

Giving It a Second Thought: Making Culturally Engaged Teaching Culturally Engaging

One way to create teacher education programs that build strategies for culturally engaged teaching is through cultural memoir and photography.

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and
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I am the day-to-day occurrences around
my house.

I am family dinners every night, where
every person must be there
or have a darn good excuse.

I am breakfast in bed birthday mornings.

I am clearing the table after dinner. . . .

I am a made bed every day before I can
go to school.

I am books that we all take on family
vacations. . . .

I am Christmas Eve at my grandmother's
house with my dad's family,

Christmas morning at home with just us,
and Christmas night in Atlanta with my
mom's family.

I am Jeopardy! and the Simpsons on TV.

I am late night talks with my dad about
what I want to be when I grow up. . . .

I am who I am because of the normal
everyday routine

that my family goes through
without giving it a second thought.

—Susan (from Cultural Memoir, Fall 1999)

Susan's reflection on herself as a cultural being was echoed by most of her classmates in their teacher education program at the University of Georgia. They talked about family influences, religious values,

and personal experiences in their small-town, suburban, or farm childhoods. And like most of her classmates, Susan was who she was "without giving it a second thought."

Our undergraduate students were white, middle-class females, many of whom had attended schools without much economic or cultural diversity. Finding ways to help our students "see" their own cultures is part of the PhOLKS Project: Photographs of Local Knowledge Sources. We, JoBeth and Linda, met regularly with ten teachers to discuss insights about our students' out-of-school lives through the students' photographs and narratives and how we can apply that information to bridge cultural borderlands (Giroux, 1992). As literacy teacher educators, we investigated strategies for building a critical, culturally conscious professional community in which prospective educators could explore themselves as cultural beings who are teaching in a multicultural society. In this article, we explore how inquiry into their own cultural influences shaped the preservice teachers' interaction with and reflections on elementary students of diverse cultural backgrounds during fieldwork. As Lawrence and Tatum (1997) asserted, "it is the teacher who does not acknowledge her own

racial or ethnic identity . . . who will not recognize the need for children of color to affirm their own" (p. 179). We asked our students to "give it a second thought."

THE CHALLENGE OF MULTICULTURAL TEACHER EDUCATION

A great deal of attention has been paid in recent years to preparing educators to "see culture," to develop "cultural lenses" (Delpit, 1995) into students' home cultures as a prerequisite for culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Hoffman (1996) emphasized the need for emic perspectives on students' lives; otherwise, members of the dominant culture make "unexamined assumptions concerning such basic concepts as culture, self, and individual identity" (p. 545) when they should instead study students' cultures and "generate their own concepts . . . from concrete evidence" (p. 564). We wanted to generate with our students a deep and complex understanding of culture. As Moll (2000) points out, normative notions of culture are inaccurate and deterministic; rather, we need "more dynamic, processual, or practice interpretations, what we call in Spanish *la cultura vivida*, how people live culturally" (p. 256).