

The Relationships Between Situated Cognition and Rural Preservice Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of Diversity

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The situative perspective, as applied to rural teacher education, provides a promising framework from which to understand the situated knowledge that rural preservice teachers bring to their preparation programs regarding diversity and strategies for creating authentic learning experiences that challenge this knowledge. The purpose of this study was to examine how situative knowledge, as embedded in rural preservice teachers' autobiographies, influenced their views of race, class, and culture. Seventeen post-baccalaureate preservice teachers participated in this study; 11 were from rural and remote locations in West Texas. Using grounded theory and the constant comparison method of data analysis, interview transcripts from each participant were analyzed. Four themes emerged from data analysis: situative cognition in rural contexts; being together, existing apart; understanding similarities and differences; and teaching in a small rural

Theoretical Framework and Purpose

As student diversity continues to increase across the nation, there remains a pressing need for teacher candidates in all geographical locations to understand how best to meet the needs of their diverse student populations (Horton, 1992; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989; Powell, 1997; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). There are more than 33,000 schools located in rural school districts with populations of less than 25,000 and a quarter of all public school students attend these schools in rural America (Beeson, 2001). These schools represent a vast range of ethnic, economic and cultural diversity (Beeson & Strange, 2000). A growing area of concern relative to the cultural mismatch between some teachers and their students pertains to geographical locations that are called rural and remote (DeYoung, 1991; Yarrow, Ballantyne, Hansford, Herschell, & Millwater, 1999). More specifically, demographics in some rural locations have sufficiently shifted to cause corresponding shifts in ethnic and cultural diversity in these locations. Rural communities that were once notably isolated from urban and suburban areas and that were once representative of cultural homogeneity are subsequently giving way, and in some locations have already given way to a global interconnectedness that has, according to Gergen

(2000) among others, led to cultural heterogeneity. This heterogeneity has been forwarded not only by advances in telecommunications but also by transformations in rural values engendered by corporate farms and by corporate owned and operated meat processing operations (Stull, Broadway & Erickson, 1992).

This does not mean, however, that specific rural communities, in the midst of cultural transformation, are beginning to take on the values that accompany urban or suburban life in a wholesale manner (Norris, 1994; Peshkin, 1978; Rhodes, 1997). Rather, what emerges is a gradual mingling of cultures in some locations where ethnic uniformity may have previously been more pervasive. With these demographic changes, teacher education programs in rural areas are challenged to prepare preservice teachers to meet the educational needs of culturally diverse students who have traditionally not been part of a rural community and consequently have not been part of long-held uniformity in rural-oriented social values and educational practices (Dinsmore & Hess, 1999).

Although cultural transformations are occurring in some rural locations, an element of social and educational stability for youth prevails in rural society (Chan & Elder, 2001; Roscigno & Crowley, 2001) which may lead preservice teachers who are from rural and remote areas to develop a specific way of knowing and viewing their world, a sociocultural phenomenon called situated cognition (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Greeno, 1989). Although the theory of situated cognition is not unique to rural areas, the application of these concepts to rural preservice teacher

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preparation may advance our own understanding of the views that preservice teachers may bring to their programs and provide a framework for creating authentic preparatory experiences that expand and challenge this situated knowledge.

The situative perspective focuses on interactive systems and posits that knowing and learning are integrally bound to particular physical and social contexts (Greeno, 1989; Putnam & Borko, 2000). This kind of cognition can be understood to be situated within and derived from a set of life experiences that are shared with others. Consistent with the work of Brown et al. (1989), an assumption for our study was that interacting with one's own culture over time facilitates a keen awareness of that culture on personal, practical, and epistemological levels. Brown et al. note:

Given the chance to observe and practice *in situ* the behavior of members of a culture, people pick up relevant jargon, imitate behavior, and gradually start to act in accordance with its norms. These cultural practices are often recondite and extremely complex. Nonetheless, given the opportunity to observe and practice them, people adopt them with great success. (p. 34)

Adopting the practices of members of a culture also highlights the social nature of cognition, another fundamental assumption of the situated perspective. Indeed, interactions with one's environment are major determinants of what is learned and how learning takes place (Putnam & Borko, 2000). When placed within a social context, one's experiences (autobiographies, dialogics, idiolect, and colloquialisms) hold potential for how a context (e.g., rural) may be illuminated or valued over another context (e.g., urban).

A reasonable conclusion from the foregoing discussion is that such cognition holds theoretical potential for influencing the teaching perspectives that some rural preservice teachers might have for teaching in contexts where cultural diversity is now a much greater possibility. Another conclusion, linked to the work of Buchmann and Schwille (1983), is that the situated cognition of preservice teachers may influence how they view diversity as a phenomenon related to rural issues. This is because situated knowledge and related cognition grounded in firsthand experience gives rise over time to commonsense strategies of judgment that "often prejudice attempts at education based on better evidence or reasoning" (Buchmann & Schwille, 1983, p. 36).

