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Transformative Education for Culturally Diverse Learners Through Narrative and Ethnography

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a study of the effects of creating a bridge between the narrative and ethnographic methods and writing processes as a means to more effectively educate teachers of culturally diverse learners. Ten teacher-participants from a Masters of Education (M.Ed.) degree programme in Bilingual Education at a university in the northwestern United States took a sequence of courses in which instructor-researchers taught them narrative and ethnographic pedagogy, theory, and methodology. Through qualitative methods, instructor-researchers analyzed teacher-participants' personal narratives and ethnographic case studies for generative themes. In discovering the commonalities of themes between these two methods of inquiry, the research reveals the value and transformative nature of building a bridge between narrative and ethnographic methods. The following overlapping generative themes were voiced by teacher-participants: 1) awareness of self and others; 2) consciousness of educational issues and their implications; 3) transformative action and advocacy. These themes are substantiated with related literature and further elucidated upon in the paper.

Introduction

The purpose of this manuscript is to encourage greater use of narrative and ethnographic writing in teacher education as a means of creating more culturally informed and transformative educators. The noteworthy positive effects for teachers employing narrative (Atkinson, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Nieto, 2003) and ethnographic methods (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, J. & L. Lofland, 2001; McCaleb, 1994; Valdes, 1996) with their students have been well-documented. That which lacks exploration and documentation is the intentional creation of a bridge between the two potentially empowering methods of inquiry.

Bridge has been commonly defined as a connecting, transitional, or intermediate route or phase between two adjacent elements, activities, conditions, or the like; a passage in a literary work or a scene in a play serving as a movement between two other passages or scenes of greater importance (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bridge). In this context we consider the research question examining the effects of bridging the narrative and ethnographic writing processes as a means for preparing teachers in the United States to more effectively educate culturally diverse learners.

In order to determine the value of creating this bridge, this manuscript first highlights the individual processes of teaching narrative and ethnographic methods. It then investigates *teacher participants' personal narratives and ethnographic case studies in search of overlapping generative themes*. For it is through the discovery of self, in narrative writing, that possibilities for the discovery of others, in ethnographic writing, are enhanced (Behar, 1993). It is first through the process of writing one's own narratives that teachers discover how their multiple identities transcend to their classroom teaching/pedagogy. This greater self-awareness opens teachers to a new desire of knowing and understanding others. Thus, when introduced to the ethnographic writing process, teachers are empowered with a discovery tool which serves as a means to gain deeper insights into the lives of their students and their students' communities.

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As three professors, two in the Bilingual Education Department and one in Curriculum, Instruction, and Foundational Studies at Boise State University in the United States, noted the critical need for helping diverse/English language learners succeed, we collaboratively considered how best to enable their success. Our department(s) seeks to educate our student-teachers in the most relevant pedagogies, theories, and methodologies for working with English language learners. Part of this mission includes educating our student-teachers on issues of cultural sensitivity and understanding, so they can most effectively work with culturally diverse learners. Although this is an overriding goal of the programme, its actualization transpires more for some students than others, depending on the professors and/or courses they enroll in and their individual degree of application of theory. That is to say, some students seriously take up their new insights into critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1983) and some students demonstrate understanding of the work required for these courses but do not necessarily take this new knowledge into their classrooms.

Through a sequence of courses, we educated teacher-participants, first in the narrative writing and secondly in the ethnographic writing processes. In two courses teachers were required to write their own narratives or ethnographic case studies. As researchers and educators, our goal was to discover the impact of narrative as an entry-way into ethnography, as well as the overall impact of learning both of these methods for working with culturally and ethnically diverse learners.

This paper describes the process of bridging the two methodologies – narrative and ethnography – to enhance graduate students' understanding and ability to become transformative educators through employing empowering methods to reach their diverse population of learners. In the following sections, we briefly explain the theoretical backgrounds of narrative and ethnography. Subsequently, we explain the importance of using the two methods together and the value of narrative *as a precursor to* ethnography. The methodology of the study is described, followed by a qualitative analysis of generative themes derived from the data. Finally, we discuss implications of the study and offer suggestions for future practice and research in the fields.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Over the course of two years, seven graduate students from Boise State University in Idaho, USA elected to participate in this study. These 'teacher-participants' were enrolled in a two-year Masters of Education in Bilingual Education programme and were full-time teachers with classes ranging from pre-kindergarten to adult education. The teacher-participants consisted of seven females: four white-European and three Latina (Latin American) females, all of middle-class backgrounds. The participants all had extensive experience, ranging from 5-15 years of teaching. They taught in small, rural Idaho, USA schools with growing immigrant populations, predominantly Latino/a. The Latino population in Idaho is largely Mexican and Central American.

