WHITE, FEMALE TEACHERS IN A PREDOMINANTLY HISPANIC HIGH SCHOOL: THE JOURNEY TO BRIDGE THE CULTURAL DIVIDE

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents, David and Marcene DeBoer, whose help and prayers kept me on this journey;

To my mother in law, Mary Soltero, who also prayed and told me ‘I could do this;’

To my children, Noelle and David, for their special love, hugs, and understanding;

To my husband, George, for his faithful love, help, insight, and excitement for me;

And to the LORD who gave me the strength and power to do all things.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the stories told by five, White, female teachers with a long-term commitment to teach at a predominantly Hispanic high school. The stories of these teachers' life experiences were part of a teaching journey that began long before their formal teacher preparation. Understanding the personal, practical knowledge embedded in the events and experiences of these teachers' journeys was important to study, as these teachers possessed an extremely positive personal and academic reputation with their mostly Hispanic students. This study shed light on possible reasons for these teachers' longevity in the profession of teaching as well as their ability to bridge cultural differences potentially dividing them from their students.

Data collection came from classroom observations, a questionnaire, and a series of three, semi-structured interviews. In a cross-case analysis of the narratives compiled from the data, three main types of stories were told: stories of cross-cultural experiences, difficult challenges, and conversations with students. The highs and lows of these unusual women's experiences provide cases for preservice teachers to consider as they prepare to teach an increasingly diverse student population. These cases also reinforce the importance of cross-cultural experiences and intimate knowledge of challenging

issues facing Hispanic communities as a prerequisite both before and throughout teacher preparation programs. These cases also emphasize the importance of conversation as a cultural strategy in bridging the cultural divide with Hispanic students.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

In classrooms across the United States, a well-documented cultural mismatch exists between teachers and students. Approximately ninety-one percent of all elementary teachers, seventy-three percent of all middle school teachers, and fifty-five percent of all high school teachers are female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Most teachers are middle class and monolingual, coming from relatively isolated rural and suburban areas of the United States (Howey & Zimpher, 1996). Although demographic estimates vary slightly, approximately 90% of the current K-12 teaching population is White or European American. This demographic situation is not expected to change in the near future (National Education Association, 2004). Some estimates also suggest the number of White college students going into teaching is steadily growing (Howey & Zimpher, 1996).

In contrast to the increasing numbers of White, female, middle class preservice teachers entering education, there is a corresponding decrease in the numbers of preservice teachers from diverse populations entering the field (Hodgkinson, 2002; Reed, 1998). Students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds pursuing college degrees are choosing fields of study other than teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Duarte, 2000; Hodgkinson, 2002). Adding to the disparity of this well-documented cultural mismatch

is the fact many current minority teachers are expected to retire from the classroom in the next few years (Gay & Howard, 2000).

While teachers entering the field are increasingly White and mono-cultural, their students are becoming increasingly diverse (Hodgkinson, 2002; Howard, 2003; National Education Association, 2004). Racial and ethnic minority students comprise an estimated 40% of the current student population in the United States. This percentage is expected to grow dramatically in the next thirty years (Hodgkinson, 2002; National Education Association, 2004). Racial and ethnic minority students are already in the majority in most urban schools. An increasing number within this group frequently speak English as their second language (Snyder & Freeman, 2003). Even in areas not traditionally associated with diversity, the number of culturally diverse students is growing (Pipher, 2002). With the continuing homogeneity of the teacher population and the steadily increasing heterogeneity of students across the United States, the "demographic divide" will continue to grow for many years to come (Gay & Howard, 2001).

This divide is further exacerbated by the cultural isolation that characterizes the lives of teachers before they actually enter the classroom (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Howey and Zimpher, 1996; Parsons & Brown, 2001; Reed, 1998). In their years of growing up in mostly rural and suburban communities, White teachers have experienced limited opportunities to "move in circles beyond the ones they know" (Parsons & Brown, 2001, p. 1). Unfortunately for many of these teachers, entering the classroom is one of

their first cross-cultural experiences. Lacking significant experiences with people outside their own culture, the overwhelmingly homogeneous teaching population in the United States is often frustrated in their efforts to teach and relate to a diverse student population (Gay & Howard, 2000; Howard, 2003; Howey & Zimpher, 1996).

Teachers frequently lack an understanding of how to teach English language learners, often judging such students as disadvantaged or underachievers. These negative teacher expectations operate from a deficit-model of thinking about their students of color, focusing on what students can't do, instead of what they can (Bryan & McLaughlin, 2005; Howard, 2003; Nieto, 2000). This negative thinking is seen in the common practice of tracking culturally diverse students into non-college-bound classes. Such classes often have lower expectations and severely limit the future educational opportunities of students enrolled (Oakes, 1985; George, 2002). Although much has been written of the inequities within the tracking system, such practices persist in the way of courses recommended as well as available to students of color (Lucas, 1999). Since many teachers do not fully recognize or understand their own capacity for perpetuating inequities through these practices, the cultural divide between themselves and their students grows even deeper.

Inevitably, conflicts between teachers and students who come from different backgrounds occur in the classroom (Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Too often, White teachers may view cultural behavior as misbehavior, misinterpreting the

highly collaborative and communicative cultural behavior of some students of color (Bryan & McLaughlin, 2005; George, 2002). Minority students are disciplined, suspended, and expelled more than White students for misbehavior in school (Noguera, 2003). They are also more likely to fail classes and drop out of school completely. Approximately one-third of all Hispanic students drop out of high school. This statistic has remained stable for the past three decades and currently does not show any signs of improvement (Howard, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

In addition, the academic performance of culturally diverse students "has been abysmal for decades" (Howard, 2003, p. 196). Students from diverse backgrounds are also much more likely to be identified as having special needs (Ford & Harris, 1999). Despite the exceptional performance of a number of high achieving racial and ethnic minority schools across the country, widespread belief in the so-called "achievement gap" continues (Romney, 2003). Though it is difficult to blame teachers for all of these problems, holding students solely accountable for the same problems is equally unacceptable. Blame on both sides does nothing to help resolve the serious educational issues related to this cultural mismatch.