Germane to the study at hand, therefore, was the kind of thinking and related knowledge and cognition that became situated in preservice teachers who lived their formative years in a broader rural culture and how this knowledge provides rural-oriented preservice teachers with

a set of default beliefs and perspectives from which they perceive solutions to immediate classroom issues, concerns, and dilemmas (Powell, 1997). This personal knowledge, which is the mental framework for situated cognition, is not necessarily easy to discern (Brown et al., 1989; Greeno, 1997; Hunt, 1987), nor is it clear how it influences classroom practice over time, especially when this practice is replete with issues of diversity and equity (Powell, 2000; Zeichner, 1993). The primary purpose of the study, therefore, was to explore the influence of situative cognition on selected rural preservice teachers' perspectives on diversity and future classroom practices. A secondary purpose, was to introduce ideas for how the situative perspective can guide our pedagogical practices related to diversity in teacher preparation programs in rural communities.

Context for the Study

The context for our study was threefold: rural geographic context, rural teacher education context, and the context of diversity.

Rural geographical context. The geographic location for this study was the high plains region of West Texas. No metropolitan areas exist within this area, although two large communities provide persons in the area with extensive medical facilities, one major university (in which this study took place), and other conveniences such as shopping malls. The population of each of these two large communities is approximately 200,000 persons, and the nearest major urban area from these communities is more than 300 miles away. This setting is representative of the state demographics for Texas (Beeson & Strange, 2000). Though Texas is ranked second in numbers of rural residents, those individuals comprise only 20% of the state's population due to a wide dispersal between big cities.

On any side of the aforementioned larger communities for many miles are much smaller, rural, and in some cases very remote, communities. Importantly, for the larger and smaller communities alike, agriculture and agriculture-related technologies predominate the economic infrastructure. In the northern portion of West Texas, wheat is a primary commodity, and in the southern portion cotton is grown extensively. In some locations, oil drilling offers a strong tax base to schools, cattle's ranching remains a rich resource, and in one area, some of the largest feedlots in the world can be found.

A noteworthy feature of agriculture-based life, of some oil field production, and of cattle growing is that each of these requires a sizeable area of land to be carried out. Not surprising, then, is that the farms and ranches are widespread and are interconnected by small rural communities. Small-town values therefore predominate many lifestyles of communities in this region. In these communities, life is mostly centralized around local schools and churches, with

harvest time bringing rural communities together at specific times of the year.

Rural teacher education context. This study was conducted in a mid-sized state university, with an enrollment of approximately 24,000 students annually. The university lies in the southernmost region of the High Plains, a geographic region that extends from North Dakota to West Texas. This entire region reflects a rural societal structure, and this university ranks as the largest in this entire regional corridor. However, just outside this geographical corridor lie some of the larger universities in the nation.

The university is multifaceted, with law and medical schools on campus, and with a large College of Agriculture that is expectedly reflective of the region in which it is located. The teacher education program accepts students from the entire West Texas region, from the two larger communities in the area, and from the suburban and urban areas that are approximately 300 or more miles away. Most of the students, however, are from the regional rural area, thus making teacher education classes a mix of rural, suburban, and urban students, although rural students clearly predominate in the population.

One of the clear tensions that exist for the teacher education program, then, is how best to organize learning experiences for teacher education students who are from differing geographic locations and/or plan on relocating to another setting to teach. For example, students from rural settings may want to focus on strategies for teaching a number of subjects rather than specializing in one content area because rural teachers tend to teach more subjects than urban teachers (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). Conversely, urban-oriented teachers may want to focus more deeply on a specific content area because of the departmentalization that is common in larger schools (Lee, 2001). In relation to diversity, rural-oriented preservice teachers may have less experience with diversity and therefore, place less importance on culturally relevant practices than individuals from larger, more culturally diverse communities. Because suburban locations often offer beginning teachers, including those from rural locations, attractive jobs, some rural-oriented beginning teachers move away from their former rural communities (Hare, 1991) and become residents of much larger communities. However, other preservice and beginning teachers have a desire to remain in their hometowns, valuing a sense of place (Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996), and would prefer to have instruction that is more in line with the values of rural communities.

Context of the Demographics of Cultural Diversity

In the specific area of this study, there exists a mixture of various cultural groups, although two groups predominate the area. The predominant groups are White and Hispanic, with Hispanics as the majority group in some of the

rural communities. Other cultural groups in the area with lesser populations include Blacks and Asians. Key landowners and other property owners are most often White, thus causing this group to have more socioeconomic status (SES) in the area. Persons of lower socioeconomic backgrounds most often, but not always, include Hispanics and Blacks. In small communities, including those that were part of this study, the White students' parents are almost invariably the employers of the Hispanic students' parents suggesting possible class differences as well.

All preservice teachers in this study were White, and were representative of both local and national demographics who seek teacher credentials (Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Despite the overwhelming number of White teacher candidates, statistics suggest that over the next few decades the population, especially in the region where this study occurred, will become increasingly Hispanic. By the year 2020 the number of White children, aged 0-17, will drop 27%, from 44.5 million to 32.3 million. The number of Hispanic children, aged 0-17, will almost triple from 6.8 million to 18.6 million, or from 11% of the population to 28% of the population. Interestingly, in the location of West Texas, the population of Black children, will remain relatively stable, only decreasing from 16% to 15% (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990).