Method of study and data analysis

As part of their Master's (Post-Graduate) programme, the participants completed the following two courses: 1) *Curriculum Planning and Implementation* and 2) *The Culturally Diverse Learner*. In the first course, participants were taught about the narrative writing process and its importance, both for the teacher-participants and for their students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Coffey, 2007; Gudmundsdottir, 2001). As a requirement of the first course, each teacher-participant wrote and presented her own narrative. In the second course, the teacher-participants were taught methods of ethnographic research and writing as a means to learn about other cultures (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001; Spradley, 1979; McCaleb, 1994; Frank, 1999; Valdes, 1996). They each completed an ethnographic case study with a member of an ethnic/cultural group (other than their own) from their pre-K to adult classes. The case study format was used due to the time limitations of one semester (16 weeks) to complete an ethnographic paper. As such, the teacher-participants wrote and presented ethnographic papers, based on their experience of studying and interviewing one informant from their culture of study. Upon completion of

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both courses, we individually compiled data to investigate the following question: What are the commonalities between the narrative and ethnographic writing processes that prepare teachers to more effectively educate culturally diverse learners in the United States?

Through a qualitative approach, we individually analyzed respective data through document analysis (Patton, 2002). We each used an open-coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in looking for generative themes—"recurring threads of thought that are woven throughout the dialogues and that signify important issues to the lives of the participants" (Freire, 1959; McCaleb, 1994). Themes emerged through our data interpretation of both the narrative and ethnographic writings (Ada, Beutel, & Peterson, 1990). We then explored themes independently and in consideration of their commonalities. Each of us also analyzed our data sources in conjunction with related literature to the field/culture of study. We subsequently compared emergent themes. In discovering commonalities within our themes, we determined a number of powerful effects for teachers of the narrative and ethnographic writing processes. Additionally, comparison of the findings across groups demonstrate that these commonalities indicate an intrinsic value of *intentionally* creating a bridge between the two processes. Creating this bridge could lead to better pedagogy in preparing teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the United States as well as throughout the world. Non-American scholars and educators can equally gain from this research as it applies to the study of self and cultures in any culturally diverse context.

Narrative

In recent years, personal narratives, or teacher autobiographies, have become an increasingly popular educational research and professional development tool in the United States' educational system (Nieto, 2003). In education, narrative writing is one of the best mechanisms for teachers to explore and re-contextualize their life experiences and to discover how they connect and influence their teaching pedagogy (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lemberger, 1997; Pinar 2004). Teacher autobiographies encourage educators to examine and reflect on their lived experiences and tell their stories as only they can tell them (Zinsser, 1998).

The uniqueness of all persons is found in the individual experiences they have lived and in the unique ways they tell their own stories. Over time, narratives help teachers answer the questions of why they entered the teaching profession and what keeps them there (Nieto, 2003). Narratives also afford teachers a mechanism or lens for more critically examining their current practices (hooks, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldua, 2002; Ah-nee Benham & Cooper, 1998). When teachers deconstruct their personal histories and stories, they may gain cultural awareness and insight into school systems and structures of power and privilege. Pinar (2004) suggests all educators engage in the process of examining the curriculum of their lives through "currere." He suggests this "autobiographical method of writing provides a strategy for self-study, one phase of which seeks synthetical moments of 'mobilization' when, as individuals and as teachers, we enter 'the arena' to educate the American public" (p. xiii). Educators will then gain reflective insight into progressive steps for their future pedagogy. Although teachers may work hard to leave their values, beliefs and biases outside school doors, the reality is that:

> *[T]eachers bring their entire autobiographies with them…It is useless for them to deny this; the most they can do is acknowledge how these may either get in the way of, or enhance, their work with students (Nieto, 2003, p. 24).*

Therefore, the value of educators gaining cognizance of how their *personal* identities influence their *teacher* identities and the interconnectedness of the two, is becoming increasingly noted. Valuing the power and influence of one's own autobiographies, "must be at the heart of teaching because teaching is an encounter with the self" (Nieto, 2003, p. 25). Our teacher-participants demonstrated their abilities to employ tools from narrative analysis to deconstruct and redesign their own selves, described in Nieto's "*What Keeps Teachers Going?" (*2003).

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Atkinson (2005) reiterates that the forms of data and analysis should reflect the *forms* of culture and of social action. In other words,

> *We collect and analyse personal narratives and life-histories because they are a collection of types or forms—spoken and written—through which various kinds of social activity are accomplished. They are themselves forms of social action in which identities, biographies, and various other kinds of work get done. One accords importance to narratives and narrative analysis because they are important kinds of social action (p. 2).*

As researchers/educators, we have chosen to incorporate narrative writing in our programme coursework because it has become a tangible and personal way for teachers to conduct and produce research on their individual education practices. What happens in a classroom is a social and cultural construction. It is thus crucial that teachers, along with their students, become authors of their own educational and life experiences and that their voices be heard and be given legitimate recognition. Doing so provides an avenue to move from a traditional form of education into one of transformative value in which teachers take ownership of their profession and work diligently to create more democratic and meaningful experiences for themselves and their students (hooks, 1994).

