisma myself).

It was puzzling to me, even long after the class was over, that my students were interested in the reasons the incident happened and in Charisma herself (they regularly called, emailed, and met with her) but not in asking the child herself about the drinking incident. Charisma was, indeed, the primary actor involved in the situation. We enquired into all of my students' postings on the class web about Charisma, surveyed the former

students, and interviewed some of them who continued being to be in touch with Charisma after the class was over. The results were astonishing and counter to our expectations. We expected to find that the more time my students spent with Charisma, the more they would ask her about her life and what she thought about it. What we found instead through analysis of students' web messages, interviews, and surveys was that my students were willing to make inferences, speculations, and observations about Charisma but, for some persistent reason, did not feel a need to ask Charisma for her own interpretation of the events and about aspects of her own life that they were interested in (for more discussion of the case see Matusov, Pleasants, & Smith, 2003). The analysis of the students' web postings revealed that Charisma and other children were asking our students about their lives but our students were not reciprocating.

After this analysis, we, as teacher educators, became alarmed. Learning involves transformation of one's subjectivity: the learner's understanding about the world, the self, community, practices and so on. Teaching, as an activity that aims at facilitating and directing learning, cannot be effective if the teacher does not actively seek how the student perceives and understands reality. Getting access to the student's subjectivity—the teacher's *learning about, with and from* the students—involves two processes for the teacher: (1) constantly asking questions about how the student thinks, understands, and perceives reality (what we call “the teacher *problematizing* the student”) and (2) involving the student him- or herself in finding the answers to these questions (we refer to this as “the teacher *subjectivizing* the student”). Although other ways how teaching can be shaped and tuned up for a particular student are important, like use of observation and the teacher's own past experiences, talking and seeking answers from the student him/herself about how he or she sees the world is crucial for effective teaching. It is important for the teacher to interact with the student about his or her views of the world because teaching is aimed at achieving intersubjectivity between the teacher and the

¹All names of children and students are pseudonyms.

student (Schifter, 2001). This intersubjectivity involves not only the teacher gaining knowledge about the student but also the student having access to the teacher's knowledge so that the student can correct it. The focus on promoting intersubjectivity makes the teacher work *with* the student as a co-learner and co-partner in learning rather than work *on* the student as an object of pedagogical actions. This promotion of intersubjectivity parallels Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's work; Bakhtin (1999) defined subjectivizing (without using this term) as a writing approach in which nothing that the author writes about his characters is not already known by the characters about themselves (this may be seen as finalizing *with* the character rather than *about* the character). Studying the work of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin also made an important observation that defines objectivizing and finalizing. Dostoevsky's "artistic work [was] guided by the principle: never use for objectifying or finalizing another's consciousness anything that might be inaccessible to that consciousness, that might lie outside its field of vision" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 278). Speaking in positive terms and applied to education, Bakhtin suggests that teachers should subjectivize and problematize students' consciousness, testing their ideas about the children's understandings of the world and the children themselves:

Given its Socratic origins, Bakhtin's dialogized or dialogical rhetoric is less a means of persuasion than a means of testing our own and others' ideas and ourselves and a testing especially of our individual and our cultural differences (Zappen, 2000, p. 17).

We do not completely agree with Bakhtin's insistence that objectivizing and finalizing should be completely avoided when talking about others. We think that in education, finalizing and objectivizing has to be appreciated. Teachers should be able to make statements of certainty about children. We even argue that excessive problematizing can be really dangerous and lead to paralysis of teachers' actions. This paralysis associated with excessive problematizing—and thus lack of finalizing—by teachers is well expressed by the following quote:

Problematizing... need not, indeed should not... become a full-time occupation in any classroom as... it could conceivably take the joy out of learning and living, lead to cynicism and make the world seem so foreign and unknowable that

learning, even confident living, may seem pointless or impossible. Although not specifically about literacy, Guy Claxton (in press) is worth quoting on the dangers of over-problematizing:

Uncovering the motive behind the method, the assumption behind the appearance, is skilled, subtle and dangerous work. It makes the world look alien and insubstantial, and can make you seem a stranger to yourself. It takes courage and resilience ... Compulsive problematization is as counter-productive as compulsive trivialization. Sticking an inquisitive nose into everything is as self-defeating as sticking your head in the sand. The cost of reflection is self-consciousness, and while the gaucheness and anxiety that go along with self-consciousness may be acute prices that are worth paying to rid oneself of a bad habit or a pernicious belief, they undermine the ability to function if they become chronic and intense (Hall, 1998, pp. 191–192).

We also think that teachers should make inferences from their observations, projections, and even "wild guesses" about circumstances of children's lives and their understandings of the world. However, these inferences, projections, and wild guesses about children's subjectivities have to eventually be checked with the children themselves.

For this study, we discovered that my students' (i.e., preservice teachers') discussions of Charisma were dominated by inferences about Charisma and her life that were left unchecked, even at the end of the semester-long class. My students did not learn how to seek out what Charisma thought about events in her own life; rather, they were comfortable making statements of certainty about Charisma based on their observations, speculations, and inferences rooted in their own experiences. It appeared that these pre-service teachers excessively finalized and objectivized the LACC teenager.

Following Bakhtin (1999), we call these narrative features of the students' statements that are focused on *knowing of* and *on*² students as: (1) "*finalizing*"—an expression of certainty about another person or the author of the statement him/herself—and (2) "*objectivizing*"—not seeking intersubjectivity with the person who is the subject of the statement about

²Although the wording "*knowing on* students" is not conventional, we use it in analogy with the wording "*working on* children" versus "*working with* children". We also want to attract attention to our use of the opposition of *learning* as a process to *knowing* as a state.

the statement (paraphrasing Bakhtin, objectivizing is transforming the represented person into a “voiceless object of the author’s deduction” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 83)). Bakhtin appears to have been mostly concerned with the dangers of excessive objectivizing rather than with excessive finalizing. He argued that in contrast to the natural sciences, characterized by high levels of objectivizing and problematizing, social sciences have to focus on subjectivizing (and problematizing):

The exact sciences constitute a monologic form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates *a thing* and expounds upon it. There is only one subject here-cognizing (contemplating) and speaking (expounding). In opposition to the subject there is only a *voiceless thing*. Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and cognized as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be *dialogic*. ... Degrees of thing-ness [*objectivizing*] and personality-ness [*subjectivizing*] (Bakhtin, Holquist, & Emerson, 1986, p. 161).

We can find similar concerns about excessive objectivizing in Heidegger’s work:

Essentially the person exists only in carrying out intentional acts, and is thus essentially *not* an object. Every psychical objectification, and thus every comprehension of acts as something psychical, is identical with depersonalization. In any case, the person is given as the agent of intentional acts which are connected by the unity of a meaning (Heidegger & Stambaugh, 1996, pp. 44-45).

We conceptualize the students’ ways of talking about children with whom they worked as their use, in combination or alone, of four major types of narratives, described above and summarized graphically in Table 1.

We use the term “narrative” here more in line with the way social linguists rather than anthropologists use it. Anthropologists (and some psychologists) use the term “narrative” as storytelling, supposing a story is told with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end (Bruner, 1990; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). However, the word “narrative” is originated from the Indo-European roots of “to tell” or “to know” (White, 1984). Here we used the term “narrative” more as “ways of talking” (and knowing) about children with whom pre-service teachers worked in their practicum that may or may not be stories with a beginning, middle, and end (cf. Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1988).

In our view, the problem with the teacher’s finalizing and objectivizing of a student emerges when these are the *only* types of teacher narratives about the student. We argue that certainty about the student resulting from finalizing is very important for teaching. We think that inquiries and knowledge about the student sought outside of the teacher–student intersubjectivity with the student (like in observation) can also be important. However, we take issue with finalizing and objectivizing being the only or most predominant ways of how the teacher deals with the student’s subjectivity.

The relationship between actual teaching and teachers’ ways of talking about their students is probably complex. Like teachers’ expectations about their students, teachers’ educational philosophies, values or beliefs, teachers’ ways of talking about their students probably mediates their teaching practices. We know that teachers’ expectations about children shape their teaching practices, although not in direct, deterministic ways; for example, students can also actively respond to the teachers’ expectations and thus co-contribute to actual teaching practices (Dweck & Elliott, 1983; Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1969; Wineberg, 1987). Although studying the relationship between teachers’ “ways of talking about students” and their actual ways of teaching is not our primary

Table 1
Conceptualizing the four types of teachers’ narratives about children

	Learning <i>about, with, & from</i> children		Knowing <i>about & on</i> children
Degree of uncertainty	Problematizing	High ←-----→ Low	Finalizing
Degree of intersubjectivity	Subjectivizing	High ←-----→ Low	Objectivizing

research focus in this study, we have tried to keep our eyes on this issue and will try to find any direct or indirect evidence that will shed light on this issue. For example, we compared our pre-service teachers' ways of talking about LACC children with in-service and model teachers' ways of talking in order to draw indirect conclusions about the relationship between ways of talking and actual teaching.

An important methodological issue we must consider is whether narratives are properties of the individual (e.g., students' "dispositions," "cognitive styles," "narrative styles") or properties of relations within specific communities (cf. Becker, 1953). Our initial suspicion was that narrative styles are not rooted in individual students, but are rather shaped by institutions. In other words, under different circumstances, the same student may use different narrative styles. Although this issue was not a primary research question, we collected data that helped to address this issue in an indirect way. Specifically, we looked at how our students talk about each other in the class.

The main purpose of our research was two-fold: (1) to investigate if pre-service teachers have a problem of predominately finalizing and objectivizing the children with whom they work and (2) to examine if pre-service teachers used more problematizing and subjectivizing in their narratives of the children with whom they worked at the end of their 9-week afterschool practicum. To avoid the possibility that we might be dealing with a rather unique situation, we systematically analyzed all web postings of our students in a similar class to see what kind of narrative features they used when talking about LACC children. We present our study in a non-traditional way, intertwining the report on findings and methodology. We decided to do this to tell the story of how our findings guided us to refine our methodology through a dialogic process of challenging our own interpretations of the findings.