That Hispanics constitute a notable part of the local population in West Texas and that Blacks comprise some part was an important contextual feature for the study at hand, since the rural preservice teachers in this study were in a situation that predisposed them to having some interactions with cultural groups other than their own. However, an important consideration is that having persons of color in a community or school does not necessarily lead to cross-cultural interactions. Selected studies suggest that positive cross-cultural interactions have to be facilitated through directed activities (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Lacking such activities can lead cultural groups to continue to stay with their own membership.

Participants and Classroom Context

Seventeen post baccalaureate preservice teachers participated in this study. Ten of these preservice teachers were female. All of the preservice teachers were White, and the group had an average age of 24. Eleven preservice teachers were from rural communities, two were from the large communities as described earlier in this paper, and four were from urban areas. We included preservice teachers from urban areas in the study so that we could have a clearer basis for exploring the influence of situative cognition on rural-oriented preservice teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning. Preservice teachers who participated in the study, including the size of their high school graduating classes, are shown in Table 1. All preservice teachers

completed their high school years in Texas, and all rural-oriented preservice teachers lived in West Texas. During the study, all of the participants were enrolled in a class that focused upon the relationships between classroom management and cultural diversity. As part of this class, students participated in case-based instruction (Powell, 2000), in site visits to selected schools in the larger community that surrounded the university, and in ongoing dialogues about local and national cultural diversity in schools.

Method

Selecting Preservice Teachers

To select preservice teachers for this study, we addressed, as Lecompte and Preissle (1996) have suggested, two sets of constraints. These constraints, which are called logistical and conceptual, affected our choice of preservice teachers who ultimately became part of our study. The logistical constraints related to selecting participants currently attending the university who were readily accessible to us as a team of researchers. Conceptual constraints of the study pertained to the participants' enrollment in the teacher education program and their geographical location from rural locations in West Texas. Another conceptual constraint was the preservice teachers' current enrollment in a course related to diversity and classroom management as this course provided the context for data collection. As noted earlier, we also selected some preservice teachers from urban locations to contrast and validate our insights about and shared reactions to the situative cognition of rural preservice teachers. By applying these constraints as guidelines for selecting preservice teachers, we were able to consider several cohorts of preservice teachers in the teacher education program and identified a naturally bounded group who shared a similar educational program (i.e., teacher preparation) and a common geographic location.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Data were gathered from preservice teachers throughout the course of a single semester in multiple ways, thus ensuring triangulation of the study (Mathison, 1988). Specifically, preservice teachers wrote an autobiographical account of their school experiences, which included demographics of their schools and their school-related experiences. This autobiography asked preservice teachers to chart the schools they attended, to describe the student diversity of the schools, and to describe how socioeconomic status influenced their learning (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Powell, Zehm, & Garcia, 1996).

As part of the autobiography, all preservice teachers recorded background information that included formative school and community experiences, and that listed experi-

ences with other cultural groups. Participants were individually interviewed about their background information and about the autobiography they wrote. All interviews, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, were taped and transcribed.

Using the constant comparison method of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we analyzed the autobiographies and resulting transcripts. Specifically, for each response on the background information sheet, we reviewed all preservice teachers' responses to each question. As we reviewed these responses, we compared each new response to those we had previously considered. We analyzed the data collected from the open-ended questions by first conducting multiple passes of the transcribed responses. Each response had been transcribed and categorized by question (Erickson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Using interpretive content analysis (Baxter, 1992; Krippendorf, 1980), a systematic approach for examining text, we examined subject's responses for common themes. As we did this for every piece of information offered by the preservice teachers, we generated themes that we believed best represented the preservice teachers' responses. After reviewing all responses for the group of preservice teachers, we then compared the themes that emerged for each question, to determine how preservice teachers' responses were related across questions.

As a team of researchers, we considered the various themes as they emerged, and as they appeared to best represent the teachers' situative cognitions for teaching in and around diverse contexts. This peer debriefing further strengthened our data analysis and ensured that we had a collective view of the situative framework in which we were working. Below are the themes that we believe most authentically depict rural preservice teachers' perspectives of classroom-based diversity.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of data resulted in four emergent themes. These themes, which are described below, include situative cognition in rural contexts, being together and existing apart, understanding similarities and differences, and teaching in a small town.

Situative Cognition in Rural Contexts

Earlier in this paper we described in a more objective fashion the context of the area. Also needed, however, for illustrating the context in which preservice teachers in this study structured their situative cognition is an examination of preservice teachers' own views of the area in which they lived. Michelle, for example, gave the following account about the schools she attended, and about the community where the schools were located:

The school I attended for elementary in [Frankton] was the same school that I attended for junior high and high school. All of the students (K-12) were in the same building. This was a very small consolidated school. Throughout my years attending the school, there was an average of 115 students total. I would also say that there was an equal amount of Hispanic and White students and that most of the community was lower middle class. My graduating class had a total of 6 students.

In another depiction of rural contexts, Laura described the role her school played in the life of the rural community where she was raised. Laura reported:

In a small school you are part of the community, and a lot of things that we did with our school were the same as the whole community getting together. For example before school started each year the school and community worked together to have a night called *Meet the Longhorns* night. On this night, the whole community came down to the school for an ice cream supper. The football players and cheerleaders were introduced and all that kind of stuff. The band played during the ice cream dinner, and the teachers were there and they got introduced, and you know, the school just did all kinds of things.