Definition and Purpose of Narratives for Teachers

Narrative essays, in simple terms, tell stories (Bruner, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Unlike traditional writing or research, narrative inquiry does not rely on numbers or triangulation of data to achieve validation; rather *plausibility*, or the persuasiveness of the story, is what narrative readers and researchers look for. Narrative is a pervasive and important way of reporting experience (Atkinson, 2005). It is an important genre of spoken action and representation in everyday life, and in many specialised contexts. Narrative, therefore, should be studied insofar as it is a particular feature of a given cultural milieu.

Narratives cannot be generalized to a broader population as is typically done with more traditional genres of writing and research because stories are unique to each individual. Instead, narrative writers and inquirers look for the *transferability* value of the story. Does the story told have the potential for relating to someone else's experiences, for connecting with somebody else's world? Finally, in order for narratives to connect with readers/listeners in a meaningful and transformative way, they must bring the reader into the story from the very beginning with an *invitational quality*.

In addition to the criteria presented above, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) propose their own guidelines for autobiographical narratives. They endorse the idea that autobiographical or self-studies should enable connection, promote insight and interpretation, be about the issues and problems that make someone an educator, and offer fresh perspectives on teaching and learning. Therefore, educators should remain cognizant of the purposes for writing one's own narratives and the audiences those stories are intended to reach. The teacher-participants in this research were asked to look into their personal histories and write narratives focusing on the following question: "How has our own school curriculum influenced us as students and as educators?" Teacher-participants were encouraged to forge connections, promote insight and interpretations into who they are as an educator and why. As each story offers a new understanding of oneself and fresh perspectives on education, the potential and possibilities for educational transformation become innumerable when the "looking back" aspect of personal narratives turns toward "looking forward" or "looking beyond."

Features of Narrative Writing

In successful narrative writing, the author always makes a point. Though on the surface, narratives might appear to be a simple retelling of a particular experience, event, or episode of a person's life, upon further examination, an effectively and passionately told story brings forth important and life-changing moral and ethical lessons.

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Narratives that are persuasive and transformative include a variety of features. First, narratives must include an introduction that clearly indicates what the story is about and ends with a conclusion that *solidifies their point.* Second, they should include anecdotes in which the author describes in detail the person, experience or event he or she is writing about. Third, thoughts, verbs, and vocabulary selected to describe the person, experience, or event should be vivid so as to "lead the reader to reflect on the human experience" (Jordan-Henley, 1988, p.1). Fourth, narratives are typically told in first person, giving the reader a more intimate connection to the author's experience. Finally, stories should be written with liveliness in new and different ways so as to demonstrate the author's own personal style. The influence of publicly sharing narratives is then to offer insights into the phenomena described for others and for transforming future practice and or potential.

To summarize, narrative writing for teachers in all countries strives to: encourage critical self-reflection of one's own lived experiences; create awareness of how one's life experiences influence their teaching philosophies and praxis; illuminate the interconnectedness of *personal* identities and *teacher* identities; provide an avenue for understanding why one entered the teaching profession and what keeps him/her there; and critically reflect on one's teaching praxis for modification and inclusion of marginalized/diverse learners.

Process for Narrative

Within the context of the *Curriculum: Creating, Planning and Implementation* course, the primary goals for teacher-participants were to:

- gain knowledge and awareness of the historical and present day influences affecting the planning and implementation of bilingual/English as a second language curriculum
- gain awareness and understanding of the marginalization and exclusion of underrepresented populations in mainstream school curriculum.
- gain knowledge and skills necessary to effectively plan and implement curricular changes within the classroom and school community so as to effectively engage culturally diverse learners in the United States.

There were three required course texts, which provided a foundation for the students to learn the praxis of narrative in conjunction with understanding the influences affecting curriculum and culturally diverse learners in the U.S.:

1) Cary, S. (2000). *Working with second language learners: Answers to teachers' top ten questions.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
2) Lemberger, N. (1997). *Bilingual education: Teachers' narratives*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
3) Peddiwell, J. A. (1939). *The saber-tooth curriculum*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

In addition to the required texts, students were also assigned other readings dealing in general with curriculum issues and teacher narratives. As part of their course assignments, students were first asked to write narratives describing a specific curricular experience they had encountered in their education which helped them re-conceptualize themselves, their school, and/or the world, either positively or negatively. A second narrative they were required to write concerned a specific school experience related to an injustice that personally affected them and their teaching praxis.

In order to tell a compelling and insightful story, the students were given the narrative features described earlier in this article to help ensure their success in the writing process. In addition, various examples of previous student and teacher narratives dealing with curriculum issues were assigned to the class. This provided concrete examples for writing stories and served as a platform for students to ask questions regarding their own narratives and the best and most effective ways to tell them.