2. Methodology

2.1. Unit of the analysis and background of the study

To address the research questions of: (1) whether pre-service teachers mainly objectivize and finalize the Latino children during their teaching practicum and (2) whether this narrative changes during the course of the semester, we analyzed the web

postings³ of one of the afterschool practicum classes taught by the authors (the instructor and the teaching assistant for the class, respectfully). The University of Delaware's EDUC258 course entitled "Cultural Diversity, Schooling and the Teacher" is a mandatory class for Elementary Teacher Education majors. Twenty-one students were enrolled in our section of the course. All of them were either first-year or second-year (mainly second-year) female middle-class students in their late teens and early 20s. One student was of white Puerto-Rican decent born in the mainland US, the others were non-Latino whites. There was some religious diversity among our students: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant. A few students could speak Spanish with different levels of fluency. One student failed the class because she did not regularly attend class meetings and the practicum (however, we included her web postings in our data).

As a part of the class requirements, the students, preservice teachers, had to participate on a password-protected online class discussion forum by contributing at least two web discussion postings per week relevant to the class. The main goal of the class was defined as learning to relate to children that are culturally different from the preservice teachers in order to develop sensitive/responsive guidance that addresses the children's educational needs. Class discussions touched on a broad range of issues including language diversity, educational injustice, cultural patterns of learning, and culturally responsive guidance. The students could initiate discussion threads and/or reply to their classmates' or the instructor's and TA's postings. During the 14 weeks of the class, 919 web messages were posted: 758 by the students, 132 by the instructor, and 29 and by the TA. The number of students' postings ranged from 22 to 53 postings per student, with an average of 36.1 postings per student, and a median of 35 postings per student. The instructor encouraged the students to write freely, informally, and concisely. Although highly variable in length, the students' postings usually approximated one 12-line paragraph.

The unit of our analysis was a student's posting that involved at least one of the four studied narratives about (an) LACC child(ren) during the

³The class web postings were not graded but were set up for the students' and instructor's informal communication. The instructor asked the students not to pay much attention to the grammar and organization of their messages.

course of the practicum. We decided to limit our analysis only to web postings, as opposed to other class assignments and final projects, because the students had the freedom to choose what to write about in the on-line discussion forum. Out of the total of 919 web postings, there were 234 postings which contained narratives about the practicum children: 203 by the students, 27 by the instructor, and 3 by the TA. The number of students' postings ranged from 5 to 15 per student, with an average of 9.7 postings per student, and a median of 10 postings per student.

Students attended the teaching practicum at the LACC for 9 weeks out of the 15-week semester. The LACC is located in an urban part of Wilmington, DE, USA about 30 min from the University campus. The teaching practicum started on the 5th week of the semester and ended on the 13th week; each student was required to spend two evenings per week for an hour and a half at the LACC, helping and guiding LACC children who were working on activities of their own choosing. These activities included educational and entertaining computer games, assembling computers, Internet activities (e.g., chats, searches) and games, board games, reading books, doing homework, dances, sport games in the gym, art activities and projects. LACC children varied in age from 5- to 15-years old; the majority of the children were in elementary and middle school. Ethnically, more than half of the LACC children were (black, brown, and white skinned) Puerto-Ricans either born in Puerto-Rico or on the continent; the next largest group of children was recent Mexican immigrants followed by children of immigrants from other Latin-American countries (e.g., Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Cuba); there was also a smaller number of African American children. It was important to mention that the children's color of skin or Spanish/English proficiency did not accurately predict their ethnicity and group affiliations, a fact which sometimes confused our students. The LACC staff was mainly of Puerto-Rican and Mexican descent. The instructor also attended the practicum about twice a week on a regular basis (although the TA did not). By the time the fall 2001 semester began, the University and the LACC were in their fifth year of a successful partnership. Two more sections of EDUC258 taught by another professor had their practicum at LACC at the same time. The after-school program involving the University students ran four evenings a week and on each evening

included approximately 30 University students and about 80 LACC children.

The curriculum of the EDUC258 class was highly focused on students' reflections and observations about their LACC practicum experience. At the beginning of the class meetings, the students and the instructor wrote down items for the class agenda that they wanted to discuss in the class. Agenda items came from web discussions, assigned readings (that could change depending on the issues that emerged in the class), weekly assignments called "mini-projects," discussions of the students' own initiated activities at the LACC (e.g., Halloween party, organizing Peaceful Posse for girls—a life issues discussion group), and some directly from the students' experiences working with LACC children. Weekly mini-projects were also web-based; students were required to post three reports based on structured interviews with the children, observations, analysis of educational statistics, and so on. There were no exams in the class. By the middle of the semester, the students had to develop proposals for a final project based on research they did at LACC. The proposals were finalized just a few weeks before the end of the semester. The students were graded on the final project (all mini-projects and web postings were not graded) as well as on their fulfillment of quantitatively defined requirements for the class (e.g., the number of the required postings).

2.2. Coding categories

2.2.1. The main four categories of narrative types

We used NVIVO version 2 (QSR Software Ltd.) to code the presence of the four types of narratives about the LACC children—subjectivizing, objectivizing, problematizing, and finalizing—in each of our students' web postings. We coded a certain part of the text of the posting as *problematizing* when the author problematized, inquired, and articulated uncertainty/surprise about the LACC children in his or her message. For example, "...[yesterday] the most important thing *I tried to do* [at LACC] was [to] *figure out their* [the children's] *interests...* [in order to improve activities in the art room]." In this example, the author expressed an inquiry about what children's artistic interests were so that the University students could develop more exciting art activities to offer to the LACC children. From this fragment it is unclear how the student was going to find out what the children's interests were: (i.e., if

she was to ask them or, for instance, observe the children to find out). Consequently, we coded this fragment neither as subjectivizing nor objectivizing.

We coded the text of a web posting as *finalizing* when the author expressed and promoted certainty in her statements about LACC children. For example, “There was this one girl who wanted to draw me a picture of my name to give to me. I thought it was so sweet of her. It made me realize *how much the children love that we are there with them.*” In this posting, the student expressed certainty that the LACC children loved the University students. It is clear that the student based her certainty on her observation (and generalization) rather than on talking directly with the children. Thus, we also coded this fragment as objectivizing.

We coded a part or all of a web posting as *subjectivizing* when the author reports on what she heard from the LACC children or explicitly articulates her intent to talk with the children. For example, “This week has definitely been awesome. *So many of the kids have told me how much fun they are having with the donut game, and especially the dirt!* [i.e., a chocolate pudding dessert with crushed cookies and candy]”. In this posting, the student reported on what the LACC children told her. This fragment was also coded as finalizing because the student articulated certainty about the children—that the children were having fun with the “donut game,” organized by the University students, and especially with the “dirt” activity.

Finally, we coded any fragment of a web posting as *objectivizing* when the author drew information and conclusions in her statements about LACC children from observations, general knowledge, her own past experiences, and other people than the LACC children themselves. For example, “*I think* a lot of these kids lack the patriotism that people from our area of the country have for several reasons. *I think* that a lot of it has to do with the fact that these kids identify with their Latin American heritage much more than they possess the wave of US patriotism that we see now.” We coded the fragment as objectivizing because this student based her conclusion that the LACC children lack patriotism to the fact that these children, in the year after the bombing of the World Trade Center, did not know a popular 1980s (the time when our students grew up) patriotic song “I Am Proud To Be an American.” This student, who grew up in New York City, had known the song when she was the children’s age. She based the fact that the

children should have known the song on her own experience rather than on a conversation with the children about their patriotism. We also coded this fragment as finalizing because the author articulated certainty about the children that they lacked this patriotism.

While coding ambiguous cases of use of narratives, we relied on “liberal” and “conservative” decision making to avoid unintentionally inflating the results in the direction of our expectations. Since we expected low frequencies of subjectivizing and problematizing and high frequencies of objectivizing and finalizing, we “liberally” coded the former (i.e., tacit but reasonable cases were included in coding these categories) and “conservatively” coded the latter (i.e., cases without direct and clear references were excluded from coding for these categories). As an example of our liberal bias, we coded a posting as subjectivizing even when there was no direct reference to any conversation with the children *although* it was reasonable to imply one occurred. However, we coded a posting as objectivizing only when it had a very clear reference as to how the statement (or question) about the practicum children was drawn *and* when it was clear that this reference did not involve talking with or listening to the children.

To illustrate how we used these rules of decision making in our coding we turn to a specific example of a posting involving a reply to the student’s claim that LACC children lack patriotism because they do not know the popular patriotic song “I Am Proud To Be an American” (see above). In this case, following our “liberal rule”, we coded fragments in the reply problematizing and subjectivizing even though we were not sure that the student problematized and subjectivized the practicum children; indeed, she seemed to be surprised and it was very plausible to assume that she did base her statement on communicating with the children. Interestingly enough, in a following posting, another student disputed the claim that the LACC children lacked US patriotism *because* they do not know the song (and thus problematized the LACC children) by referring to her own unfamiliarity with the listed patriotic songs while considering herself to be very patriotic. The second student wrote in her reply:

It is true that New Yorkers probably have a lot more patriotism after what happened on 9-11. I am from Connecticut and I feel that I was just as affected because I was in the city all the time, and

I miss the old New York skyline. The reason I am saying this is that I do not know that song, I Am Proud To Be an American, but I feel that I am patriotic. You are probably right, that these kids could not relate to certain things that happened this past year and it is great that you thought about that. *I don't really know what I am trying to say, I guess just that you don't know for sure how people were affected by 9-11, in or out of New York, unless they tell you.*

Although, in both cases the students referred to their own subjectivities and not to the LACC children's ones, their disagreement tacitly problematized the LACC children. We coded this reply posting as problematizing: the problem being whether the practicum children really were patriotic or not. The student did not articulate an explicit inquiry about LACC children. She seemed to be more concerned with the epistemology of how to learn about other people's patriotism (e.g., knowing popular patriotic songs versus talking directly with the people) rather than directly with the issue of whether the LACC children really were patriotic or not. However, we cannot know this for sure because even the student herself openly admitted in the posting that she was confused about what exactly she was saying. Indeed, she seemed to also care about the issue of the LACC children's patriotism and agreed with the first student's point about the children's lack of patriotism on the ground of their being Latino, "You are probably right, that these kids could not relate to certain things that happened this past year and it is great that you thought about that." This point was probably rooted in these two students' general reasoning that LACC children, being bicultural and binational, could not commit to US patriotism to the same extent as mononational Americans. Again this is a speculation on our part based on what both of these students wrote in their postings. However, using our "liberal" rule we coded this posting as problematizing LACC children because it is reasonable to assume that the second student wanted to know whether the LACC children were really were patriotic or not (see our discussion of "liberal and "conservative" rules of coding below). Similarly we used our "liberal" rule and coded this posting (the last sentence) as subjectivizing because the student seemed to imply that in order to learn about the LACC children's patriotism they have to be asked, "*you don't know for sure how people were affected by 9-11, in or out of*

New York, unless they tell you." It is interesting that it seemed to be the student's problematizing how to find out if people are patriotic that led to the student's subjectivizing the practicum children (i.e., that one needs to talk with the children to find about their patriotism). As far as we know, the students did not follow this advice and they did not talk with the LACC children about their patriotism. Looking back on the web discussion, it is clear that the instructor missed a teaching opportunity to support the student's idea to talk with the LACC children about their patriotism—to access the children's subjectivities (fortunately, the instructor did not miss these teaching opportunities in some other cases and the students did follow his advice).