Mikki, another rural student, graduated from her high school with a class of 60 students. The community where she spent her entire life had 3600 persons. Mikki describes her home community this way:

Westville is a farming, ranching, and oil field community. This accounts for the diverse population there. The majority of students come from lower to middle class families. I guess the composition of the student body is 50% White, 40% Hispanic, and 10% Black. My friends were diverse. They included Whites, Mexicans, Blacks, and biracial students. And all these friends came from lower to middle class families. I guess I never really gave much thought to the diversity in my community and among my friends. I lived with them, and it was just something I grew up with. It seemed normal, so I never thought about diversity as something we needed to study here at the university.

A very interesting depiction of the rural culture of West Texas came from Benji, who was president of the university's Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization and who had "been employed by several farmers and

ranchers since [he] was fourteen years old." About his former life and about the culture of West Texas Benji said:

Both of my grandparents were farmers and ranchers for their complete lives. Farming is deeply rooted in my family. My grandfather raised cotton and cows his whole life. From him, I learned many of the values I hold true to my heart. He taught me about the great responsibility that there is to the farm and the many responsibilities there are around it. I also was actively involved in FFA growing up. I exhibited barrows, sheep, and steers. Each species was a little different in the responsibilities it taught me. Not only did I show livestock but also I also actively judged livestock, soils, and cotton.

We further asked Benji about the persons he went to school with and about whom he worked with on various farms. He replied:

I went to school mostly with Whites and Hispanics. I would say maybe 50% White and 40-45% Hispanic. But I worked with almost all Hispanics. Some of the hardest workers I worked with around here were Hispanics. I learned to speak some Spanish from them. But the Hispanics I knew didn't have a lot of money. They were the workers like me.

Benji's and Laura's comments suggest that rural communities, with their own geographic mission and their own individuality, have values that likely become part of the situative knowledge that persons from these communities acquire and hold. All of these comments point to the nature of the local diversity, mostly the diversity that comes from White and Hispanic ethnic groups.

What surfaced from the interviews with the preservice teachers was primarily a tricultural existence. That is, from the perspectives of these preservice teachers, White, Hispanic and Black students made up the population of schools and communities. No other ethnic groups were mentioned. While Hispanic, Black and White students attended school together, this does not suggest that the groups were necessarily interactive in and out of school. What surfaces from this tricultural existence is reflected in what Mikki noted—that living within a community and growing up in a school with Hispanics and some Blacks appears to negate the perceived need to explore cultural diversity in more theoretical and reflective ways. When Mikki's comment and other comments reported later are juxtaposed with the framework of situative cognition, a phenomenon may emerge wherein university-taught (i.e., decontextualized) information becomes less meaningful if not discounted entirely. This phe-

nomenon was apparent for some of the preservice teachers in this study.

Being Together, Existing Apart

In the aforementioned paragraph we argued that cultural groups being together in school does not necessarily suggest that the groups were concomitantly interactive in collegial and cross-cultural ways. While this working hypothesis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) might appear reasonable given the data we reported, as a research team we agreed that the hypothesis needed further exploration. We observed that while these preservice teachers were brought together with other cultures in rural schools and communities, in many ways they existed apart due to cultural differences and biases. However, in one area, namely sports, students were brought together in ways that seemingly extended beyond cultural differences.

We first turn to the comments of Amanda who offered insight into how cultural separation has perpetuated itself in her community. In an interview with her we talked about her interactions with Black and Hispanic students.

R: Amanda, do you have many interactions with students of color or of other cultural groups in your school?

Amanda: Not really. Of all the things I was involved in at school, minorities weren't really involved in, so I didn't interact with them. Like when I was in the Honors program they weren't in that program. I don't think there were any minorities in the Honors program, in any of my classes. Our school was tracked, so we had honors classes. And during track and field season, which I was in, there weren't any minorities in the events I did, except at the track meets and things. So I didn't really talk to them very much.

R: So it sounds like you were pretty limited in the interactions you had with cultural groups such as Hispanic and Black, although Hispanic was a very prevalent part of the school.

Amanda: I don't think it was really like a fact of trying to stay segregated. That is just the way it was, and it still is that way today.

Lisa perpetuated this kind of segregation noted by Amanda for personal reasons. In a very candid conversation with us, Lisa noted:

I am going to be 100% honest with you. I have reservations about the Hispanic culture because I

don't know enough about this culture, and I get uncomfortable because I don't know enough. The Hispanic community intimidates me because I don't feel that I know enough about them. Right now, I deal with Hispanics at work, and I get so uncomfortable with this. When you go outside at work and go to the smoking area and three or four of them come out there and they just speak in Spanish and they look sharply at me, I feel so uncomfortable. Another example is when I was in junior high school a while back. This young woman had a beef with my friend and me. She wasn't about to jump us physically so she went to get a friend that she thought could handle us. Her friend called us a bitch and we almost fought, and at age 13 I could have done that. But nobody really fought and because of teachers, we all ran away.

Although Lisa was clearly unsure if not confused about people of color, she made a comment that suggests at least some willingness to learn about cultures other than her own. Lisa said:

If someone would sit down with me and say, "To understand the Hispanic culture, they look at things this way, and the family structure is this way." If I knew I could pull something from my learning that would give us common ground to start with then maybe I could teach Hispanics in the future.