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In order to facilitate a safe environment with a low affective filter, students were divided into small groups and asked to share their narratives. The students listening were encouraged to ask questions, give feedback, and make connections and comments to the author of each narrative. Atkinson (2005) documents the need to

> *analyse narratives and life-materials, in order to treat them as instances of social action—as speech-acts or events with common properties, recurrent structures, cultural conventions and recognisable genres* (p.6).

In order for "narrative" analysis to have rigour, individual "stories" must be grounded in a sustained analysis of their forms and functions. Thus, once students in the group had read their narrative, students were asked to compare and contrast the similarities and differences amongst their experiences. After each group completed this activity, the instructor sought volunteers to share their narrative with the entire class. At the end of the course, a class collection of the narratives was compiled by the instructor and each student was given a copy.

It was through narrative writing, sharing, and the critiquing process that an act of collective responsibility was formed in which each individual was responsible for creating a shared and connected learning environment. Through the telling of narratives a communal commitment to learning was established and the fear of conflict was not as powerful as was the renewed commitment for growth and new ways of thinking. This concept is similarly conveyed by Conle (2003) when he writes:

> *Stories open possibilities to our imagination. The quality of those possibilities is vital to the quality of our future. A person without access to certain stories is a person without hope, without social vision…The narratives available to us delimit our areas of choice. It is the narrative repertoire of our imagination that helps us distinguish the world we live in from the world we want to live in…Teacher and student are co-inquirers and co-learners, each with their own crucial expertise contributing to the [learning] process (p. 4).*

Once discovery of self has been experienced and critically reflected upon through narrative writing, the introduction of ethnography is a powerful subsequent step to enhancing teacher efficacy in working with diverse learners.

Ethnography

A simple definition of ethnography is a written description of culture**,** which itself has numerous definitions. In one respect, culture can be viewed as the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experiences and generate social behavior. It is not just a cognitive map that “tells” people what to do in given situations; it is a guide for acting, knowing what is appropriate; principles for interpreting and responding within a given society (Spradley, 1979, pp. 5-7). Herbert Blumer enunciated the principle that research should be "faithful" to the phenomena under investigation (Blumer 1954; Hammersley, 1989). As researchers and educators, we educate our students in both narrative and ethnographic writing processes as we believe they are both *faithful* to the process of studying one’s own and other cultures.

In contrast to anthropology where one collects data about a certain group of people, ethnography seeks to learn about a people group from studying *with* them. It starts with a humble attitude of *ignorance* with the goal of developing an “epistemological humility” (Spradley, 1979, p. 11). In other words, the goal is to

learn from the people, verses having a superior theoretical attitude of studying *about* them. It allows for a member of the cultural group to experience the value of having something to teach the ethnographer. The realization that one’s ‘outside’ interpretation may not always be accurate provides the need to include the ‘insider’ perspective.

Ethnographers seek to gain depth of awareness; greater consciousness; to grasp an “emic” or an insider’s perspective verses an “etic” or outside perspective. Although it is extremely difficult to obtain a fully ‘insider’ perspective, the realization of one’s place (outside) is a vital part of the awareness process.

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Ethnography also entails a desire to learn about oneself—to consider one's own culture in light of the culture(s) he/she is studying. In particular, ethnographers seek to understand aspects of culture that cannot be *seen*--the iceberg below the surface of the water--having to do with the *meaning* of values, belief systems and worldviews which drive cultural group behaviors. Often cultural studies are conducted *on* people groups as a means of further oppression. In contrast, the goal of a teacher ethnographer is also to set free and give voice to his/her students.

As professors and researchers, our purpose in incorporating ethnography into our programme coursework, is for our teachers to gain knowledge of their students so as to be more effective in teaching their increasingly diverse learners. It is also to reflect, with our teachers, in what concrete ways educators [and administrators] can improve their validation of children's/parents cultures, outside of the dominant culture.

This process involves becoming more reflective and critical of one's teaching. It strives to consider what is being done consciously/unconsciously to validate or invalidate home cultures. It seeks to gain understanding of other cultural perceptions and expectations of education. It hopes to consider ways that teachers could do more to incorporate minority cultures in the U.S. and *give more voice to* children of these cultures.

Our goal as educators is for teachers to ultimately gain a deeper understanding of their students so that they are better prepared to deal with issues of equity and social justice. As such, an intrinsic part of ethnography is to recognize one's own biases in order to gain new perspectives and *act* within this perspective toward one's students and their cultural group.

As teachers, it is our responsibility to help students succeed. When a teacher *knows* a student, there is a much greater chance of academic success as the child develops a greater sense of self-esteem/confidence from being *known* and understood. Educators know self-esteem and confidence are indispensable for long-term positive learning. In *knowing* a child, a teacher in the U.S. can affirm a child's home values rather than create a struggle of allegiances between home and school cultures and value systems.