These cultural divisions are the biggest contributors to the problem as they work to undermine the relationships teachers and students form with each other (Valenzuela, 1999). Many educational researchers believe caring relationships with teachers are crucial to the academic success of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2003;

Noguera, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). Without the presence of caring teachers in their lives, the successes of these students will be further decreased. Although most teachers have been taught the value of knowing their students deeply both in and outside of school, such a degree of caring is much easier said than done. This problem is compounded when culturally diverse students perceive their White teachers as uncaring.

An Alternative View

The above description of the cultural divide between teachers and students does not portray a hopeful view for the future of education in the United States. Without a significant improvement in teachers' understanding of racial and ethnic minority students, it seems the lowered academic performance of such students will continue into the future. This view, however, is not the complete story. Sprinkled throughout the American teaching population are pockets of exemplar, White teachers who, over time, have learned to navigate their teaching quite successfully in schools with high numbers of minority students. The individual stories of these teachers offer an alternative, positive view of the problems inherent in the demographics separating teachers and students. Unfortunately, those both in and outside of the field of education do not often hear these alternative stories. We are more familiar with the stories emphasizing the difficulties often caused by the cultural divisions that exist between many teachers and students.

Avenues of inquiry must be explored, so the hopeful stories of success will be heard with more impact and understood more clearly.

My interest in such stories has its roots in my own story as a teacher. My journey of understanding diversity began in the late 1980s when I moved from teaching in the quiet suburbs of a large Midwestern, metropolitan area, to the heart of a largely Hispanic, major city in the American Southwest. Experiences in this new environment became the basis of an ongoing interest in the issues created by the cultural mismatch between teachers and students. As a White, middle class teacher who grew up in the rural Midwest, I struggled to understand and teach students who were very different from previous experiences both in and outside of teaching. Thrust into teaching in an English as a Second Language (ESL) history class without any previous ESL training, I was often frustrated with my students and my overall teaching situation. Observing the similar experiences of my White colleagues, it was clear I was not alone in these frustrations. Feeling overloaded, teachers commonly complained they could not do their job when ESL students were continually added to their class lists. The low grades and frequent absenteeism of these same students made it painfully obvious they were frustrated with us as well.

Frustration, however, was not the whole story. A small group of White colleagues were thriving in this extremely diverse school. Over time, some of us who had struggled in our early years began to improve in our efforts to teach and relate to an

increasingly diverse student population. One of the lessons I learned firsthand during my years at that school was that students could be very forgiving of cultural mistakes if a strong relationship with them was already established. I knew this to be true as I made my fair share of those mistakes, often receiving positive feedback from students with whom I had already invested in establishing a relationship.

In those first years of teaching, I frequently made the mistake of expecting the worst from students who came to class wearing clothing typically associated with being in a "gang." When these students spoke Spanish to each other while I was speaking, I often assumed they were not listening to me. Many times I lashed out at them for this behavior, only to find they were actually asking each other for translations of what I had just said. Thankfully, many of these same students were still willing to give me a chance as their teacher, once I showed a genuine willingness to know of their lives both in and outside of school. In the process, I learned a great deal from these students, including the fact that most were not really in a gang at all, and that many were very eager to learn from me despite substantial language and cultural barriers. Looking back at my own behavior, I am not sure I would have been as forgiving of similar treatment from my own teachers.

Eventually some of my students asked me to teach them about their "own" history. When I scaled back a very Euro-centric social studies curriculum enhancing it with lessons on their "own" history and culture, my students appreciated my humble

efforts. My ten years at that school were an often difficult, but always exciting road I would not hesitate to travel again. My experiences there were an important part of an ongoing, personal journey I continue to travel, as I work to understand my own cultural identity as a White teacher.

The Journey

The teaching "journey" is a common metaphor within educational research literature. Ayers' recent book, *To teach: The journey of a teacher* (2001) is representative of current educational literature which borrows heavily on this metaphor to describe the lives of teachers as an ongoing journey. The journey metaphor is especially present in the diversity and multicultural literature to describe the road that teachers travel as they seek to understand themselves and their role as teachers of racial and ethnic minority students (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2003; Harding, 2005; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Pierce, 2005; Wilson, 2002).

According to these researchers, this teaching journey involves critical reflection on one's own cultural identity and its impact on the mismatch between teachers and students (Howard, 2003). For the journey to be successful as a process, it must start with a commitment to actively reconstruct traditional practices and roles within American schooling in an effort to make their schools and classrooms more socially just (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Nieto, 2000). This journey also involves a strong attention to culture in a

deliberate attempt to form stronger relationships with students who have been marginalized through traditional schooling (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Nieto, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999).

An attention to culture is another critical component in improving the academic achievement of minority students in the classroom. Teachers involved in these practices are described in the literature as exercising the first steps of becoming "culturally relevant" or "culturally responsive teachers" (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Despite the lofty ideals of social justice embedded within culturally relevant teaching, the stories of actual teachers who have traveled this journey are not always easy to find. Too often White teachers have remained "colorblind" to the cultural differences that have kept them from being successful teachers of ethnic minority students (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001). Such teachers have both consciously and unconsciously made choices not to travel down those roads. Understanding the lives of teachers who *have* been willing to take such roads need to be examined in order to learn from their journeys.