The four types of University students' narratives about the practicum children were not mutually exclusive; an entire posting or a certain fragment was coded using several categories (see the examples above). For example, the following posting was coded for all four narratives, "I can't wait to start the posse [Peaceful Posse for girls]! I agree that we should definitely start by telling about ourselves, so they will feel like they know us a little better and will be comfortable talking with us. *We should make a sheet where the girls can write down topics they want to talk about, or things that they would like to do together—because we are doing this for them.* The make-over day sounds like a really cute idea, I know a lot of girls love experimenting with make-up and stuff like that....it would be a good way to bond." We coded the above italicized sentence as subjectivizing and problematizing as it showed clear intent to inquire about the situation, to ask the children what they wanted to do in the Peaceful Posse meetings. We coded the underlined sentence as finalizing and objectivizing since the author articulated certainty about what would be interesting for the LACC girls based on her own experiences and knowledge about girls in general.

To check the intercoder reliability of the four categories we asked the second coder to code 78 (38% of the total) student postings with at least one of the four narratives about LACC children. Table 2 shows the analysis of the intercoder reliability. The findings of this analysis suggest that the intercoder reliability is highly acceptable (Fleiss, 1981).

To operationalize the notion of "comprehensive/excessive objectivizing and finalizing" we compared the distribution of the four narratives in the

Table 2
Intercoder reliability

	Subjectivizing	Objectivizing	Problematizing	Finalizing
Agreement	92%	82%	86%	88%
Correlation	0.836	0.622	0.723	0.704
Kappa	0.831	0.621	0.717	0.694

Note: $p < 0.0001$ for all correlation and Kappa coefficients.

students' web postings about the Latino children with:

- (1) their narratives about their own class members (thus we compared narratives about the students' own learning community with narratives constituting their teaching community): 19 students (out of 21) wrote 63 postings about their classmates;
- (2) the instructor's 27 postings with the narratives about Latino children;
- (3) pre-service teachers' narratives about mostly white middle-class children from another class, EDUC390, entitled "Instructional Strategies and Reflective Practices", with a teaching practicum situated in regular elementary schools: 22 pre-service teachers generated 104 postings about their practicum children;
- (4) inservice teachers' narratives about their students available on Internet discussions (e.g., "Teacher Talk" at <http://www.teaching.com/ttalk>). We found five online teacher forums with a total of 55 participants and 61 postings; and
- (5) model inservice teachers' narratives about their students available in their published writings (e.g., writings by such internationally and nationally recognized teachers as Vivian Paley, Erin Gruwell, Mike Rose, Janusz Korczak, Cristina Igoa, Stephanie Dalton, Gregory Michie, Judy Logan, Jaime Escalante, and Cynthia Ballenger: Ballenger, 1999; Escalante, 1998; Freedom Writers & Gruwell, 1999; Igoa, 1995; Korczak, 1978; Logan, 1997; Michie, 1999; Paley, 1992; Rose, 1989; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988); We selected these writings from 10 nationally and/or internationally recognized teachers, taking out more or less three random fragments from each instance the author talked about his or her students (30 entries total).

We coded these texts using the same principles as the coding for the EDUC258 course. These multiple

comparisons helped us also to address the issue of what is responsible for comprehensive objectivizing and finalizing (if we found this issue emerging again across the groups). We had several alternative hypotheses to consider. Can it be that any discourse about third person(s) promotes overwhelming objectivizing and finalizing by any author? Can it be that the pre-service teachers were unfamiliar with problematizing and subjectivizing in any context (that is, for example, even with children with whom they worked in the past)? Can it be that the pre-service teachers were uncomfortable to reveal any uncertainty or problems they faced on the class online discussions? Can it be that overwhelming objectivizing and finalizing is caused by the fact that Latino working-class children are so different from our white middle-class pre-service teachers?

2.2.2. Coding subcategories for subjectivizing and problematizing narratives

In addition to the main categories, involving the four types of students' narratives about their practicum children, we coded some subcategories when we explored time changes in frequencies of the subjectivizing narrative in the students' postings during their teaching practicum. We coded whether the students' subjectivizing postings were *written in response to the instructor's problematizing and/or subjectivizing postings*. This coding and the following analysis helped us to check the role of the instructor's postings for the students' subjectivizing. For example, one student, named Donna⁴ wrote in an objectivizing and finalizing manner that both parents and teachers of the LACC children neglect the children and that was why the presence of the University students (i.e., caring adults who listen to and advise the children) at LACC was so important, "The most important thing to do [for us, the University students, at LACC] is to just listen to

⁴All names of the University students and LACC children are pseudonyms.

these children because some of them did not get much attention at home or at school and what they really need is someone who is willing to listen to what they have to say.” The instructor replied:

I can probably see where Donna came from in her statement. We have seen both at LACC (in the homework room and just from talking with the kids about their schools) and in our class (remember the teachers’ survey saying that LACC kids have no strengths) a lot of evidence that many teachers of LACC [children] are insensitive to their needs in school. As for the parents, they often have to work 2–3 low paid jobs and may not have opportunities to see or talk much with the kids.

My own guess is both similar and different from Donna’s. I suspect it is true that school does not listen to the kids but I think parents do listen to the kids, although this can vary across the kids. Latino and African American families are often strong in part because dealing with the hardship of poverty requires joint efforts of family and community. But, I confess that I’m not sure and Donna can be right (or we both can be wrong). I wonder if we can investigate that. Can you ask the kids at LACC if they have opportunities to talk with adults at school and at home (should we add LACC as well?), if the kids have an opportunity to share with the adults what is going in their lives, if the adults listen to them. We can add these questions to your ongoing survey for the 9th week’s mini-project [weekly writing assignment on the web]...

By the way, this can be a great final project if you are excited to do this survey...”

The student replied that she was interested in following up on the inquiry raised by the instructor, “I made that statement based on the experience I had over the summer. I worked in a daycare center in a predominantly Hispanic area, which was very similar to the LACC. A large majority of the children were there from 7:30 in the morning until 5:30 in the evening, and when they got home their parents put them in front of the television until it was time for bed. This was not the case for all of the children and I hope that it is not the case for the children at the LACC. I would be interested in doing a survey like you mentioned to further investigate this topic.” We coded this posting as both problematizing and subjectivizing the practicum children. For her final project, the student

actually interviewed the LACC children, children of same age from her white middle-class neighborhood, and her University classmates about whom they would turn for advice if they were faced with a difficult situation (different scenarios were presented). She found that, unlike the other two groups, the LACC children prioritized their parents over their peers. The majority of the LACC children said that they would never turn to their teachers for advice (which was also different for the other two groups). This case suggests that some of the subjectivizing and problematizing postings were prompted by the instructor’s problematizing and subjectivizing postings. We systematically explored this possibility in our analysis.

Other subcategories associated with subjectivizing and problematizing involved *references to what initiated the posting*: mini-project interviews and final projects, student-initiated activities, participation in the practicum, and *focus of the postings’ topics* (whether it is focused on the children or the University students themselves). Some subjectivizing and problematizing was associated with mini-project interviews and the final project. For example, a student wrote, “Through my interviews with the kids at the LACC I have found that most of the kids speak Spanish, and this is something that I wish I were able to do. Although this has made learning for some of them more difficult, it will be a very good asset to have. I am also envious at how close most children are to their extended families. Most children live with their families, and although I would not like to live with a large number of people, they have also developed strong relationships with each of them. One boy I interviewed considered his uncle that he lives with to be his second father. The brothers and sisters at the LACC are also very protective of each other. In a majority of the kids I have talked to I can see that family is very valued.” We coded this posting as *initiated by a mini-project interview* because the student’s subjectivizing was clearly prompted by the mini-project. We also coded it as *child-centered* because what the student reported hearing from the practicum children was about practicum children rather than about the University students themselves. In contrast, the following posting was University *student-centered* and was *initiated from a student being at the LACC*, “He [an LACC child] said a girl [a University student] was in here singing and had everybody else singing. “We were like, ‘you, mean Mindy?’ [a University student] and he said ‘yeah,

that girl is active.”” In this posting, the student wanted to make a point that the University students were highly valued by the LACC children; the message was primarily about the students but was told through remarks made by the LACC children (i.e., subjectivizing). Finally, some postings *originated from the students’ planning or reporting about their activities at LACC*, “This week has definitely been awesome [during a Halloween party organized by the students]. *So many of the kids have told me how much fun they are having with the donut game, and especially the dirt!!* [the games organized by the students during the party]. Of course they loved all the candy we gave them too.”

2.3. Data analysis

For the data analysis, we used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods—the basis of any analysis—helped to develop, situate, and describe observed patterns. We performed a qualitative content analysis of postings that allowed us to reveal differences and similarities within the same category. For example, we compared what is problematized in children by EDUC258 pre-service teachers with what is problematized in children by in-service teachers in their online discussions. We also used content analysis to check if students’ subjectivizing during the first part of the practicum is similar or different than in the second part of the semester and what might be responsible for the difference. When some qualitative patterns were revealed as quantitative (e.g., something is more or less frequent), the quantitative analyses were used. We presented the results of the quantitative analyses in the form of graphs and tables. Finally, we used statistical analysis for testing hypotheses about quantitative differences and similarities to explore the quantitative patterns.