In summary, ethnographic writing for teachers strives to:

- encourage critical reflection of one's own teaching practices
- gain awareness of cultural differences and negative perceptions
- modify culturally bound theories of others
- enable educators to more effectively teach different ethnic groups
- encourage advocacy for one's culturally diverse learners.

Process for Ethnographic Case Study

Within the context of the *Cultural Diverse Learner* course, the primary course goals for educators were to:

- identify and investigate an ethnic/cultural group for study
- identify group perspectives with relation to education, and how these perspectives correspond with the framework of a public American school
- read literature from one's own cultural background to better inform one's understanding of this group's belief and value systems
- understand how belief systems affect different understandings of education
- learn the ethnographic writing process
- complete an ethnographic case study.

The required course texts were:

1) Frank, C. (1999). *Ethnographic eyes: A teacher's guide to classroom observation***.** Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
2) McCaleb, S.P. (1994). *Building communities of learners: A collaboration among teachers, students, families, and community*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

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3) Spradley, James P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Students were also responsible for outside readings, based on their culture of study. They were required to research: 1) adult literature written by a member of the group, such as an ethnography, oral history, or case study; 2) children's literature revealing values/belief systems (applicable to gaining insights into values toward education); 3) culturally specific articles about educating members of the group under study.

Students were made aware that the primary purpose of the ethnographic project (in the context of the Bilingual Master's degree) was to learn how best to educate U.S. students from differing ethnic/cultural groups. Through ethnographic interviewing, students sought to gain insights into a particular cultural group's perspectives, attitudes, values, and belief systems. The project was designed to set students on a lifelong path of learning about other cultures. Over the years, students from varying socio-cultural backgrounds will enter a given U.S. classroom and it is a teacher's obligation to at least try to understand a child's worldview so as to more effectively meet his/her educational needs. By reading culturally relevant literature and by talking to community members, teachers in the U.S. may increase their ability to reach a child as well as educate other children about this child's cultural group.

The process of engaging in an ethnographic case study included students selecting an ethnic/cultural group for study. Each student wrote a short, personal essay on why they chose the specific group they wanted to study. Reflecting on readings from Spadley's book, *The Ethnographic Interview*, students gained understanding of the difference in scope between a full ethnography and an ethnographic case study. The case study approach fit into the limitations of a semester-long course and ability to interview only one informant. Merriam (1998) defines the case study as *particularistic* (focusing on one person or social unit), *descriptive* (because the result is a rich, thick portrait), and *heuristic* (because it sharpens the reader's understanding and leads to discovering new meanings). The case study is also *inductive* (because generalizations and hypotheses emerge from examination of the data). The purpose of case studies is not to generalize, but to look at specific examples so that solutions for more general situations can be developed. Within this context, students thus conducted a comparative analysis of their case study findings with culturally specific literature to validate/invalidate their conclusions. All of the students, both within and outside of this study came away with incredible personal, educational, and cultural insights which greatly affected their teaching praxis.

Bridging Narrative and Ethnography: Teachers' and Students' Experiences

Both the narrative and ethnographic processes involve first becoming aware of the lens or perspective one is looking through, from one's own cultural background. They are methods that seek not to make assumptions or to judge, but to try to be as objective as possible. In theory, this concept is often readily adopted by practitioners. However, the actual praxis of first becoming aware of one's own cultural biases; recognizing the *color* of the water one swims in, is not always simple. It takes concerted time, effort and desire.

If the educational process is truly going to have a transformative effect on its students, it cannot continue to separate the teacher from the student, nor the student from the subject matter, nor either of these from the pedagogy employed in the classroom. All parties must merge together for real change to occur. The

inclusion of personal experience in coursework and ethnographic understanding allows for this merging to take place because it allows students to take ownership of their own learning and "claim a knowledge base from which they can speak" (hooks, 1994, p. 148) allowing knowledge to be sought collectively rather than taught individually.

As Chavez-Chavez (1999) declares:

> *Multicultural education and its discourse are inextricably linked to the telling and listening of story. Stories show that reality is not fixed. Reality is not a given. We construct our stories through conversations, through our lives together, through the*

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> *visions that we construct together. This process cannot exist without both teller and listener, a tango, where no one leads nor follows but because of both something new, better is created (pp. 248-249).*

It is impossible to deny teachers and students have experiences that are relevant to the learning process. The purpose of education has been, and will always be, showing teachers and students how to reconstruct and re-define themselves, their schools and the world. Coffey (2007) describes this process as an autoethnographic practice, in which the presence of the researcher (ethnographer) is intrinsically a part of the research process. Stories help educators and students discover their own *beings* and collectively work to *re-member* each other and change the world into a more equitable and just place.