A notable exception to the foregoing comments by Lisa and comments of other preservice teachers were those offered by Liz. Liz, like Lisa, was immersed in a rural community that maintained segregationist practices. However, Liz had some experiences that were atypical for West Texas throughout her formative years. These experiences helped her to look more closely at how segregation and racism as ideologies create inequities. As a child Liz had a babysitter who was Black; the babysitter lived in that part of the community that was notably a lower socioeconomic status (SES) area of town. Such lower SES areas of town, according to Phelps and Prock (1991), can be more pervasive in rural family and community impact than in urban areas. Liz admitted that some of her family members, all of who had financial privilege and lived in upper middle class neighborhoods, were very prejudiced. Liz explained how her babysitter, not the teachers of her school or her family, taught her about equity and prejudice. Although Liz made several comments about interacting with her babysitter, the following comment typifies most of her perceptions:

R: Where did you learn about prejudice and equity?

Liz: When I would watch TV at my babysitter's. She would see something on TV and she would say, "That's not the way it goes." And she would say, "That's not fair to anybody," and stuff like that. And when I would use words like "nigger" that I learned from my own home she would say, "That's not right," and tell me why it is wrong to use those kind of words.

Another dimension of the theme, *Being Together, Existing Apart*, relates to how students viewed cultural interactions during sporting activities. Several comments made by preservice teachers suggest how community members and how students might view cultural interactions among players of various sporting activities. The following comment by Casey demonstrates how a sporting event might serve as a community arena where racist ideals may prevail possibly suggesting the existing apart from others theme. Casey noted that her sister plays high school basketball on a team that has one Black student. Casey said:

I think they give that Black student a harder time. And believe it or not, I still hear racist remarks about her. Remarks such as "Look at that nigger." If I hate these comments I can imagine what the girl thinks. Most of the people in that community graduated from high school [in that community] and stayed there to work or something. They have been there forever, and their perceptions just don't change.

Aside from Casey's observation and reflection about the place community factors such as sports might have in perpetuating negative stereotypes in a community, the comments of Shannon (rural preservice teacher) and Jeff (urban preservice teacher) depict an alternative situation among students who participate in athletic events. Jeff said:

I decided to play basketball because I knew for sure I would play a lot. I was happy with my decision. I made some great friends while I was on the team. There were several Blacks on the team and they ended up becoming some of my best friends that I had in school. They are still my best friends today.

Further insight into the relationship among athletes was derived from Shannon, who replied to the following question:

R: Shannon, what helped you the most for learning about different cultures in school?

Shannon: I think what helped me out a lot with different cultures was playing sports because I look at it this way: I didn't look at it as being Black or being Hispanic. You know, I looked at it as we got to win. And I rely on you and I hope you rely on me, and the color factor in games was never involved in [Whetstone]. That is one thing that helped me about cultures. I tried not to be racist; I just went out there and played. Never was an issue with me, you know, what color you were.

The comments of Shannon and Jeff suggest that at least during an athletic activity they were unified with others. That is, they united together with peers who represented cultural groups other than their own. What remains unclear in their comments, however, is the extent to which such activities influenced interactions of Shannon and Jeff with persons of color at other times, although Jeff's comment about having Black friends from his basketball activities might be indicative of extended cultural connections based on school-related activities.

Demonstrated in this section of the paper was how deeply embedded contextual learning experiences in both school and community have become for the preservice teachers in this study. Such experiences can lead some preservice teachers to have specific thoughts about issues of diversity, and to have certain predispositions for interacting with various cultural groups. Despite the homogeneous culture that dominated life for the rural preservice teachers (Powell, 2000), some of them nonetheless internalized rural culture in differing ways (e.g., Liz, Lisa, and Amanda). However, from an autobiographical perspective (Knowles, 1992), local community issues (e.g., stereotyping, segregation, inequity, and privilege) became part of preservice teachers' perspectives on rural community and school life (Powell, 1997). These perspectives can predispose preservice teachers like those in this study to shape their future classroom learning environments in ways that align closely with, if not entirely mirror, their own experiences as students and with their experiences as members of a specific rural community where they began compiling their autobiographical experiences (Powell, 1997). In rural areas where the Hispanic population is growing at unprecedented rates and in some locations has now become the majority population, preservice teachers, for example Mikki, must be helped to understand how situative cognition may interfere with her willingness and ability to adapt her teaching practices for children from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Helping preservice teachers reflect critically upon how they think about teaching diverse learners is complex, especially when such thinking is embedded in contextual experiences within rural communities and schools where cultural diversity may have been less prevalent (Dinsmore

& Hess, 1999; Hipps, 1999; Yarrow et al, 1999). Yet this critical reflection by preservice teachers is crucial for thinking more carefully about teaching in rural schools that are presently immersed in shifting demographics (Dinsmore & Hess, 1999; Hipps, 1999; Powell, 1997; Roth, Masciotra, & Boyd, 1999; Stull et al., 1992; Yarrow et al., 1999) which will consequently create communities that are less uniform in lifestyle, values, ethnicity, race, place of origin, and socioeconomic status (Phelps & Prock, 1991).