In our statistical analysis, we used inferential statistics procedures. We defined “the total imaginary pool” as all possible postings that other middle-class UD pre-service teachers can generate in a similar class with a similar teaching practicum. So, the analyzed postings from the EDUC258 class we studied were a “sample” from this imaginary pool. Since our variables were all ordinal—the absence (coded as 0) or the presence (coded as 1) of a given category in a posting—we used non-parametric statistics.

Our unit of analysis (a statistical “case”)—a student’s individual posting involving at least one of

the four studied narratives about the practicum children—presented a certain statistical challenge for our analysis. We were highly aware that these statistical cases—the students’ web postings—were probably dependent in, at least, three important ways. First, they could be dependent because some of the postings were written by the same students. Second, by belonging to the same discussion threads, some postings could be dependent because these postings were written by students in reply to earlier postings of other students and/or the instructor. Finally, all postings had a “historical” and “recursive” property: it was fair to assume (based on the instructor’s interview with the students after the semester was over) that all past postings were read by the students and thus the past postings could directly or indirectly affect the students’ new postings (and at different times). This case dependency in our data could reduce the statistical error and, thus, could increase the possibility of finding bigger statistical differences which, in turn, could lead to rejecting some null hypotheses that should have been upheld. To address this problem, we decided to make the rejection range of the null hypothesis “super-conservative” by moving the threshold of rejection to $p < 0.001$ instead of the traditional $p < 0.05$. However, this move makes acceptance of the null hypotheses “too liberal” ($p > 0.001$ instead of the traditional $p > 0.05$). To avoid this new problem, we introduced three possible outcomes of our statistical analyses (in place of the traditional two): (1) the null hypotheses were rejected when $p < 0.001$, (2) the null hypotheses were accepted when $p < 0.05$, and (3) the results of the statistical tests were considered inconclusive when $0.05 < p < 0.001$. We think our approach is probably excessively “conservative” and that other, new, methods of inferential statistics dealing with testing hypotheses of *historical and recursive* data should be used (e.g., statistics of neural networks based on connectionist models); however, these are not available for us at the time of our analysis.

We are not fully satisfied with the statistical method used here for several reasons. First, we are uncertain if our unit of analysis should be an individual posting, an individual student, the whole class or the “neural interactive network.” As we discussed above, there is a high dependency in the students’ postings. The postings are connected to and defined by each other through the discussion threads, the students’ experiences, the students’

communication with each other, by the fact that the students are reading previous postings and remembering them, and by the fact that the postings are changing the students (both readers and the authors of the postings). On top of this, this interactive and transactional network is unfolding in time in parallel with students' experiences in the practicum. We found that the closest mathematical models were applied in the study of neural networks, gene networks, and pattern recognition. For these problems, mathematicians developed diverse methods like connectionist "neural network" methods, Markov chains, graph theory, and cluster analysis (Lidia Rejto, personal communication, March 2004). It appears, however, after our investigation and consultation with professional mathematicians/statisticians, that no appropriate statistical/mathematical model has been developed for our problem of studying asynchronous discussion forums. We are highly aware that the statistical methods and models that we are using in this research are highly inappropriate and mainly serve for analytic estimation (similar to graphs) rather than for strong statistical conclusions. As we described above, we used highly conservative p -values in order to make our analytical estimations more realistic. We hope that new statistical/mathematical methods will be developed in the future that will allow for analysis of transactional networks unfolding in time.

3. Findings

3.1. Narratives of a "teaching imaginary children/ students" pedagogical regime

The results of our analysis show that EDUC258 students predominately used objectivizing and finalizing narratives about the LACC children during their teaching practicum (Fig. 1). Over 80% of their web postings about LACC children involved objectivizing and finalizing narratives. In about 20% of their postings about the practicum children, EDUC258 students used subjectivizing and problematizing narratives. As Fig. 3 (see several pages below) shows, not all students used comprehensive objectivizing and finalizing. The first 3 students on the graph demonstrated a high level of subjectivizing while students 4 and 10 showed high levels of problematizing. Although levels of objectivizing and finalizing varied among the students, they remained rather high especially in comparison with the instructor's levels.

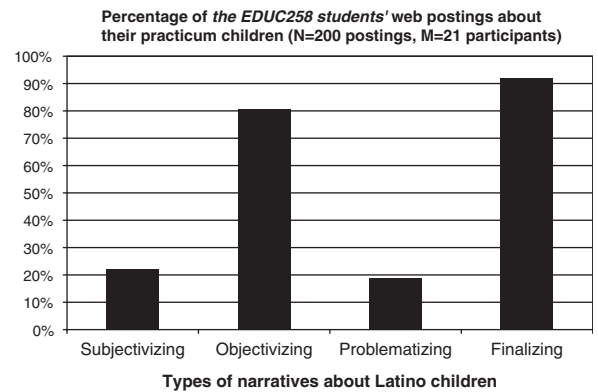


Fig. 1. Percentage of the EDUC258 students' web postings.

In their class web postings, the preservice teachers speculated, interpreted, projected, and inferred a lot about how the Latino children felt and thought without much checking up on their speculations with the children themselves, as the following posting illustrates, "Right as I was leaving [LACC] they ran up to me and gave me their pictures I was amazed. These girls barely knew me but yet they wanted me to have their pictures. All three pictures are hanging on my wall so I can remember how loving kids really are. I just hope I can always be as generous as those three kids were to me!" (Week 2 of the practicum). The point here is not so much that the University students were wrong in their interpretations of the LACC children's behaviors and actions (although they were wrong in many cases, including this one) but that they rarely tested their interpretations with the children themselves (especially in the first part of the practicum).

The students' interpretative meaning making was heavily based on their general knowledge about nonspecific children, Latino communities, poor families, and their own experiences as children. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that if LACC children who do not know you give you the pictures that they just drew, then it means that they like you and are generous. It is okay for the University students not to know that there has been a long tradition at LACC for the children to give away their pictures to the adults at LACC. From this context, the children's actions, although probably friendly, were not very special. It is also reasonable to assume that if Latino children do not speak to you, they may have problems with English, "I think that it is awesome that we are beginning to learn Spanish at the same time that *the children at the*

LACC are becoming comfortable with English” (Week 2 of the practicum). But in actuality, rather than becoming more comfortable with English, which the far majority of the children could speak rather fluently, the children’s increased use of the spoken English language was related to them becoming more comfortable with the University students. It was also common that the students used their personal experiences to make sense of how the LACC children felt, “On Wednesday at the LACC, I met Rosa, a shy 10-year old with one older brother and one little brother. We started out playing [the card game] Apples to Apples (the best game ever!) together with two other UD students. After, I asked her if she wanted to go into the art room with me. We sat together while I drew her name and she just kind of watched me and then eventually started drawing after a lot of encouragement. We talked a lot—about her family, school, TV... and since she was so shy, I talked a lot. *I was shy as a little kid, so I knew exactly how she felt, and I kept putting myself in her shoes, having a college kid ask you all these questions and what not*” (Week 3 of the practicum).

The students rarely problematized their own speculations or tried to investigate them even when they were aware of the speculative nature of their statements. For example, “I think a lot of these kids lack the patriotism that people from our area of the country have for several reasons. I think that a lot of it has to do with the fact that these kids identify with their Latin American heritage much more than they possess the wave of US patriotism that we see now. In the art room, I noticed that a lot of the boys will draw the flag of Puerto Rico... you don’t really see them drawing the American flag... plus, they are really young. I mean, I don’t know the words to many patriotic songs other than the national anthem and “My country ‘tis of thee.” I think that different schools place different degrees of emphasis on patriotism and I wouldn’t be the least bit surprised that these kids weren’t as spirited about our nation as kids in New York. Plus being that these kids are Latin American and probably go to schools where they are the majority, emphasis might be placed on celebrating their countries of origin. I don’t know, that’s my speculation” (Week 3 of the practicum).

Some of the students’ erroneous speculations such as the LACC children’s lack of fluency in English, the University students’ huge impact on the children from at their first day at LACC, and so on did not apparently have negative consequences on

the children and even were taken care of by the students’ further experiences with the LACC children. However, some other erroneous speculations like the assumption that low-income parents neglect their children, Latino children are unpatriotic, Latino boys are aggressive and so on could have potential negative consequences. Although some of the speculations made by the students turned to be correct (e.g., that the children indeed liked candies “paid” by some students for participation in the interviews assigned in the class) miscommunication, adversity, and disengagement could easily result from these suppositions if they are left unchecked. These negative consequences could be more severe for students who come from different backgrounds than the teachers. Since teachers seemed to use their backgrounds in inferring and projecting their students’ subjectivities, they will make more mistakes with students who are different from them. For white middle-class teachers, learning how to subjectivize and problematize students in their professional discourse is especially important when their students are males, from families of color, working class and/or have handicaps because of the limitations these teachers face relying on similarities between their own and their students’ upbringing (Banks, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999, 2000).

3.2. Testing alternative hypotheses

We wondered if this high level of unchecked speculation about Latino children evident in the students’ comprehensive objectivizing and finalizing resulted from the unfamiliarity of our white middle-class University students with low-income Latino children. Perhaps if the practicum children had been children of similar backgrounds to our students, our students would have used more subjectivizing and problematizing. We wished to test this alternative hypothesis since, as we will see further in this paper, the students were much less comfortable objectivizing and finalizing each other. To test this hypothesis, we compared the frequencies of the 4 narratives about practicum children in EDUC258 and EDUC390 classes (Table 3). The EDUC390 class was taught by the first author and involved a teaching practicum in local schools where University students worked with mainly white middle-class children from similar backgrounds to our students. As Fig. 2 shows, the frequency distributions across the four narratives (the black and diagonal bars)

Table 3

Nonparametric sign tests of the four narratives between EDUC258 and EDUC390 classes

	Number of ties	Percent $v < V$	Z	p-level	Accepting the null hypothesis
Problematizing	37	56.8	0.66	0.510798	Yes
Finalizing	23	21.7	2.50	0.012343	Inconclusive
Subjectivizing	30	66.7	1.64	0.100348	Yes
Objectivizing	32	31.3	1.94	0.051830	Yes

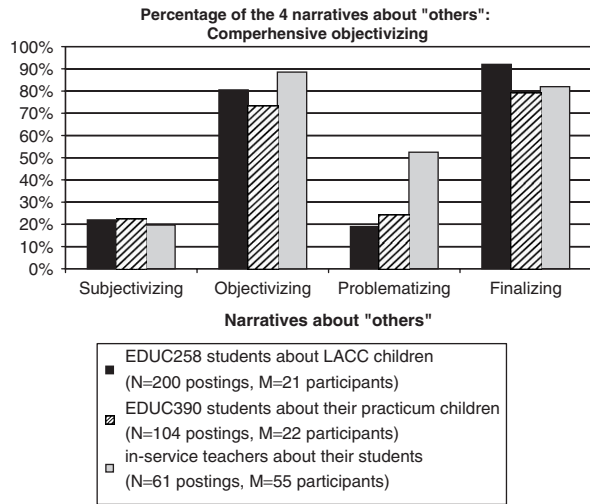


Fig. 2. Narratives in "teaching imaginary children" pedagogical regimes.

look remarkably similar for both classes. The nonparametric Sign tests revealed no differences between the students' narratives from the two classes. We did not find any differences between pre-service teachers' narratives about low-income Latino and white middle-class practicum children.