Only when teachers and students truly become "whole" by *feeling* with both mind and body can American education for the practice of freedom, democracy and social justice become a reality (Burch, 2001). Stories help push teachers and students in that direction through the endless possibilities they present for seeing others as part of a collective whole rather than marginalized and isolated strangers. Stories help individuals humanize "The Other" (Chavez-Chavez, 1999) by eradicating fear and allowing for more humane and compassionate understanding. As Smith (1999) once said, "I have come to understand that I use my own stories as a *bridge* to understand the lives of others" (p. 2-3). Similarly, we as researchers have come to see the value of teachers bridging their narratives with the ethnographic stories of their students. As our teacher-participants engaged in this critical process, they demonstrated a depth of awareness, described by Smith (1999), of both self and others.

Having a base understanding of the narrative and ethnographic research and writing processes provides the background for unveiling the themes, as voiced by our teacher-participants. The interconnected nature of these themes creates an interwoven tapestry that supersedes the individual themes. The importance of these themes is evidenced in the personal and professional transformations that occurred for our teachers. Highlights of their stories will be shared after a brief discussion of the narrative and ethnographic research and writing process. We conclude with suggestions for classroom application for implementing these methods.

RESULTS

As part of completing their respective coursework, teacher-participants were asked to reflect on the value of learning narrative and ethnographic methods as a means to more effectively teach culturally diverse learners. These reflections were included as periodic class writings as well as in the teacher-participants' final papers. The three primary themes instructor-researchers discovered in common were: 1) awareness of self and others; 2) consciousness of educational issues and their implications; 3) transformative action and advocacy. These themes are elaborated upon with quotes from teacher-participants and supporting literature.

Awareness of self and others

Awareness of self involves acknowledging the value of one's own life experiences and seeing how those experiences have shaped one's personal beliefs and values. For teacher-participants this awareness involves acknowledging how one's identity enters the classroom and is a pervasive force in driving curricular decisions as well as interactions with students. Ultimately this understanding brings about a greater awareness of what brings an individual to the teaching profession and what keeps him/her there. This awareness of self and one's own potential biases enables a teacher to value and respect others' stories as they value their own. Teachers are then able to be more understanding and compassionate when their cultural values and beliefs conflict with those of their students.

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Gaining awareness of self and others is one of the most fundamental and critical parts of both narrative and ethnographic studies. Freire (1970) posits:

> *How is it possible for us to work in a community without feeling the spirit of the culture that has been there for many years, without trying to understand the soul of the culture? Without understanding the soul of the culture, we just invade the culture.*

In a similar vein, teachers who lack understanding of themselves and their students may inadvertently devalue a student's culture, values, and belief systems. Through an increased awareness, teachers can come to a truer understanding of the challenges their students face. With this knowledge, they then may become more proactive in taking transformative action on behalf of themselves and their students.

In her narrative, Cindy, a teacher-participant in the *Curriculum, Planning, and Implementation* course expresses the crucial nature of engaging in the sharing of stories through dialogue and written narratives with oneself and others. It is through the exchange of words that people come to know one another, and in doing so, transcend themselves— opening up the possibilities for changing the status quo of American society in solidarity with others.

> *Without dialogue and narratives the learning becomes one-sided and patriarchal. Only the teacher's version (or the teacher's How-to Manual) is considered. This type of teaching is a continuation of teacher centered learning, which is following the status quo of our society and eventually leading us into an abyss by the continuous creation of a society that is illiterate, ignorant, and inhumane. We as educators have a moral obligation to do cultural work in our classrooms. Only then can we begin to transform society and eventually the world. (Cindy).*

Renee, another teacher-participant in the same course, realized that part of her journey of self discovery involved experiencing the stories of others and how those stories are interconnected with her own, transforming her into a more aware and understanding teacher.

> *The [narrative nature of the] curriculum of this programme has helped me to see others' situations as real, to feel their pain, and understand their struggles. I know my privilege and recognize my oppressive behavior. I no longer discount stories of oppression as fiction, but have begun to understand the validity and impact these stories have on human beings. I leave the programme understanding the importance of a caring, loving, compassionate teacher. (Renee)*

Ana, also from the curriculum course, reflects on the transformation she is going through in her narrative, as she thinks about and questions her role as a teacher. Her transformation allows her to see the importance of critical questioning, self-reflection, and what Maxine Greene (1986) calls, 'being fully present." As a result of Ana's transformative journey, her students are now reaping the benefit of her realization that school is not only about facts and figures, but rather, about the human experiences of her students.