A function of this shifting is that White middle class teachers, especially those who may lack an understanding of other local cultures and consequently may even be fearful of these cultures (e.g., Lisa), are given cause, as are teacher education programs who have a majority of preservice teachers from rural areas, to intensify efforts in the study of cultural and ethnic issues. Using strategies that provide for authentic learning will allow preservice teachers to broaden their understanding of diversity issues. Brown et al. (1989) notes that knowledge will continually evolve "with each new occasion of use, because new situations, negotiations, and activities inevitably recast it in a new, more densely textured form" (p. 33). Unless helped to examine how their situated cognition affects their ideas about teaching and learning, rural preservice teachers like those in this study could spend much of their preparatory teacher education work without thinking about the strengths and limitations of their perspectives and how it provides a framework for their future educational practices (Bullough, 1989; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). A concomitant result may be a mismatch between teaching styles and needs of students, thus leading to teacher and student frustration. Emerging from this frustration may be teacher burnout due to lack of success teaching culturally diverse students.

Understanding Similarities and Differences

In the preceding section we explored how various societal groups, as these groups manifested themselves in rural social and educational life, culminate in school life. We also explored how the groups, when brought together in school, remained apart socially. In this section we offer insight into preservice teachers' perspectives of various social groups. Specifically, from preservice teachers we sought an answer to the question: Who and what am I to students? Finding a response to this question could shed light upon the degree to which preservice teachers in this study understood similarities and differences between themselves and the students they will likely teach. Finding a response might also illuminate how preservice teachers' biases, stereotypes and preconceptions may interfere with classroom communication among cultural groups in rural classrooms.

We first highlight a comment made by Casey. Her comment was based on an experience she had while she was

completing a project in a sociology course. This comment sheds light on Casey's lack of awareness of SES differences between cultural groups. Casey reported:

Last semester I volunteered at the Optimists' Boys and Girls Clubs. Most of the children there were Hispanic. There were a few African-American children, but they got to the club after school and a lot of them stayed until 9:00 or 10:00 at night. I remember this one particular experience. I had driven my car over there and I was getting ready to leave. One of the young girls wanted some money from me, and she held out her hand and said, "I am taking money for the poor." I thought she was joking and I said, "But honey, I am the poor." And then almost all of the girls just ripped into me. They said, "Look at your clothes, your shoes. And look at your car." That made me really stop and look at the way I perceive what I am in the world to other people. I felt so badly after I left the club that evening.

Casey made a related comment that compared her family life to those of the children she worked with at the clubs. Casey said:

At the clubs I learned about families too. I come from a very traditional family. My parents are still married and there are no real problems in my home. But most of those kids in the Boys and Girls' clubs don't have both parents at home.

Casey's comments may demonstrate a lack of awareness of how lower SES and issues of family dynamics may affect the lives of those young children. Such lack of awareness may have comprised her perspective of some children and her ability to work with them as students in a culturally responsive way. If a goal of the teaching profession is for teachers to be facilitators and guides in addition to be instructors, then Casey's early perspectives on students may have aligned with her perspectives of a middle class citizen. Casey's exploration of similarities and differences between her and children in neighborhood clubs provided her with a means to gain insight into how her perspectives might contribute to limiting her ability to communicate with children from differing social groups.

As another example, in an interview with Michelle we discovered a perspective of some preservice teachers where they saw no differences between them and other cultural groups. Michelle, a White middle class preservice teacher, was from a very small West Texas town with a large population of Hispanic citizens and students. When asked about her experiences with Hispanic students Michelle replied:

Most of the [Hispanics] I went to school with didn't really have a deep background in, you know, traditional Hispanic stuff. They were more just like me. Their family life was pretty much just like mine. One of my friends, however, was more like Hispanic culture. They spoke Spanish at home because her parents only knew Spanish. They made their own tortillas and all that kind of stuff. And they had a lot of family. When the sisters would get married, they would live at home.

When we asked Michelle how she would teach a Hispanic student, she reported:

I see the teaching of Hispanic students the same as teaching any other student. They are no different than me.

The aforementioned comments of Michelle display a just like me perspective for this student. While some preservice teachers did not see any reason to vary their teaching strategies based on the ethnicity of their students, others acknowledged their uncertainty in meeting the needs of ethnically and socially diverse students. During her formative years, Liz attended a school in a White rural community. We asked her how she might teach in a school with mostly Black students. She replied:

Liz: That would depend on where the school and its community is located.

R: What do you mean by that?

Liz: In a larger area I would be a little more intimidated. But around here, I guess it would be better. Because like around Dallas and Austin there is much more violence and a little more poverty. I guess I am not really familiar with how much poverty is around here.

R: What do you know about poverty around here?

Liz: I know for sure that there is a lot of poverty here. Some of these homes you see on the east side of town are really poor. But I have only seen it. I am not really familiar with it because I have not lived that way. Where I went to school it was mostly middle class and upper-middle class.

As another example, Shannon expressed fear of teaching in a predominantly Black school. The Black population in rural West Texas has traditionally been smaller than the Hispanic population. This creates a situation where the rural preservice teachers in this study had fewer opportuni-

ties during their formative years to interact with Black students. This further influences the confidence that the rural preservice teachers had to consider themselves future teachers of African Americans, thus intensifying certain kinds of cultural uncertainties. Shannon noted:

I am not very well educated in the African American culture. You know, I really do not know much about that at all. I think that it would be hard to overcome my lack of awareness in order to relate to Black kids. And I think the respect level would not be real good. If you can't get any respect then you would be in trouble. And if you can't relate to the kids you would be in trouble too. It would be really hard for me to try to gain respect and to adapt to African Americans. This would be a very difficult challenge for me I think. I really do not know how to even get started.