Overview of Study

Research questions

The purpose of this study was to uncover the personal, practical knowledge held by White, female teachers who have held a long-term commitment to bridge the cultural

differences that potentially separate them from their students. Much of this knowledge was found in an analysis of the stories they told as teachers. I was interested in understanding the stories of other White, female teachers who, like myself, found themselves teaching in classrooms where their students came from backgrounds very different from their own. I was especially interested in understanding the long-term commitment of exemplar teachers who taught in schools where minority students made up the majority of the student population. Such teachers have not followed other colleagues to teach in the perceived, "easier" schools of the suburbs. These teachers acknowledged the critical role race, ethnicity, and culture has played in American schooling. They recognized their own racial and cultural background has a significant impact on their teaching. Their engagement in "critical reflection" challenged them to examine their positionality as White teachers (Howard, 2003). These teachers also formed caring relationships, actively working to close the cultural divide between themselves and their students. They understood that bridging this gap was a critical step in increasing the academic achievement of their students. My interest in the journeys of such teachers was the basis for the research questions that drove this study:

1. What are the stories and experiences of White, female teachers who are committed to bridging the cultural divide between themselves and their students?
2. What have been the "peaks" and "valleys" that have fueled their ongoing

"journeys" to bridge the cultural divide?

The Study Itself

To get to the heart of these questions, the Principal of a predominantly Hispanic high school in a large city of the Southwest was asked to identify White, female teachers holding a well-known, long-term, personal and academic commitment to the students at his school. Once identified, a minimum of four class periods was spent in each of these teachers' classrooms to gain a deeper sense of their commitment to students in action. These observations were followed up with a series of interviews to understand and identify key events the participants experienced along their own "journeys" as teachers. Whether fully realized or not, the various events of each participant's journey were the historical markers that helped create their identities as White teachers. In retelling their stories, a number of more hopeful cases of White, female teachers were provided. These were women who realized that bridging the cultural gap between themselves and their students was at the heart of what they continue to do as teachers. Greater focus on the methodology for this study will be discussed in chapter three.

Theoretical Issues Surrounding the Study

Throughout this study, I used a number of different issues to inform my understandings. Previous scholarship on culturally relevant teaching, White teachers, and

the use of story were the main strands providing the theoretical backdrop for this project. While an attention to teachers' stories is not new in educational research, such stories frequently avoid discussions of race, ethnicity, and culture. Much of the existing literature that deals with teachers' stories about diversity focuses on the attitudes and initial teaching experiences of preservice teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Howard & Denning Del Rosario, 2000; Pohan, 1996; Shultz & Easter, 1996), not the stories of the White, inservice teachers who were the participants of this study. These teachers possessed a wealth of practical knowledge gained from years of teaching in a school setting where *they* were the minority. An analysis of the events within these teachers' lives created a better understanding of travels that accounted for their exceptional ability to bridge the cultural gap with students.

Importance of the Study

This study gave the teachers in this study the unusual opportunity of reflecting upon the ups and downs of what was often a difficult journey. In this day and age, teachers are extremely busy with newly added pressures related to standards and testing, along with the older pressures of planning and grading. In all of this, many teachers do not often have the time to deliberately reflect on their lives as teachers (Eraut, 2002). A deeper understanding of one's own story has the power to create the type of reflection seen as critical in clarifying teachers' understandings of their own cultural identity (Gay

& Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Milner, 2003). It was an assumption of this study that this level of personal reflection is an important step in becoming a more culturally responsive teacher.

Palmer's (1998) notion that "we teach who we are" is especially important in the consideration of one's story and identity as a teacher. Similarly, Sfard and Prusak (2005) have recently suggested that one's teaching identity is the holistic product of his/her life events and experiences. An attention to the events and experiences of the teacher participants' teaching journeys promoted the type of honest self-reflection and critique needed in a deeper understanding of cultural identity, teaching, and issues related to diversity (Dillard, 1996; Howard, 2003). As hoped, this study gave these busy teachers the opportunity to step back from their teaching and reflect on where they have come from, where they are, and where they hope to still travel in their individual journeys.

This study deliberately focused on the life experiences of White, female teachers. The stories of White women holding a long-term commitment to teach predominantly ethnic minority students is especially important, as most teachers are women. This long-term commitment is also important as it is estimated approximately 30% of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (Darling-Hammond &Sykes, 2003). This figure is as high as 50% in low-income, urban schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Understanding the journeys of White, female teachers who have stayed in urban schools and have a positive reputation for bridging the cultural divisions between themselves and

their students is critical, as the average teacher turnover for such schools is astonishingly high (Ingersoll, 2001).

There is also much to be learned from the positive stories of women who have first-hand knowledge of learning to teach in a setting where they are the minority. Before preservice teachers even enter the profession, many of them have been bombarded with negative stories of teaching in schools with high numbers of racial and ethnic minority students. Such stories come from a variety of sources but have powerfully contributed to the negative and deficit attitudes and beliefs preservice possess upon entering teacher preparation programs (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Teachers with fewer cross-cultural experiences are often fearful and intimidated by the possibility of teaching in a diverse school setting. Providing realistic cases of where White teachers have traveled and what they have done to bridge the cultural divide gives preservice teachers much to consider as they embark on similar journeys. Studying their stories aids in demystifying the practical ways in which exemplar teachers are forging a path of racial and cultural reconciliation.