In the light of these findings showing no differences in pre-service teachers' narratives about low-income Latino and white middle-class practicum children, we hypothesized that a semester-long practicum may not be enough to establish rapport between the pre-service teachers and their practicum children; in turn, comprehensive objectivizing and finalizing may not be overcome unless the practicum is longer. To check this hypothesis, we decided to compare the narratives of the EDUC258 pre-service teachers about their practicum children and the narratives of in-service teachers discussing about their students in publicly accessible online discussion forums. Although, we did not have systematic information about years of teaching experiences of

these in-service teachers, the information that participants of the online discussions revealed about themselves suggested that they had very diverse teaching experiences with regards of years of teaching, subjects, and the ages of the children they teach. As Fig. 2 shows (black and gray bars), there was no apparent differences in the narratives between our pre-service and the in-service teachers except in the problematizing narrative. The Sign tests revealed that only problematizing was at a significantly higher level for the in-service teachers (Table 4).

The much higher level of the problematizing narrative in the in-service teachers' postings may reflect the different nature of participation in online professional discussions versus our class web discussion forum. It can be that in-service teachers choose to participate in the online discussions because they have questions about their practices while pre-service teachers' do not use the problematizing narrative to the same extent since they are required to post by the instructor (two postings minimum per week). Further investigation of this phenomenon is needed.

Our content analysis of the pre-service and in-service teachers' postings shows that all but two postings by in-service teachers were about classroom management and control issues such as conflicts among students, conflicts between the teacher and students, and organizational issues. The other two postings were about cultural diversity. Very few of EDUC258 postings about their practicum children and only about one-fourth of EDUC390 postings were about classroom management issues. This phenomenon probably reflects: (1) the peripheral roles and responsibilities of the pre-service teachers in comparison with the in-service teachers who were fully responsible for running their classrooms; (2) the different pedagogical regimes (traditional schools versus afterschool programs); and (3) the instructor's focus on

Table 4
Nonparametric sign tests of the four narratives between our pre-service and in-service teachers

	Number of ties	Percent $v < V$	Z	p-level	Accepting the null hypothesis
Problematizing	33	87.9	4.18	0.000029	No
Finalizing	11	9.1	2.41	0.015861	Inconclusive
Subjectivizing	14	71.4	1.34	0.181449	Yes
Objectivizing	8	50.0	-0.35	0.723674	Yes

instruction and other issues in his guidance of the EDUC258 and EDUC390 students. Further investigation of this phenomenon is needed.

In addition, problematizing by the EDUC258 students was more associated with subjectivizing about their practicum children (25% of all postings with the problematizing narrative) than in-service teachers' discussions (6%) ($\chi^2 = 4.50$, $p = 0.0335$; the test is inconclusive). Many in-service teachers in their on-line discussions problematize situations involving their students after they finalize and objectivize them; this is evident in the following example, "I have big problems in getting the 8 year olds to pay attention, getting them to stay in their seats can be a problem. Any tips or any ideas, I really need it. They seem to choose not to learn. How do I overcome this? Thank you. Tom" (TeacherTalk, 23, April 13, 2003). In this example, the teacher characterized his students as not paying attention, not being able to stay in their seats, and apparently choosing not to learn. We coded this as finalizing because of the level of certainty in the teacher's statements, and as objectivizing, because the teacher apparently bases his statements on inferences from the students' behavior. The teacher problematized the situation by asking the online teacher community how he could overcome the problem he faced with the child.

The inservice teachers' responses to other online participants usually involved the replier raising similar problems in their practices or providing solutions that rely on finalizing and objectivizing narratives, as is evident in the following response, "In response to your question, I have my 8 year old students do a little exercise routine in the morning. We do some stretches and movement activities and incorporate it in our morning routine. *I find them to be more attentive and able to stay in their seats because they got some jitters out.* You could do a math lesson and have the bodies play out the problem. Hope this is helpful! Good luck!" (TeacherTalk, 24, April 27, 2003).

Through the content analysis, we found that pre- and in-service teachers used a different type of objectivizing of their students. The in-service teachers seemed to use *hard objectivizing* of their students and *treat children as objects of their pedagogical actions*. In their postings, the in-service teachers treated their students *as things*, highly objectivizing and problematizing their children—in much the same way as, let's say, computer programmers treat their hardware and software. Indeed, if we replaced the references to the children in the exchange above for the references hardware and software, we would get a plausible exchange about objects, not people: "I have big problems with my 3-year old computer getting slower and slower every month to the point that I have to wait several minutes before a simple program like Word can start. Any tips or any ideas, I really need it. My computer gets lazy. How do I overcome this? Thank you. Tom" Reply: "In response to your situation, I have my 4-year old computer scheduled to do regular defragmentation every morning. It puts all the programs on the same sectors so they work faster. I find the programs working faster (and more reliably) after the defragmentation procedures. You can schedule your defrag program to work every week (at least). Hope this is helpful! Good luck!" These discussions remind us that Bakhtin warned against using narratives from natural sciences (and technology) in the area of human relations (Bakhtin, 1999).

In contrast to in-service teachers, EDUC258 (and EDUC390) students often used *soft objectivizing* based on projections, inferences, observations, and speculations, "They [LACC children] were so happy, and excited to show us their dance steps" (Week 1 of the practicum). Although not to the same extent as the in-service teachers, we found that some of our EDUC258 students also used *hard objectivizing* and treated LACC children as objects of their pedagogical actions, "Alice was right about the candy... some kids were really greedy about it

and would constantly come up to ask for more candy, each claiming that they hadn't gotten any yet. Having candy definitely makes you everyone's best friend, but it would definitely be more helpful if we thought of a way to make the kids earn it. After a while I was only giving candy to kids if they told me about what they'd learned at school that day, it got them talking which was kind of cool" (Week 5 of the practicum). Based on the data presented below, we hypothesize that with support and guidance, pre-service teachers' soft objectivizing can lead to subjectivizing or can shift to hard objectivizing if pre-service teachers are left unsupported.

3.3. Narratives of a "communities of learners" pedagogical regime

It is very important for teaching in general, and for planning teaching specifically, for teachers to imagine students' motives and the reasons for their behavior and actions, to understand the circumstances of their lives, and to anticipate potential problems that the children may have. Teachers are never "blank slates" and should never be "blank slates" without any expectations and pre-conceptions about the students they are going to teach. Teachers cannot plan their instruction without anticipating how their students will engage and respond to the instruction or even why their students need the instruction in the first place. Good, experienced teachers probably not only have even more expectations and pre-conceptions about their students than inexperienced and inept teachers do, but, even more importantly, their expectations and pre-conceptions are more accurate and useful (which may not be necessarily the same). Our findings suggest that model teachers test and problematize their expectations and pre-conceptions and are extremely interested in and attuned to their students' articulation of their own views and talking about themselves. These discursive processes seem to create recursive chains of corrections of the teachers' expectations and promote their understanding of their students.

Fig. 4 shows the distribution of the four types of narratives in the ten model teachers' writing about their students (checkered bars). It strikes us to find a high level of subjectivizing (93%) in the narratives of the model teachers about their students. Their writings are full of direct or indirect quotes from their students. For example, Cynthia Ballinger

describes her student, "Tiny Tatie, not yet 3 years old, never says a word and never comes to circle where we read the names and talk a little about letters. *I am amazed to discover that she has been walking around the classroom all morning with two fingers in the shape of a T. When asked what she's doing, she says, "It's me," and continues silently to parade her T around the classroom*" (Ballinger, 1999, p. 45). We coded the italicized fragment as subjectivizing and problematizing because not only did the teacher express puzzlement about the student's behavior (i.e., problematizing) but also she asked the student to explain what her behavior meant (i.e., subjectivizing). Amazingly, all model teachers without exception subjectivized their students in their writing. This shows their deep attention to what their students say. Seven out of the ten model teachers we studied problematized their students in the random fragments of their writings we chose (passages when model teachers talk about their students were randomly selected). Problematizing narratives were coded in 53% of the selected fragments. In all of the instances, the problematizing narrative either stood alone or was accompanied by subjectivizing narratives as shown in the example above. There was no overabundance of objectivized problematizing that was seen in the on-line discussions of in-service teachers. The model teachers' narratives were also characterized by a high level of subjectivized finalizing—with the exception of two fragments, all other finalizing fragments involved subjectivizing, "You knew when that student walked through the door; you could sense the feeling of injustice he brought with him as he sat down alongside you. 'Something's wrong,' Tony blurted out soon after he introduced himself. 'This class is way below my level.' The tutor assured him that the class was a tough one and would soon get harder. 'Well, I hope so,' he said, "cause I took Advanced English in high school. I feel kind of silly doing this stuff'" (Rose, 1989, p. 172). The model teachers often reported what they learned from their students and how their statements about the students (i.e., finalizing) arrived from what the students said about themselves or the world (i.e., subjectivizing). Objectivizing narratives were present in the model teachers' writings, but not extensively (30%). With the exception of two fragments, model teachers' objectivizing was intertwined with their subjectivizing (and finalizing), as it is evident in the following example (italics show our coding of objectivizing):

Some of our kids, they don't want to learn their times tables, because they have the calculator. And at the end, the student is the slave of the calculator. He depends on the calculator; he can't even estimate.

I said this in the classroom, "10 percent of \$80 is less than 8, more than 8 or only 8?" Some of the kids didn't do anything, and I don't understand, "You can't do this?" [They say,] "I don't have my calculator."