The comments above taken from interviews with Casey, Michelle, Liz, and Shannon suggest how these preservice teachers view themselves relative to their students. Casey thought more about the SES and family structure of her students; Michelle, a preservice teacher with perhaps the most alarming perspective, held strongly to her belief that Hispanic students are just like her, and that she would teach them according to that belief; Liz related that she did not understand the nature of poverty of some students she might be teaching; and Shannon admitted to cultural uncertainty about Black students. Our analysis points to two trends regarding biases and stereotypes demonstrated by participants in this study. One trend was the belief that there are no real differences among various ethnic and social groups and, thus, no need to vary one's teaching strategies. Another trend was that there are differences which can lead to wide chasms between the preservice teachers and students of color they might teach in the future. However, what is unclear is whether these same preservice teachers, and others in the cohort, would have reflected on their future teaching had they not participated in these reflective interviews and had they not participated in focused activities in their work at the university.

Teaching in a Small Rural Town

Results of the previous section suggest that preservice teachers have strong rural values about diversity, although some of these values might be considered a *laissez faire* approach to dealing with issues, challenges, and concerns over diverse students. Indeed, some preservice teachers we interviewed believed that such issues did not necessarily need to be dealt with at all. Of importance to this study, however, is the clear inclination of the rural preservice teachers to return to the rural setting from which they came,

or at least a similar setting. This is consistent with earlier findings reported by Peshkin of growing up American in a small rural town (Peshkin, 1978). Writing about Mansfield, a small rural community, Peshkin noted:

Both as a consequence of teacher self-selection and the choice of teachers made by Mansfield's school leaders, rural-oriented educators are hired. They have been raised in small towns and they attended the smaller branches of the state university system; and typically they have grown up in Mansfield or its environs. (p. 197)

Peshkin also found that Mansfield's stable cadre of teachers preferred small town life and corresponding values. Altering Mansfield's educational infrastructure was not a foremost consideration of the teachers of community members. The responses that emerged from the preservice teachers in our study corroborated the findings of Peshkin. As an example, we asked Mikki where she wanted to teach when she finished the teacher education program. She responded, "Would you be surprised [if I said] in a small town around here?"

The majority of the preservice teachers planned to teach in small rural areas similar to the ones they lived in through much if not all of their K-12 school years. Familiarity and personal relationships were often cited as the key factors influencing their decisions. Laura explained:

I just don't want to teach in a really, really big school. I don't think big schools are as personal. That's all. I don't think it's as personal, and I think I'd rather be on the personal side of teaching. I always knew all of my teachers. You went to their church with them, or their kids were my friends. I spent the night at their houses and stuff. I just knew them all. And they knew you. I think it's a lot easier to talk to somebody if you know them, if you need help or something.

After briefly living with a relative in a large west-coast city, Shannon pointed out one of those differences in lifestyle that he knew conflicted with his. The lifestyle of west coast cities tends to be faster and in some locations goes continuously. Shannon noted: "I wasn't going to get used to running 24 hours a day. That's not me."

Another reason some rural preservice teachers planned to teach in rural communities related to perceived violence that presumably prevails in urban areas. Casey, for example, explained what would be her least favored teaching position:

One that's got a lot of violence. I think I'm more susceptible to being threatened. I don't think I

could really handle it. I know it scares me a lot. I'm from a small school and I would prefer to teach at a small school. Really the only thing that scares me about teaching is the violence. I think everything else I can handle.

Several other students articulated similar perceptions of urban schools and their fears attached with teaching there. Liz describes what she sees as an example of city life.

I've never experienced it, but when the public introduces the inner city everybody is getting shot and beat up. You know, like the show, *Dangerous Minds*. I picture it to be like that and I don't know Tai Kwon Do, but I don't know if I would be able to do that kind of thing.

Corey shares these fears:

I want students to actually want to learn and help themselves. And I don't want to be in a dangerous situation where there might be some students in there that might be in a gang or something like that. I could say something one day and they get all upset and I wouldn't mean to get them upset and someone pulls a knife.

Shannon identified violence as key factor in his school choices, reporting:

I've got an uncle that works in San Antonio. He says they have metal detectors in schools. And I really cannot see myself walking into a school with metal detectors. I couldn't do that.