The teachers in this study have had their share of both peaks and valleys in their teaching careers. In an age where there are increasing pressures to be "highly qualified," an examination of these stories will aid teachers in their quest to become more "highly qualified" with all students, regardless of racial and cultural background (National Education Association, 2004). The stories of these teachers' ongoing journeys provide a

more hopeful vision of the future possibilities for all White teachers and the racial and ethnic minority students they teach.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research related to this study came from several areas within educational literature. However, previous studies of culturally relevant teachers, personal narratives of White teachers, and studies of White teachers were most closely related to the ideas and ethos of this current project. Some of these studies focused on the culturally relevant classroom practices of White teachers specifically; others did not. Many of these works were first-person narratives of White teachers' experiences with diversity. Still other studies were examples of narrative inquiry, where the researchers took on the role of narrator or storyteller in their understandings of White teachers. Regardless of the differences throughout these studies, they are linked in their attention to race, ethnicity, and culture as key areas of consideration for teachers. As discussed earlier, such a focus is seen as a necessary component in the important task of reflecting on one's own cultural identity (Cochran-Smith, 1995; 2004; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2003; Nieto, 2003). Conclusions and questions raised by these studies will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Studies of Culturally Relevant Teachers

In the last ten years, there has been a large amount of research focusing on the classroom practice of teachers who have been described as "culturally relevant or culturally responsive teachers" (Benson, 2003; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-

Billings, 1994; 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This research grew out of a concern with the increasing racial, ethnic, and cultural differences between teachers and students and the continued lower academic achievement of racial and ethnic minority students. Gloria Ladson-Billings' study of eight, exemplary teachers of African American students in *The Dreamkeepers* (1994) was the initial inspiration for much of this recent research. In this small-scale, ethnographic study, Ladson-Billings observed the classrooms of exemplary teachers who kept "the dream alive" for African American students to achieve at high levels in elementary classrooms. Rather than focus on the problems faced by African American students in schools, Ladson-Billings chose to write a more positive book that focused on specific stories of highly effective teachers. The practical classroom experiences of a wide variety of teachers were told in story form, not as recipes or prescriptions for practice, but as illustrations for consideration as teachers create their own culturally relevant classrooms. Ladson-Billings chose to focus on commonalities within these teachers' philosophies, pedagogies, and commitments to form the basis of her definition of culturally relevant teaching.

To find her participants, Ladson-Billings went to parents and principals of elementary schoolchildren to identify teachers believed to be "effective" with their African American school children. Ladson-Billings found that African American parents nominated teachers who were perceived as helping their children pursue academic excellence without sacrificing their identification with African and African American

culture. Five African American and three White teachers formed this core group of elementary teachers studied in an urban school district in northern California. All of the participants were women, even though this was not a specific component of the criteria for the study. Over the course of three years, Ladson-Billings observed classrooms and interviewed these eight women in a collaborative project in which they analyzed and interpreted research data together.

Throughout this work, Ladson-Billings connected her own story as an African American student with the stories of the teachers in her study. In taking this approach, Ladson-Billings' goal was to unmask how her own experiences affected her interpretation of the pedagogical practices observed. Ladson-Billings found the teachers in her study held a critical view of the educational system that employed them. These "dreamkeepers" questioned the inequalities and racism they saw embedded in society and taught their students to question the same. The racial and cultural background of these teachers' students was openly acknowledged and formed the basis of their teaching. The genuine care shown for each student helped these teachers build classrooms that resembled a family structure where everyone had a role in each other's success. These and other findings created Ladson-Billings' definition of the culturally relevant teacher.

In *Crossing Over to Canaan* (2001), Ladson-Billings put together a similar study of exemplar preservice teachers. Using a Biblical reference for the title of this book, Ladson-Billings described the journey of eight novice teachers into a metaphorical

Canaan, or the "Promised Land" of teaching. In this study, Ladson-Billings provided a hopeful snapshot of how the next generation of teachers can be educated to effectively teach racial and ethnic minority students. This study built on earlier notions of culturally relevant teaching in the stories of the struggles and triumphs of eight novice teachers involved in a new teacher education program.

The preservice teachers observed and interviewed in this study came from a new, 15-month elementary certification program entitled "Teach for Diversity." This program focused on preparing future teachers to teach in diverse learning environments. These preservice teachers were the members of one cohort assigned to a single elementary school in urban Philadelphia. This particular cohort was selected based on their camaraderie with each other and a "relatively smooth transition to their school site" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 54). All of the participants were women, but again, this was not a specific component of the selection criteria. Of the preservice teacher participants, one was Latina, one was African American, and six were European American.

Ladson-Billings used the experiences of these women to provide a vision of how teacher education should be changed to better prepare preservice teachers for diversity. As she did in the previous study, Ladson-Billings wove her own story into the stories told of the eight preservice teachers. She shared her own experiences as a former public school teacher in Philadelphia to help her audience understand how she made sense of the events experienced by the younger women of this cohort. Throughout their program, the

preservice teachers were encouraged to undergo a deeply reflective examination of their own racial and cultural backgrounds. Again, a deeper understanding of their own identities was seen as necessary in understanding students from distinct cultural backgrounds. The "Teach for Diversity" program also focused on social justice as a natural component of teaching. Dialogue on how classrooms could be changed to be more socially just was a continuing conversation throughout this new program.