> *The journey has been enlightening; my mind has felt restless during several occasions. I have questioned my pedagogy…am I really present in the classroom? Am I deeply engaged with my students? The pain and discomfort that I have experienced throughout the programme has been good for me; it has helped me grow and become a better educator…I need to invite my students to share their personal experiences. The curriculum I employ in my classroom needs to reflect the culture, value, experiences and interests of my students. (Ana)*

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From an ethnographic perspective of gaining awareness, Michelle, a teacher-participant from the *Culturally Diverse Learner* course reflects:

> *I learned so many things from this project. I really enjoyed doing it. I had the myth dispelled for me that a lot of white families are not interested or just don't care about their child's education. I learned many of the reasons why my ethnographic group is not as involved as I hope they would be. Finding out that poverty is not just a choice, but an ethnic group, was very interesting to me since I, in a way, grew up in poverty. I feel that understanding that poverty is a culture will give way to understanding my students better. I try to understand and gain knowledge of a student's culture, but just never quite realized that poverty was a culture. (Michelle)*

This teacher-participant gained great insight into herself in realizing the lens with which she was looking at world. Though she came from this same ethnic/cultural group, she was like a fish unable to see the water she was swimming in. The ethnography gave her the opportunity to get outside of this water and see herself from the outside, as well as her students from the inside. At the same time, we recognize that this teacher-participant could be entertaining a deficit model of cultural awareness in her references to a "culture of poverty." For the first time, she was recognizing socio-economic class as an important part of getting to know her students. However, all educators must work to ensure teachers do not diminish their conceptions of individual students by associating them all into similar ethnic/cultural categories. In this study all of our teacher-participants evidenced their comprehension and internalization of the concept, which has been well-documented in ethnographic literature (McCaleb, 1997; Valdes, 1996), that teachers need to understand or at least try to take into account the socio-cultural backgrounds of their students without reducing them to such if they wish to teach effectively.

With a new appreciation for their increased awareness of themselves and others, our teacher-participants gained a greater consciousness of educational issues facing students in their class and the implications these issues have on their daily lives. They came away with an *awakening* of curricular issues in that, where they once were unable to see certain biases they became enlightened with an 'insider' perspective. While initially being *blind* to certain discriminatory practices within the system affecting their students, they gained cognizance to the prevalent biases inherent in school cultures. Reflecting on the process of narrative and ethnography teacher-participants responded to their individual experiences and then made connections through bridging the two pedagogies used in this coursework and considering their own future pedagogy with culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the U.S.

Consciousness of educational issues and their implications

Nieto (2003) has theorized that in order to truly understand one's students, one must first understand herself. This theory was supported by our teacher-participants' self-declared increased awareness. It was also taken a step further as this awareness led to a new level of consciousness of educational issues often faced by their students.

Katie, a teacher-participant in the curriculum course, chronicles her journey as a young child coping with her mother's cancer and subsequent death. She reflects on the internal struggles she faced and how they affected her time and work in the classroom. By understanding how her mother's death affected her own identity as a student, among other roles, she is now able to really *see* into the faces of her students. In her narrative, Katie speaks to the power of Nieto's theory, as well as taking the next step of adopting a more democratic and transformative pedagogy for her students.

> *Now I look upon the faces of my students and know that each day they are faced with challenges. For some they are small and for some they are unbearable. Yet, they must learn and I must teach. The word that keeps entering my mind is the word balance. How do we balance it all? How do we offer a rewarding educational experience when the lives of many have disproportionate hardship and/or injustice? First we must reflect upon our*

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> *beliefs, biases, and practices. Do we make assumptions or base our practices, as teachers, on a student's race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, first language, or socio-economic status? Do we care about our students and do they know we care? (Katie)*

Katie's reflective questions reveal not only her heightened awareness of her students' lives, but also a deeper consciousness of how she as a teacher plays a critical role in facilitating a positive educational experience for her students.

Sonia, another teacher-participant from the diversity course gained great insights into her Latina identity and the struggles Latinas face in the educational system by engaging in an ethnographic study of Latina women. The following quote reflects the consciousness she gained:

> *I have appreciated this time to reflect upon my own identity and the where and how I became who I am. It is enlightening to draw connections to literature and other great females historically and present-day. This is an opportunity that should be afforded to all females, the earlier, the better. (*Sonia)

The different insights each teacher-participant came away with from their ethnographies, although varied, ultimately helped them know how to teach their students more effectively. For instance, Sonia's cultural analysis enabled her to understand more of the assimilation children go through to survive in the dominant culture of the United States. In her ethnography, the Latina girl Sonia interviewed stated,

> *A lot of the girls in my grade say she thinks she's better than us because she hangs out with the white girls* (ethnographic interviewee).

As children try to "assimilate" into the dominant culture, they often experience resentment by peers from their own culture, particularly if they begin to blend in. An awareness of these challenges provided the ethnographer/teacher with greater empathy toward her student's struggles and ability to design more appropriate class work. The teacher subsequently added components of diversity and valuing others to her curriculum in an attempt to alleviate some of the cultural tensions the girls in her class were encountering. As explored by one of the most renowned educators of voicing a need for advocacy, Freire (1970) emphasizes,

> *Traditional schooling is too often a process of domestication; as such, it seeks to preserve the status quo and prevailing social conditions. Transformative education, on the other hand, aims to support the full development of human beings* (p. 60).