Clearly, what these rural preservice teachers have reported suggests yet another reason why they prefer to teach in their home settings, namely violence and other urban problems. That preservice teachers actually have a clear understanding of this violence and other related urban issues is not clear. Yet part of their cognition about wanting to teach in rural areas extends beyond issues of race and class, to geographical locations and attributes of those locations. All but one rural preservice teacher wanted to return to their home communities to teach, or at least a community like where they spent their formative years.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The application of a situative perspective to rural preservice teacher preparation provides a starting point from which to understand the views that preservice teachers may bring to their teacher preparation programs. Such cognition, as embedded in their own autobiographies, offers

preservice teachers very real experiences from which they understand diversity and how it impacts their future teaching practice. The preservice teachers in this study clearly had cognition that was situated within the rural locations and experiences in which their past and present lives were embedded. Furthermore, this situated cognition seemed to limit, in some instances, their thinking about the culturally based needs of some student groups

The use of autobiographies (Bullough & Gitlin, 1994) represents an approach that recognizes and values the situated perspective that preservice teachers' bring to the educational setting. Through this approach students are provided an opportunity to engage in rich discourse in which they think about and challenge their own and each others' perspectives related to the role of diversity in rural educational dynamics (Powell et al., 1996). However, without some kind of academic or theoretical discourse, or without some form of discussion that fosters reflective thinking about teaching various social groups (e.g., class, gender, ethnicity), then any reflection and thinking directed toward a more critical awareness may be perceived to be unnecessary, as reported by Mikki, a preservice teacher in this study. Such cognition, to follow Anderson, Reder, and Simon (1996), may preclude an accommodation of alternative viewpoints for learning academically about diversity, about the need to move beyond localized ways of knowing, and about diverse groups. As reported in this study, some preservice teachers viewed some ethnic and social groups as being just like any other group in the local community (e.g., "there is no real difference between Hispanics and Whites").

As we began reflecting more comprehensively on the results of this study, we identified an interesting and notable phenomenon. As we have already reported, the rural preservice teachers understood their communities and former schools to be segregated by race, class, and language despite the finding that some of them believed that all students were alike. However, whenever some preservice teachers, as former rural students, were engaged with diverse persons in activities where they needed to work together toward a common goal (e.g., farming, sports), there reportedly was more understanding and acceptance of diverse groups. This phenomenon highlights the importance of authentic experiences in expanding preservice teacher perspectives.

All universities struggle with the issue of how to create learning experiences powerful enough to transform teachers' classroom practice. By participating in activities designed to question and extend their own knowledge in various domains, students will become enculturated into ways of learning that will continue for the rest of their lives (Brown et al., 1993; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Because preservice teachers do not have their own classroom in which to situate learning activities and have limited teach-

ing experiences from which to base their discussions of pedagogical issues, there is a need to create meaningful field experiences. A combination of university courses and field-based experiences can lead to learning experiences that are superior to either of the above mentioned settings presented in isolation (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Unfortunately, a university, equally situated within a rural context, may have difficulty enhancing perspectives related to diversity because of limited access to diverse classroom settings with culturally responsive teaching role models. In turn, information related to culturally competent teaching practices presented in university courses may become marginalized because it does not fit within the situated knowledge of these students. As noted by Sykes and Bird (1992):

The situated cognition perspective draws on the image of apprenticeship in a guild or a professional community as a powerful form of learning. But this image requires a stable, satisfactory practice that the novice can join. If the aim of teacher education is a reformed practice that is not readily available, and if there is no reinforcing culture to support such practice, then the basic imagery of apprenticeship seems to break down. Teachers' knowledge is situated, but this truism creates a puzzle for reform. Through what activities and situations do teachers learn new practices that may not be routinely reinforced in the work setting? (p. 501)

This same line of reasoning can be applied to the issue of helping rural students in enhancing their teaching practice to accommodate diverse students.

Putnam and Borko (2000) provide potential solutions for creating authentic learning experiences through case-based learning, including hypermedia environments that provide rich sets of materials for documenting classroom teaching and learning. Salomon (1993) defines these strategies as pedagogical tools that are designed to change or enhance the user's understanding of a concept or skill. Another potential tool, an observation checklist designed specifically to assess and evaluate a preservice teacher's diversity-responsive teaching abilities, offers an opportunity to substantially advance conversations and ultimately one's practice (Sobel, Taylor, & Anderson, under review). Such evaluation tools could be used during actual work in a diverse setting or as a critique guide in either "live feed" or videotaped scenarios. For example, Lampert and Ball (1998) describe a unique approach to preparing preservice teachers through videotapes of daily interactions in a math classroom. A similar approach could be used to examine issues related to student-teacher relationships, differences

Table 1
Geographic Region, Graduating Class Size, and Name of Study Participants

Students	Graduating Class
Urban	
Beth	1036
Brandon	1500
Brian	629
Jeff	738
Large Rural	
Lisa	450
Marissa	439
Small Rural & Remote	
Amanda	40
Benji	25
Brandi	36
Casey	97
Corey	120
James	136
Laura	23
Liz	175
Michelle	6
Mikki	60

in teaching styles, and student learning in diverse classrooms (both rural and urban).

The situated perspective provides a promising framework by which teacher preparation programs can build practices that encourage students to both recognize and challenge their own and others' situated knowledge around diversity and demographics. Using pedagogical tools consistent with the situated perspective (e.g., discourse communities, case studies), rural universities can create authentic learning experiences that recognize the knowledge that students bring to their preparation and assist them in building a range of cultural competencies appropriate to a variety of educational settings. As rural preservice teachers expand their personal views of diversity, in combination with their knowledge of rural contexts, they can strengthen their personal efforts to become positive purveyors of rural educational and community values. Such strengthening can happen if and only if, we maintain, preservice teachers like those in this study can come to understand the value of and need for learning experiences that cause them to examine critically those issues that pertain to rural-situated diversity.

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