Examples of other researchers who have also studied the classroom practices of culturally relevant teachers include Howard (2001), Benson (2003), and Cooper (2003). Howard (2001) focused on the classroom practices of four African American teachers, while Benson (2003) observed the classroom practices of two African American teachers and two European American teachers. Cooper's (2003) study joined a small, but growing number of studies focused on White teachers only. Each of these studies focused on the pedagogy of elementary teachers in urban settings where the majority of their students were African American, similar to the studies by Ladson-Billings (1994; 2001). Although these researchers did not weave their own teaching narratives into their studies as in the style of Ladson-Billings' research, each researcher identified their own racial and cultural background and the potential impact of their identity on the interpretation of their findings. Relying heavily on classroom observation and interviews, these researchers constructed stories of their participants' approaches to teaching students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Personal familiarity with their students'

backgrounds and communication skills were just a few of the culturally relevant practices found in their participants' classrooms. Of all the exemplar teachers of these studies, those chosen were all women, even though this was not identified by any of the researchers as a requirement for their research. The nomination and selection processes used in these studies were similar to Ladson-Billings' 1994 study, relying mainly on principals, parents, community members, and college supervisors to identify teachers with extremely positive, teaching reputations. The urban settings represented in these studies were found in schools from the Northeastern, Northwestern, and Southeastern regions of the United States.

Several other researchers inspired by the ideas of culturally relevant teaching have expanded this notion into studies of "culturally relevant management" (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003, p. 25) and "culturally relevant caring" (Parsons, 2005, p.25). Similar to the previous studies, these researchers were again concerned with the preponderance of White females in the teaching profession. Such studies argued there were other aspects of teaching, in addition to classroom pedagogy, that were essential in bridging the cultural divide between teachers and students. To these researchers, culturally relevant teaching also included specific ways of managing and caring for students coming from backgrounds very different from their own.

Personal Narratives of White Teachers

Another body of literature concerned with the growing demographic divisions between teachers and students included the personal narratives of White teachers who teach in schools with predominantly racial and ethnic minority student populations. This small, but growing, genre of first-person stories has had a tremendous amount of influence in education in the last several years. Such stories are frequently found in book form and feature articles for educational journals. Those telling the stories have undergone powerful soul-searching and reflective journeys to understand themselves as racial and cultural beings. In sharing testimonials of what they have learned about themselves and their students, these first-person writers modeled the type of reflection important for all White teachers who want to teach more equitably. In giving an account of the highs and lows of their teaching journeys, these teachers hoped their audience would also confront their own racial and cultural identities. These teachers chose to share their stories, because they believed others could learn from the experiences of their lives (Paley, 1979). Even though many of these teachers were not full-fledged educational researchers, their reflective, autobiographical work continues to touch the hearts of readers in ways often more powerful than formal research studies.

Vivian Paley is one of the earliest and best-known writers within this particular genre. In *White Teacher* (1979), Paley wrote the humorous and painfully honest story of her life as a kindergarten teacher in a racially mixed, middle-class elementary school. Although a slight majority of her students were White, Paley was especially focused on

making her classroom more equitable for her African American students. Throughout the book, Paley took her readers through an honest examination of her own prejudices. Paley's ability to systematically question and examine the cultural practices within her classroom was a hopeful account, but she wrote candidly about her mistakes as well. In her own journey of understanding how to teach students of color, Paley found the parents of her African American students were one of her greatest resources as a teacher. From these parents, Paley learned to openly acknowledge and talk about racial and cultural difference in the classroom. Gradually, Paley grew to be more and more comfortable with differences and made a more "determined effort to understand herself and culturally different people" (1979, p. ix). Paley has continued this personal journey in other books such as *Kwanzaa and Me: A Teacher's Story* (1995).

Gary Howard's *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (1999) is another example of how this genre of personal narrative has been used to examine one's ability to teach racially and culturally diverse students. This work focused on the importance of understanding one's own Whiteness as the first step in becoming "multiculturally competent people" (p. 4). Howard viewed himself as a traveler on an ongoing journey of understanding himself and what it meant to be a multicultural teacher. The first chapter in his book, "White Man Dancing," was the story of his own transformation in the way he viewed himself as a White teacher. In this book,

diversity was described as a "dance in which everyone shares the lead" (p. 10). According to Howard, learning the moves of this dance was not always easy.

Though the remainder of the book primarily focused on research from the last twenty years on multicultural education, Howard frequently wove his own stories of experience in his attempts to link theory with the actual practice of doing the difficult inner work of a multicultural teacher. In doing so, Howard outlined a plan supporting the formation of an "authentic and positive White racial identity" in all teachers (Howard, 1999, p. 8). Howard's strong attention to race as a key element of a White teacher's identity encouraged dialogue and reflection in an ongoing journey of transformation that was sometimes awkward and difficult.

Benham (2003), Picower (2004), Pierce (2005), and Starnes (2003) have written some of the most recent articles about their experiences as White teachers in both racially and culturally diverse classrooms. In their writings, these teachers shared frustrations of feeling like "outsiders in their own classrooms" (Benham, 2003). They also wrote of their attempts to connect to students, despite the differences between them. As an idealistic elementary music teacher in an urban school, Benham realized he possessed only a surface knowledge of his African American students' cultural backgrounds. Benham honestly shared his own biases and the practical ways he learned to be a more culturally relevant teacher in this setting. Pierce (2005) also contributed a brief account of her own journey to connect with her African American students. Pierce described her

journey as one where she "stumbled [her] way through" critical issues of educating African American students (p. 48). In a similar fashion, Picower (2004) discussed her experiences as a White teacher with an Ebonics program in an elementary school in Oakland, California. Finally, Starnes (2003) told of her own struggle as a White teacher to teach American History from the Chippewa-Cree perspective.

In each of these articles, the teachers modeled a type of reflective, autobiographical account of the road they traveled in understanding themselves as White teachers. Their honesty in tackling their own complicity in difficult racial and cultural issues created very appealing stories. In sharing practical knowledge from their lives as White teachers, they also hoped to inspire others with a consideration of their own racial and cultural identity and its impact on their teaching practice.