One kid came to class with a sophisticated calculator. He had the program, and he was doing the correct answers. And I said, "You have to show the steps to the end." And he said, "I did it with the calculator; I programmed it."

And he don't know what the maximum minimum inflexion point is. So it's the answer but no understanding—nothing. He does not have the basics, he doesn't have the knowledge (Escalante, 1998).

We associate teachers' strong use of subjectivizing and problematizing narratives about their students (along with finalizing and objectivizing) with a "community of learners" model of education

(Brown & Campione, 1994; Matusov, 1999; Matusov & Rogoff, 2002; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996; Wells, Chang, & Maher, 1990). A community of learners model of education is based on collaboration between the teacher and the students about learning about the world. This collaboration is impossible without the teacher carefully listening to the students and problematizing what the teacher knows about the students and how they think about the world (and about the world itself).

In their narratives about LACC children, our EDUC258 pre-service teachers demonstrated some rudimentary sense of the community of learners model. As Fig. 4 shows, they do subjectivize and problematize the LACC children. As Fig. 3 shows, 17 out of 21 students demonstrated the subjectivizing narrative in their web postings. Students 2 and 3 used subjectivizing in more than 40% of their postings about LACC children. Often (in 50% of all postings with subjectivizing narratives) our pre-service teachers' subjectivizing was prompted by or associated with the class assignments, "In interviewing kids at the LACC [a class assignment] and talking to them, I found that almost all of them live with or have extended family very close by" (Week 7

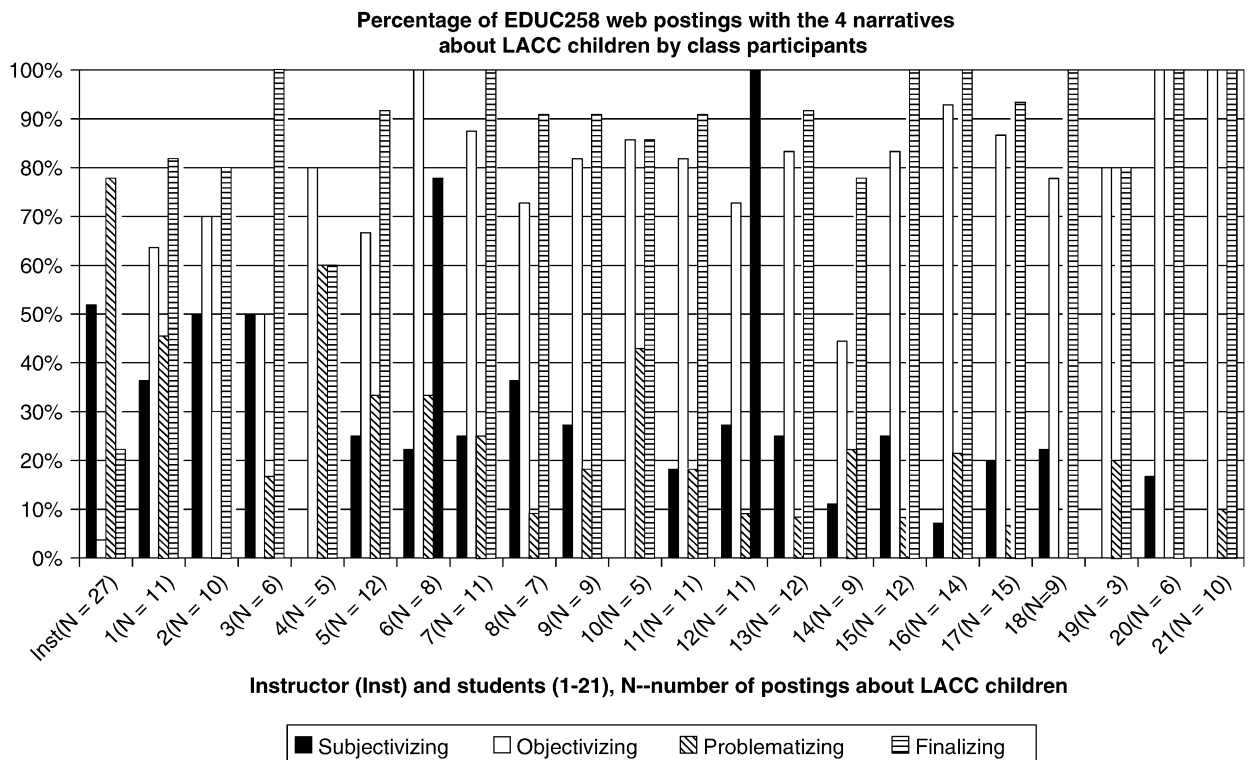


Fig. 3. Percentage of EDUC258 web postings with the four narratives.

of the practicum). It appears that students' subjectivizing was also facilitated by the instructor, as 39% of the subjectivizing postings were in discussion threads initiated by the instructor either through the class web or through class meetings. Some postings with subjectivizing narratives (27%) were about *planning* subjectivizing, which involved UD students planning to listen to or to ask the children about activities they were preparing for the children. Students wrote these messages in order to try to organize their activities with the children so that the activities they planned would be more sensitive for the LACC children, "...I think the pizza is a good idea. That could be our own Thanksgiving Feast with the kids. *We could get them to think about what they are truly thankful for and make a thanksgiving chain like we did for the wish chain. I think it would be interesting to see what everyone is thankful for in their life*" (Week 6 of the practicum). There was a certain quality of self-centeredness in the pre-service teachers' subjectivizing of their practicum children. In 56% of the total subjectivizing postings, our students focused on the children's feedback about the UD students themselves—what the LACC children thought about the UD students or about the activities the students organized for the children, "This week has definitely been awesome. *So many of the kids have told me how much fun they are having with the donut game, and especially the dirt!!* Of course they loved all the candy we gave them too" (Week 5 of the practicum). Only in 46% of the subjectivizing postings, the EDUC258 pre-service teachers focused on learning about the LACC children (e.g., their views, their lives, their problems), as the two above postings show.

The problematizing narrative was involved in 19% of all postings about LACC children. As Fig. 3 shows, 19 out of 21 students used the problematizing narrative about LACC children in their postings. Students 1, 4, and 10 used problematizing narratives more than 40% of their postings about LACC children. Among these three students' problematizing narratives, 25% involved subjectivized problematizing, e.g., "*I think that it would be a great idea to make a quick survey to find out exactly where the children's most favorite place is at the LACC*" (Week 3 of the practicum) and 25% involved objectivized problematizing, e.g., "I think that the Peaceful Posse [group] is good for the boys but I also think that it would be a great idea for the girls to have their own group. *I don't know how*

much the young girls would benefit as much, I think the different age groups would be more effective" (Week 4 of the practicum). The students' problematizing was mostly children-centered (64%) rather than centered on themselves, that is about the children's feedback on their own activities or themselves (28%). About 15% of problematizing postings came from threads initiated in the class discussions or by the instructor; 31% were prompted by or associated with the class assignments, 15% were related to activities that the students planned and/or carried out at the LACC; and 38% of the postings with problematizing narratives originated from the students' reflection on just being at LACC with the children. This data suggests that the students' problematizing was supported by the instructor, by their own activism, and by being with the children.

The EDUC258 students showed a very different distribution of the four narratives when we analyzed their postings about their classmates (see Fig. 4, wave bars). The percentage of subjectivizing postings jumped up to 63% and problematizing to 44%, while objectivizing dropped to 37% and finalizing to 51%. The students clearly listened to each other and were willing to problematize each other, "...as you guys know, Sandy and I are working with the girls for our final project. I just wanted to know what some of your experiences with all-girl groups have been—maybe something like Brownies [a scouting group], Girl Scouts, gymnastics, dance class, clubs you made yourself, anything in high school, etc." Their narrative distribution with strong emphasis on subjectivizing and problematizing suggests that they might constitute a community of learners with regard to each other. Similarly, the distributions of the instructor's narratives about his students, the EDUC258 pre-service teachers (the brick bars on Fig. 4) and his narratives about LACC children (the grid bars on Fig. 4) also suggest that he treated his students and the LACC children according to a community of learners model of education.

The previous findings suggest that the four narratives we describe here are unlikely to be student dispositions, but rather appear to reflect the relations that our pre-service teachers have with LACC children, as institutionalized by the University course (which indeed can induce certain power relationships between UD students and LACC children). When power relationships are different, as they are among classmates, our students became very comfortable subjectivizing

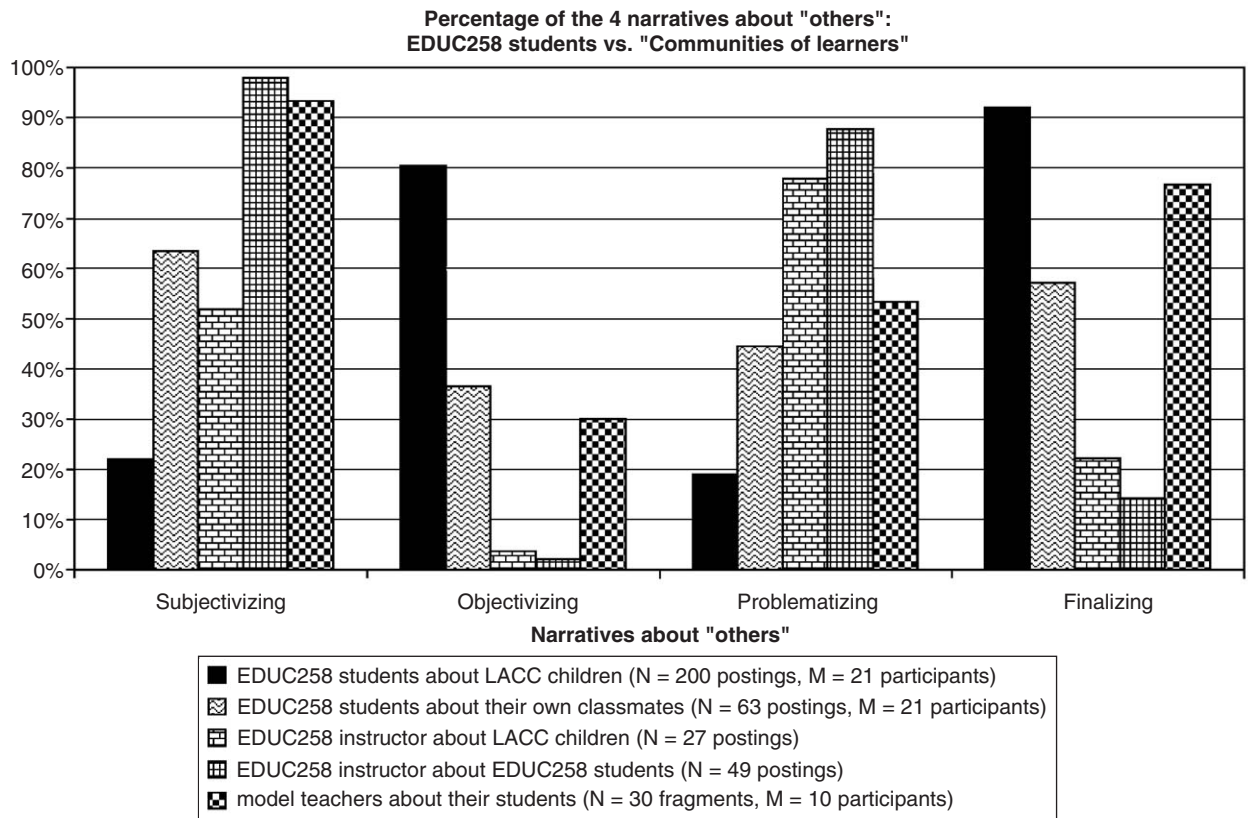


Fig. 4. Narrative in EDUC258 vs. "Communities of learners".