Narrative and ethnography enabled our teacher-participants to gain increased consciousness through looking critically at themselves, their life experiences, and those of others. Through a new lens they recognized educational issues and implications which were previously hidden from their vision. Discovering new and multiple perspectives their students bring to the classroom motivated our teacher-participants to gain their own voices in proactive advocacy for their students.

Transformative action and advocacy

Transformative advocacy can take many forms. While some of our teacher-participants took more blatant measures of advocacy, others operated through more subtle means, yet all had a similar transformative aim or effect. Having the courage to look deep inside oneself and make the necessary changes it takes to become a more caring, passionate, and democratic educator is not an easy task. It is often a painful journey that leaves the individual with more questions than answers. However, truly knowing oneself and how one's experiences have shaped who the individual is, as a teacher, gives rise to a transformative power—a power that awakens the silenced voices and hearts of teachers and allows them to be a part of their own practices, their educational destinies. Jolene, a teacher-participant from the curriculum course, powerfully illustrates this when she writes:

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> *My personality has changed from being a silent people-pleaser, to being confident in my own thinking ability. I now recognize the empty rhetoric I constantly hear and acknowledge there is abuse and discrimination occurring everywhere around me. I feel an incessant need to speak out in defense…I have personally opted out of several 'institutions' that existed in glory in my former life. I have opted out of the status quo that accompanies my job as a public school teacher. That 'institution' with all its colonizing virtues is alive and healthy in my local school district. (Jolene)*

Jolene is emphasizing that she now clearly sees her local school system as a patriarchal, colonizing institution for her minority students or those with less power. Having recognized this, she now is compelled to speak out against such injustices. Another example of transformative action was evidenced in the diversity course. A teacher-participant discovered some inner fears of the student she interviewed in her ethnographic study. Through gaining 'insider' knowledge of cultural and linguistic pressures within the educational testing system in the U.S., the teacher-participant became much more of an advocate for her students:

> *Educating students sometimes involves helping them to find their own voices; knowing a problem exists, but not being able to name it is a reality for many people. Transformation begins with education, but takes flight with critical thinking. The action I will take will be in posing questions that require students to think critically of themselves, their education and their futures. I'll work to expose the barriers in education that this cultural group faces within members of the group and those that affect members of the group. (Leanne)*

With this knowledge, Leanne became more proactive in helping to alleviate her students' fears and empower them to succeed. Through additional research of related literature, Leanne learned that thoughts of college are often not as realistic for some communities, when getting through high school is possibly the greatest personal achievement and family expectation. Yet, knowing the individual strengths and capabilities of all her students, she advocated for them to reach their full potential, both within and beyond the classroom.

An important step for educators in the journey towards a more transformative form of education is not only in finding one's voice, but also in learning how to use it proactively so that changes can be made. In their writing, Ada and Campoy (1998) emphasize the point of transformative education as being a *new approach* for teachers to reach their own true goals, rather than an *additional process* that teachers add on to what they are already doing.

The majority of our teacher-participants from both courses revealed how finding their voices gave them the courage to become active participants in their respective school communities. Through more engaged participation, teacher-participants were able to make small, yet crucial, changes which benefited not only their students, but also their schools and colleagues. One of the greatest effects of narratives and ethnographies that we, as researchers, encountered was the transformative power of this discovery process for teachers--to move from greater self-awareness and critical consciousness to transformative action—which was realized through varying types of advocacy for themselves and their students.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Educational Praxis

The inherent value of narrative and ethnographic writing, coupled with the documented positive effects of bridging the two, lead us to conclude with several considerations of how educators can apply these methodologies with their own students.
Educators can:

- "mine their own histories" as a means of gaining self-awareness
- research an ethnic group within their student body to gain a deeper understanding of how to educate a given cultural group
- help students discover the power of their own cultural origins and experiences through writing their own stories and documenting the stories of their ancestors.

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If educators are going to do their part to become more transformative individuals, they must make a radical shift and reflect on how their values, beliefs, biases, and experiences influence and guide the work they do with students. As Feldman (2003) says, "For us to change how we teach requires us to change who we are as teachers" (p. 27). Aside from being an academic endeavor, educating ourselves as teachers is undeniably a moral and political activity (Purpel, 1999). Educators must embrace new ways of challenging themselves to think differently about the world they live in and how that world affects the educational experiences of their students. Indeed, educators in all countries would benefit from deconstructing their self and teaching identities in order to better understand potential difference students may bring to the classroom and how they may best serve all of their students. When a richer understanding of any society and its influences on education systems is uncovered, educators may guide students to more productive participation in those societies. Bridging narrative and ethnography provides educators with an avenue for the education of self and others, the world they live in, how that world affects the educational experiences of their students, and ultimately the role they can play to make an ever greater difference in the lives of their students.

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