Studies of White Teachers

Several, new research studies of White teachers have been added to the educational research literature on diversity in recent years. These qualitative research projects are more formal than the first person narratives previously described. They form the body of work most closely associated with the research ideas of this current study. In most of these studies, one or more White teachers were identified as having a positive reputation with their students of color. The lives and experiences of these exemplar teachers were examined to understand the reasons behind their unusual "success" in

culturally diverse schools. These studies mostly took the form of case studies and relied on "story" as a method of inquiry (Carter, 1993).

Alan Wieder is an American researcher currently engaged in a large oral history project analyzing the experiences of White South African teachers who taught in Black schools during apartheid (2001; 2004). These teachers were unusual for their choice of where to teach and their active struggle against the policies of apartheid. In interviews, teachers were simply asked to tell their stories. It was up to them to decide which stories were important to share. Although these stories included a wide variety of subjects, they were similar in that the majority of these teachers' White, South African peers both pitied and despised them for their choice to work in a Black school. Wieder (2001) believed these biographical stories provided "dynamic portraits of teachers working and making choices in an imperfect world" (p. 23). Wieder (2004) also viewed these unique stories as powerful, biographical "testimonies" that gave voice to teachers as witnesses to history. While the biographies of these South African teachers were unique to their own country's history, their experiences have obvious parallels to the racial and cultural divides within the United States and similar needs for reconciliation.

Sharon Chubbuck's case study examination of the life histories of White, secondary English teachers (2004) explored how well their beliefs about race matched their pedagogical practice in the classroom. Two teachers, one male and one female from two different school districts in a Midwestern city of 100,000 people, were nominated by

the African American community as demonstrating "both a level of effectiveness in teaching students of color and a level of activism in response to racism in education" (p. 311).

The teachers in Chubbuck's study understood their own Whiteness as an each identity that developed out of their unique experiences as individuals. Their heightened understanding of themselves as White teachers made them particularly sensitive to issues of race and racism in the classroom. Chubbuck found, however, that while both teachers demonstrated several classroom practices viewed as effective for students of color, they also demonstrated classroom practices widely viewed as ineffective. Low expectations for academic work and personal behavior were continuing problems in one teacher's classroom. In addition, the other teacher's acceptance of the school's tracking system was another example of incongruence between belief systems and actual practice. Chubbuck wrote these teachers' Whiteness played a part in their classrooms in ways that may not have been "entirely clear even to them" (p. 326). This study showed that a heightened understanding of teachers' racial identities did not ensure their classrooms were fair and equitable for all students. Chubbuck suggested such incongruence was understandable and connected to an ongoing process of disrupting Whiteness that may take a lifetime to complete (2004).

Harding (2005) also found the presence of contradictions between beliefs and actual practice in the classroom of the White, female teacher who was the single

participant of a recent case study. Set in an urban area of the Northeast, "Jennifer" was identified by her principal as a White teacher who was extremely successful with her mostly African American and Hispanic students. Using the method of "portraiture," Harding investigated how racial identity and understanding of race informed Jennifer's instruction and relationships with students. A combination of interviews and classroom observations were collected by the researcher to paint an in-depth, ethnographic portrait of this young woman's life both in and outside of teaching.

Harding found Jennifer's identity as a "city girl" enabled her to make strong connections to racially and culturally diverse students. This teacher had grown up in an urban context her entire life, just like the majority of her students. She also shared a similar socio-economic background with her students. Most of the friends in her life had been people of color. This teacher identified so strongly with her students of color, the researcher sometimes imagined her as one who felt "trapped inside White skin" (p. 62).

Despite the strong connection to her students, Jennifer was able to articulate ways in which her understandings of race were conflicted in the classroom. For example, Jennifer admitted she sometimes tried to "save" students, much like many Hollywood movies' portrayals of White teachers. Although Jennifer held a firm commitment to teach her students the academic culture of power, it was distressing to teach them to act like White people in order to maximize their participation in dominant, White, American society. An understanding of Jennifer's complicated life story showed successful cross-

racial, cross-cultural teaching can occur between White teachers and students of color, despite contradictions. Harding found Jennifer's willingness to openly discuss sensitive issues of race and identity was the key to her success as a teacher. According to Harding, the push for "culturally relevant pedagogy is incomplete without a full understanding of the individual teacher's biography, racial identity and beliefs about where they have common ground with their students" (p. 77). Harding argued reflection and dialogue about such issues must become a common practice in order to understand the structures of inequality in American schools.

A small number of slightly larger studies of White teachers exist in the literature as well. Reed (1998) interviewed and observed the classrooms of four, White secondary teachers to understand their experiences and perceptions of what it took to be effective teachers of African American students. Two male and two female teachers were selected by the researcher for their long-term commitment to teach in Richmond, Virginia public schools and the perception that they were effective in teaching students of color. These teachers were asked to write about experiences in the classroom that triggered an emotional reaction. Finally, these teachers participated with the researcher in a focus group to discuss their insights into their teaching experiences.

Reed found the four teachers came from widely varied backgrounds. Some had had experiences with people of color prior to teaching, and others had not. All of them had a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction from teaching but were frequently

criticized by friends and family for their commitment to teach in urban schools. All of these teachers seemed to possess a disposition towards working with students of color, but none of them believed they had been adequately prepared in their teacher education programs to work in culturally diverse classrooms. Reed concluded teacher education programs needed to consider both the personal qualities and amount of urban field experiences required of preservice teachers.