and problematizing each other. We can conclude that the UD students' high objectivizing and finalizing is *not* a result of their dispositions, "cognitive styles" or "narrative styles." We think that it is more parsimonious to think about students' narratives in relational terms as promoted by institutional power structures. According to our findings comparing our EDUC258 students working with Latino working class children and EDUC390 students working mainly with white middle-class children, we can conclude that the nature of these institutional power structures is probably rooted in the "teacher-student" hierarchy common in traditional schools (Rogoff et al., 1996) rather than in mere differences between the teachers' and students' backgrounds. However, as we speculated before, there can be more severe consequences for predominately objectivizing and finalizing discourse by the teachers for minority, working class, and/or handicapped children. More research is needed to further investigate this issue.

Despite some apparent elements of subjectivizing and problematizing, it is fair to conclude that the

EDUC258 students did not treat LACC children according to a community of learners model of education. Our non-parametric Sign tests show that all contrasts but one between the distribution of the four narratives by the EDUC258 students about LACC children (the black bars on Fig. 4) and the four distributions of community of learners' narratives (the wave, brick, grid, and checkered bars on Fig. 4) were statistically significant at higher level. The comparison of EDUC258 students' finalizing and model teachers' finalizing was inconclusive ($Z = 2.27, p < 0.023$). However, it is important to bear in mind that *the nature of finalizing* was different in these two populations. In the case of the EDUC258 students, finalizing was mostly present as objectivized finalizing (84.8% objectivized finalizing and 18.3% subjectivized finalizing with little overlap between subjectivizing and objectivizing), while in the case of the model teachers it was mostly subjectivized finalizing (39.1% objectivized finalizing and 91.3% subjectivized finalizing, with high overlap between objectivizing and subjectivizing).

These findings help to raise an important question about what differences in practices between traditional pre- and in-service teachers, on the one hand, and the model teachers, on the other hand, are responsible for the observed differences in their discourses about their own students. We think that this question requires further investigation and a direct comparison of the teaching practices.

3.4. Narrative changes during the semester

3.4.1. Changes in subjectivizing

We found that the changes in the subjectivizing narrative across the practicum were the key for understanding the changes in all other narratives, as all other narratives became more subjectivized, and less objectivized, across the practicum. We found a single major quantitative and qualitative jump in students' subjectivizing in the middle of the practicum (Fig. 5). During the 9-week practicum, the students' subjectivizing of the LACC children remained at a relatively low level for the first 5 weeks (found in between 5% and 20% of postings), but spiked during Week 10 of the practicum (from 10% to 40% of postings), and then stabilized at approximately 35% of the postings for the remainder of the practicum (Weeks 10–13). A nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis ANOVA by ranks showed a statistically significant difference between subjectivizing in the first part of the practicum (Weeks 5–9) and the second part of the practicum (Weeks 10–13), $H(1, N = 183) = 13.63, p < 0.0002$.

We performed a content analysis of the differences between the subjectivizing postings across the two time phases to find out whether the type of subjectivizing was the same or different across the two time phases. We looked at whether the

subjectivized posting was centered on students versus LACC children in order to determine if, for example, in the first weeks of the practicum, our students were mostly concerned with how children perceived them or their activities. Our follow-up statistical analysis using non-parametric Kruskal–Wallace ANOVAs by ranks showed this difference to be clearly non-significant.

We also wanted to determine whether the differences across the time phases in students' subjectivizing postings were in response to the instructor's initiation of these postings. For example, the instructor brought an issue of racism at LACC in week 8 of the practicum (phase 2 in our analysis) mentioned by a student in her interview mini-project:

“Hi everybody—

In her 12th week's mini-project [Week 8 of the practicum] Sarah, wrote, ‘For this week's mini project, I interviewed 12-year old Alberto. ... I asked him if there was anything that he disliked about the LACC and he said that sometimes some of the people there act like racists.’

Sarah and everybody, do you know what specifically Alberto meant? Did you face with racism at LACC? Can somebody talk with Alberto more next week to learn what he meant, please?

Eugene” (Week 9 of the practicum).

The interview mini-project prompted the student, Sarah, to listen to the children and to report to her classmates about the issue of racism. Although this was the case of the student's subjectivizing LACC children, we did not code mini-projects. We decided not code the students' mini-projects because they were “forced”—assigned—by the instructor on the students. However, when the students brought issues from the mini-project to the class web-talk we coded these postings because the students had the freedom to bring or not to bring these issues—they were not required to discuss what they have heard from the children. The following web-talk posting by another student was in response to the instructor's message asking (problematizing) about the issue of racism at the LACC:

I think that I might have an idea of what Alberto means about racism at the LACC. *One day I heard the boys calling each other “Chicanos”, I am not sure exactly what this means, but when I asked the kids, they told me it was a really bad word. I*

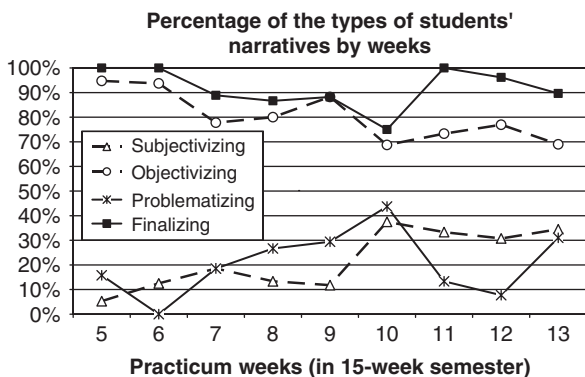


Fig. 5. The four narratives during the practicum.

was wondering if maybe it was a derogatory name for Mexican people because they told me it had something to do with being Mexican. If I had to guess what Alberto meant by racism, I would say it was probably the kids teasing each other and nothing that the adults do (Week 9 of the practicum).

We coded this posting as subjectivizing because it reports what the student heard from the LACC children and makes inferences from that. Although in this case, the student's subjectivizing was apparently not prompted by the instructor, the fact that she posted her subjectivizing posting was prompted by the instructor. In other cases, the subjectivizing itself was prompted by the instructor, as he suggested students to investigate their assumptions about LACC children. Thus, we coded this student's posting also as *replying to the instructor*.

Our analysis of the influence of instructor initiation in students' subjectivizing postings across the time phases indicated an inconclusive statistical difference according to a Kruskal–Wallace test $H(1, N = 39) = 6.29, p < 0.012$: 54% of subjectivizing postings ($N = 28$) were initiated by the instructor in phase 2, versus 9% of postings in phase 1 ($N = 11$).

The influence of the assignments across the time phases may also have prompted students to subjectivize more in the later part of the practicum. There were two interview assignments in phase 1, and one interview and a final project (mini-research often requiring engagement with the LACC children) in the last part of the practicum. We found a highly significant difference $H(1, N = 39) = 14.18, p < 0.0002$: 64% of subjectivizing postings were associated with the assignments in phase 2, versus none in phase 1.

As they become more comfortable at LACC, students seem to assume ownership for activities with the children which might have increased their engagement with the children. It was reasonable for us to hypothesize that in the second part of the practicum, subjectivizing postings may be more associated with student-initiated activities than in the first part of the practicum. For this hypothesis, we found a highly insignificant difference using a Kruskal–Wallace test ($p < 0.87$).

As students *spent more time* with the children at the LACC, we expected to find that they would be more likely to write about what they *learned from being* with the children. However, to our surprise,

our statistical analysis showed that the reverse is true $H(1, N = 39) = 29.02, p < 0.00001$: in phase 1 (81% of subjectivizing postings, $N = 11$), students were more likely to talk about what they learned from being with the children than in phase 2 (3.6% of subjectivizing postings, $N = 28$). For example, in the first phase of the practicum, UD students' subjectivizing postings referred more generally to what children told them about the LACC:

He [an LACC child] said that Steve [the LACC computer room director] has trained several “techies” as they are called, to help other students who need it. Since Steve can't be around all the time, these young boys control and maintain order when he is gone. I thought it was great too that they are able to do this (Week 5 of the practicum).

It appears that the shared focus of the class web discussions shifted from messages that emerged from *listening spontaneously* to what children said about themselves and LACC to discussions that centered on *planning inquiries* to find out more about the children. Students planned inquiries about LACC children seem to result from the class assignments, student-initiated activities and instructors' guidance. More investigation is needed to understand this phenomenon.

3.4.2. Changes in problematizing

We found that the problematizing narrative changed in its nature across the course of the practicum. Quantitatively, we found a steady increase in problematizing across the first phase of the practicum (from 7% in Week 1 and 2 to 30% in Week 5 of the practicum). In the second phase of the practicum, there was a cyclic pattern in students' problematizing, with the maximum reaching 45% of postings in Week 6, the minimum at 8% in Week 8, and the problematizing rising back to 30% in Week 9.