Life histories were examined in Johnson's (2002) study of White teachers who taught in culturally diverse classrooms. A diverse group of community experts identified six, White female teachers who possessed a positive reputation and were known for their "awareness of race and racism" (p. 153). All of the teachers worked in schools located in the Pacific Northwest and taught students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

"Critical life events" were identified in a series of interviews to construct personal narratives that were analyzed for common themes and patterns. Johnson found that all of the participants felt they held some sort of outsider status that helped them "disidentify with the White mainstream" (p. 153). All of the participants had lived and worked with individuals of other races and ethnic minorities and developed close relationships that gave them an insider's perspective on race and racism. Each participant also held strong religious and philosophical beliefs that valued equality and social justice. Johnson concluded with a recommendation for teacher educators to admit preservice teachers into

their programs with life experiences and perspectives on race and ethnicity similar to those of the participants in her study. Johnson argued this practice would help create a future teaching force that valued diversity and was predisposed to discuss race and ethnicity as a key component of their preservice program.

Conclusions and Questions Raised by the Research

The studies reviewed in this chapter shared a concern with the lack of racial and cultural congruence between teachers and students in American classrooms. The principal aim of these studies was to describe the lives and practices of teachers identified as doing an exemplary job in culturally diverse school settings. Reflection and dialogue was used by each of the researchers to construct stories about these teachers' lives as well as their pedagogical beliefs and practices in the classroom. These studies form a small, but growing body of literature focused on the importance of understanding teachers' awareness of cultural identities as a key element in narrowing the cultural divide with students. In these studies, bridging this divide was viewed as a critical step in improving the academic performance of racial and ethnic minority students.

The settings for each of the studies reviewed were located in urban schools in major metropolitan regions of the United States. Much has been written in the last ten years about White teachers who teach in schools where the student population is predominantly African American (Cooper, 2003; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994;

Parsons, 2005). In contrast, very little has been written about White teachers who teach predominantly Hispanic students. With the exception of Johnson (2002) and Starnes (2003), all of the teachers in these studies taught in urban schools with high populations of African American students. Completely missing in this group of studies was an attention to complex issues of culture existing between White teachers and culturally diverse students in the Southwest. Little is known of the stories and experiences that formed the identities of White teachers of this region. Little is also known about the relationships formed between these teachers and their students. This lack of attention is surprising, as the Southwest is currently one of the fastest growing regions of the United States.

In the American Southwest, the majority of culturally diverse students are Hispanic. Those falling under the umbrella of "Hispanic" are currently the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). "Hispanics" are from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds that include persons from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. Hispanic students in the American Southwest, however, are mostly from a Mexican immigrant and Mexican American background. These students are best described as an ethnic minority group, rather than a racial group. While it is possible the study at hand may simply reinforce what is already known about exemplar teachers of African American and other racial and ethnic minority students, the geographic and demographic context of this study has the

potential to reveal new understandings of exemplar White teachers and their relationships with Hispanic students in the American Southwest.

Studies of culturally relevant teachers in the Southwest are largely missing in the literature. Culturally relevant teachers in the Southwest undoubtedly exist, but so far, little if anything has been written about them. Much has been written about Hispanic students, but this research is often focused on current concerns over language acquisition. Studies of Hispanic students are also concerned with acculturation, high drop out rates, and a perceived lack of parental involvement in schooling. Very little has been done in the way of studies that examine the cultural mismatch existing between White teachers and Hispanic students. Valenzuela's recent study (1999) of the interpersonal relationships between teachers and Hispanic students in a Texas high school is one notable exception to this gap in the research. However, the main focus of Valenzuela's study was the relationship between schooling and achievement, not the gender and race of the teachers from that school and the impact their background had on their ability to connect with students.

Valenzuela found the relationships the mostly Hispanic students formed (or did not form) with each other and with their teachers was directly related to the students' motivation to achieve in school. As part of her findings, Valenzuela found many of the White teachers at this school did not relate well to their Hispanic students. Valenzuela acknowledged a small number of White teachers who did form positive relationships with

their students, but concluded the majority of the teachers at the school (both White and not) held beliefs and practices that tore away at their Hispanic students' self-worth. Valenzuela viewed the cultural mismatch between teachers and students at this school as simply one part of an entire system of schooling that routinely "subtracted" from Mexican and Mexican American students (1999).

With few exceptions, most of the studies reviewed in this chapter were in elementary school settings. Much more needs to be done in understanding the unique dynamics between White teachers and ethnic minority students in secondary settings, especially as the demographics of those going into teaching and those in the classroom continue to move in opposite directions. Understanding the experiences of White, female, teachers committed in secondary settings is particularly critical, as students of all backgrounds increasingly drop out of school in the later grades. By studying the lives of White, female, secondary teachers in the American Southwest, this study will contribute to several contextual areas missing in the current research.

Recently, Sleeter (2001) has called for researchers to begin with good teaching and work backwards towards teacher preparation by learning about exemplar teachers who are already in the field. Although the studies highlighted in this chapter contribute some practical knowledge about teachers' effectiveness with diverse students, the journey traveled to bring these exemplar teachers to this point in their teaching careers is less clear. Recently, Hollins & Guzman (2005) have called for more research that examines

how effective teachers have acquired the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for successful teaching of culturally diverse students. This study's attention to the life experiences within these teachers' journeys has the potential to shed light on each of the above areas as well as reasons for their longevity in the teaching profession. Understanding these teachers' commitment to bridge the cultural divisions between themselves and their students will contribute valuable, practical knowledge for all teachers, especially those teaching in this rapidly growing region of the United States. Such knowledge is especially important for preservice teachers lacking in their preparedness to work in culturally diverse schools.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to uncover the personal, practical knowledge held by White, female teachers with a long-term commitment to bridge the cultural differences that potentially separate them from their Hispanic students. This knowledge was best found in a study of the stories told by the exemplar teachers matching the criteria above. The following research questions were the basis for this study:

1. What are the stories and experiences of White, female teachers who are committed to bridging the cultural divide between themselves and their students?
2. What have been the "peaks" and "valleys" that have fueled their ongoing "journeys" to bridge this cultural divide?