However, through our content analysis, we suspected that the nature of the problematizing narrative changed between phase 1 and phase 2. In phase 1, we found that 41% ($N = 17$) of problematizing was *objectivized* problematizing and 12% was *subjectivized* problematizing. An example of this objectivized problematizing in phase 1 was written by a student referring to the fact that LACC children did not know some common US patriotic songs: “This surprised me. I am aware that the children may not be born here, but especially

considering the major amount of patriotism since 9-11-2001 that the kids never heard the song before” (Week 3 of practicum).

In phase 2, we found that 14% ($N = 21$) of problematizing was objectivized problematizing and 38% of problematizing was subjectivized problematizing. An example of subjectivized problematizing referred to a student-initiated activity, “We should make a sheet where the girls can write down topics they want to talk about, or things that they would like to do together—because we are doing this for them” (Week 6).

Since we could not find a nonparametric test equivalent to a multivariate test of significance, we ran a parametric two-way ANOVA to find the interaction between objectivized and subjectivized problematizing across time phases. The result of this interaction was highly significant, $F(2, 35) = 11.83$, $p < 0.00012$.

3.4.3. Changes in finalizing

We found no significant quantitative changes in finalizing across the practicum. However, we did find a qualitative difference, shifting from objectivized finalizing to subjectivized finalizing. In phase 1, we found that 86% ($N = 88$) of finalizing was objectivized finalizing and 9% was subjectivized finalizing. An example of objectivized finalizing is the following posting in which the student discusses organizing a Peaceful Posse group for LACC girls, “I think the female UD students would be great role models for the LACC girls and we can learn a lot from each other” (Week 4 of the practicum). In phase 2, 78% of finalizing ($N = 80$) was objectivized finalizing and 29% was subjectivized finalizing. An example of subjectivized finalizing in the second phase of the practicum can be found in the following posting, “One boy I interviewed considered his uncle that he lives with to be his second father. The brothers and sisters at the LACC are also very protective of each other. In a majority of the kids I have talked to I can see that family is very valued” (Week 7 of the practicum). The parametric two-way ANOVA showed a strong interaction between subjectivizing and finalizing across time phases, $F(2, 165) = 1390.1$, $p < 0.0000001$.

4. Discussion of the findings and implications for practice

Our findings suggest that, overall, in talking about their students, pre- and in-service teachers

predominately objectivize and finalize their students in their web postings. However, by the end of their 9-week practicum experience, pre-service teachers used more subjectivizing narratives about Latino children.

The overwhelming predominance of objectivizing and finalizing in teachers’ narratives about children with whom they work seems to define a certain pedagogical regime that we call here “teaching imaginary children/students.” This “way of talking” about children seems to be characterized by unchecked speculations guiding instruction that are not tested by finding out from the children themselves how they understand the instruction and the world, an approach which can lead to a dogmatic approach to children. In making unchecked speculations, teachers are *only able to guess* that their instruction is needed by the children, and that this instruction is relevant and sensitive to the children’s needs. This may particularly be a problem for teachers when they have to make guesses about the experiences and needs of children culturally different from them. As we saw in our analysis of pre-service teachers’ ways of talking about Latino children, the possible consequences of predominantly objectivizing and finalizing children are in misunderstanding the children’s experience, possible miscommunication, blaming, labeling, and/or disengagement (and adversarial relations were in evidence in in-service teachers’ narratives).

We found another model of teaching/learning that is based on a “community of learners” approach to instruction. This approach prioritizes subjectivizing and problematizing of students that can help to recursively correct the assumptions and preconceptions teachers may have of their students. We found that model teachers’ objectivizing and finalizing was predominantly subjectivized, while our students’ and in-service teachers’ writing on public forums were far more likely to make assumptions that were untested by finding out about how students understand instruction and the world. We found that quality of teaching is correlated with the amount of teachers’ subjectivizing/objectivizing about their students. More research is needed to understand how teachers’ way of talking relates to their actual teaching. We suggest that the promotion of subjectivizing and problematizing of students should become a central part of the curriculum of pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher professional development programs.

In reflecting on the implications of this study on our own practice working with pre-service teachers, we both recognize the importance of as well as the current limitations of our pre-service teachers' involvement with children in the informal community center environment. The instructor should actively invite pre-service teachers to problematize their objectivizing and finalizing statements about practicum children and ask pre-service teachers to test their ideas by talking with and listening to the children on a systematic basis. However, we are concerned with the high degree of self-centeredness evident in our students' subjectivized postings that does not reveal our students learning from children in the way that is so clearly demonstrated by model teachers' subjectivizing. Less than half of our students' subjectivized postings reflected what they themselves learned from the LACC children, whereas the majority of postings focused on the children's feedback about the UD students themselves—what the LACC children thought about the UD students or about the activities the students organized for the children. We also noted a higher degree of objectivized problematizing versus subjectivized problematizing in our students' postings that contrasted with model teachers' writing about children. In contrast with in-service teachers, who used *hard* objectivizing that treated students as objects of their pedagogical actions, our pre-service teachers used *soft* objectivizing that mainly consisted of inferences from observations, and projections of their own experiences on children's subjectivities. In this sense, pre-service teachers are "in-between" in the continuum between in-service and model teachers who predominately use subjectivizing (although they are much closer to in-service teachers on this continuum).

We wonder whether more time is needed for us to guide the preservice teachers to learn how to relate to the children, before devoting our instructional efforts to helping students to design educational projects or activities. In reflecting on how we guided our students to learn to become teachers, we seemed to expect and encourage our students to plan their own activities before they learned to how to relate to the children. It appears that pre-service teachers need to learn how to listen to children, to learn from children, and to learn to challenge and recursively test their own assumptions they make about children. The changes in subjectivizing we found in our students' postings between the two time-phases of the practicum appeared to be associated

most with the influence of assignments which required students to investigate how students think about the world. Students' subjectivizing switched from listening to the children early in the practicum, to planning inquiries with the children later in the practicum. There is reason to suspect that more time is needed for students to learn to how to relate to the children before planning activities with children in order to better promote subjectivizing. It is helpful to think of what we are trying to do with our students as they are learning to become model teachers by building a community of learners with the children, and with each other and the instructor. We need to study the conditions under which our classroom learning community of preservice teachers predictably generates a significant amount of problematizing and subjectifying in our students' discourse about their practicum children. Consequently, we need to find the conditions (similar or otherwise) that predictably promote subjectifying and problematizing discourse in inservice teachers about their own students. It is also important to investigate what the conditions are in university classes and in schools that systematically prevent teachers from subjectifying and problematizing their students in the teachers' discourse about them.

According to Bakhtin, truth exists in dialogue (Bakhtin, 1999; Sidorkin, 2002; Skidmore, 2000). Truth does not just come from dialogue, truth is dialogue. Often truth has been attributed to a statement, neglecting the fact that any statement is an utterance in a dialogue. An utterance of truth addresses past, present and future people, participants in never-ending dialogue. It answers to certain questions raised in the past, present, and future. It stays against alternative utterances. Without this dialogue, there is not an utterance of truth, there is not truth. Outside of this dialogue, "a statement of truth" does not make sense and, thus, does not have truth. "A statement of truth" signifies truth but not the truth itself.

The "truth" of our study is in initiating a dialogue about the importance for teachers to listen *to* their students and to check their own ideas about their students *with* their students. Without teachers' active subjectivizing and problematizing of their students, their guidance will be blind and their students will be non-cooperative. Without talking and listening to their students, teachers cannot know how their students think, feel, and perceive the world and themselves and, thus, it becomes very difficult to engage in collaboration with students

about learning. We want to address our own past and future students—preservice teachers, educators, teacher educators, and educational researchers. The questions we addressed in this study were about how teachers know their students and talk about them and what consequences their ways of knowing and talking (i.e., “narratives”) may have for their guidance. In the present research, we argue against alternative ideas that students can be sufficiently known through objectives tests, exams, quizzes, observations, portfolios, speculations, diagnosis, analyses, projections, applications, statistics, actions, and so on. Furthermore, we argue that knowing students is not enough for the teachers. Teacher’s guidance should be based on learning together with students.

In closing this article, we have some concerns about how we talked about our students. Did we ourselves objectivize our own students, preservice teachers who worked in 2002 with Latino children? Are we guilty of “teaching imaginary students” in this research ourselves? We definitely objectivized our students as objects of our research. However, we did NOT argue against objectivization per se but only against untested objectivization. We have shared our research findings with our past students and plan to share them with our future students, preservice teachers, to keep the dialogue going. Here is what one of our former students wrote to us in her feedback to this article:

I just finished reading your article. It was very interesting and brought up some issues I had never even thought about or considered in that way before.

I was trying to think back to my LACC experiences...which was long ago and it is hard to remember. It has made me think about my interactions with the LACC children in a new light, and I am starting to wonder about some of my conversations with the children. For me, I just remember being very nervous about meeting the children, and unsure of how we would get along or if they would like me. I remember a few of the children who I first started talking to (they were young girls, maybe 9 or 10 years old, African American). I tried to ask as many questions as possible when talking to them so that I would get to know them and understand where they were coming from better. I definitely did want to learn about their background. However, I think in my quest for being a “good

teacher,” I may have jumped to conclusions quickly and analyzed my observations to make inferences about their behavior. I wanted to act like a professional teacher and educator, which may have led me to analyze every detail and draw my own conclusions about situations, without stopping to sit down and engage in a deeper conversation with the students. I can now understand from the article that perhaps the main part of being a good teacher is being able to learn from what your students tell you, and to listen to what they have to say, before making final judgments and conclusions.

I think you accurately portrayed our class and our web postings, and our identities were definitely protected. After reading the article, I would have to say that I agree with your analysis, although it was a little surprising, considering I had never viewed it in that way before. However, the data analysis section was a little confusing for me and hard to understand. I will have to read it over more carefully.

This will definitely be useful to me as a future teacher, for now I will be more aware of the way I will interact with my students in the future. I will now be more likely to check my ideas with my students before jumping to any conclusions. It was also very helpful to view the “model teachers” web postings to see how they talked about their students. They were good examples and I will keep them in mind when interacting with my students (June 11, 2004).

We have grown as teachers and researchers from this study. We also are going to (recursively) test our research in our future teaching (and research). In future, it is very important to find where regimes of “teaching imaginary children/students” are situated institutionally and culturally and what can undermine these narrative practices.

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