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the terminology used by the researcher followed by a discussion on the use of metaphor. A discussion of the use of story as a research method is also included. This chapter concludes with the data collection process used in identifying, observing, and interviewing the teacher participants whose stories formed the heart of this project.

Terminology

It should be noted that using the terms, "Hispanic" and "White" throughout this study was a political choice that is not without controversy. The United States has had a long, complicated history of labeling different people groups that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

In the American Southwest, it is not unusual for both Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities to refer to individuals perceived as having a mostly European background as "Anglos" and "Gringos." Such terms are neither flattering nor correct. Similarly, many individuals in the Southwest with a mostly Mexican background are not comfortable with the label "Hispanic" and even more so, "Latino." My choice in using the terms "Hispanic" and "White" throughout this study simply followed the patterns used in most of the studies reviewed in this chapter. I fully acknowledge that both of these labels are flawed in various ways.

The Use of Metaphor

Throughout the research process, a heavy emphasis on the metaphor of "journey" was deliberately used as a tool to help the teachers of this study reflect far deeper than might normally be gained through a simple retelling of their life stories. Carter and Doyle (1995) describe the process of learning to teach as a long and "difficult journey

with few, if any, shortcuts" (p. 191). This study took this well-used metaphor a step further by examining more thoroughly the ongoing journey traveled by teachers as they learn to teach in a setting in which *they* are the minority. Engaging in discussions of these journeys required the participants to deliberately examine their life experiences, particularly those experiences that have directly touched issues of diversity.

In it's simplest form, a journey can be defined as a long trip or distance traveled. This study considers a journey as having a starting point, continuing on with many points of learning, enrichment and personal development along the way. To continue to be vital and effective in the classroom, the journey traveled by teachers is never-ending. Learning to teach is an ongoing process even the best of teachers do not completely master throughout their careers. It follows uncertain paths that are different for all teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Although there are teachers who believe they have figured out the complex activity of teaching, it was an assumption of this study that the truly exemplar teachers in this profession always believe in room to grow as educators. The journey is a nonlinear progression of steps backwards and forwards that are constantly redefining each teacher's personal map of the journey. Personal reflection about this journey enables teachers to become better teachers of future students. Such teachers understand "one never completely arrives at a place of completion" (Howard, 2003). They accept that their journey is ongoing (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

The journey each teacher travels is different, but inevitably it includes "peaks" and "valleys." These are the highs and lows of teaching that both inspire and discourage. The peaks are mountaintop experiences that provide much-needed fuel for a journey that is often quite demanding. The peaks in a teacher's life include special memories both in and outside of the classroom. In contrast, the valleys of a teacher's life are the rocky, low-points that include difficult events and experiences that are sometimes just as important as the mountaintop experiences. Both types of events contribute to the kind of teachers they become with students. The high and low moments of their travels cannot be separated from who they are as teachers.

In addition, the phrase "bridging the cultural divide," was used as an internal metaphor in this study. An understanding of this metaphor was at the center of the study. As discussed earlier, the issues and problems dividing White teachers from racial and ethnic minority students have been well documented in the literature. The cultural divide can be compared to a "chasm" or "canyon" that continues to keep many students from crossing into an education that benefits them in the same ways as White students. The problems created by this divide have contributed to the lowered achievement of racial and ethnic minority students across the country.

To be sure, the cultural divide is far wider between some teachers and students than with others. It is important to understand the experiences and practical wisdom of exemplar teachers contributing to a cultural divide that is less deep, less broad and less

treacherous. Strong anchors in their own identity have helped these teachers meet their students on a bridge halfway across this divide. In order to learn from these successful teacher's travels, their stories need to be heard and their journeys examined.

In deliberately using the above metaphors as themes in this research, it was assumed they would be helpful tools in capturing the complexity of teaching (Carter, 1993). Metaphor can be used to help teachers talk meaningfully about their teaching practice (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Many educational researchers have also used metaphor in a variety of ways to aid in the narrative description of teachers' lives (Craig, 2000; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Wilson, 2002; Woon Yee Ho, 2005). In this study, the use of metaphor sought to do all of the above. Looking at teachers' commitment to bridge the cultural divide between themselves and their students in an ongoing journey assisted in a deeper reflection of their life stories. The use of these metaphors also assisted in constructing a narrative of their complex stories. Finally, the use of metaphor provided a common language to focus teacher/researcher discussions about the actual research.

Story as Method

In this study, story or personal narrative was used as both "phenomenon and method" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The events and experiences shared by the teachers was the phenomenon to be studied, while the researcher constructed written narratives of their stories as a method in the analysis of their experiences. In recent years,

story or personal narrative has become a popular form of qualitative research in the educational research community. Educational researchers such as Doyle (1997) have suggested story is perhaps the most appropriate way to understand teaching. Researchers using story as both the phenomenon to be studied and the method of analysis include Clandinin's (1989) narrative of a beginning teacher's classroom, Cohen's (1991) portraits of five veteran high school teachers, Carter's (1994) work with preservice students and well-remembered events, Ben-Peretz' (1995; 2002) studies of retired teachers in Israel, Clandinin and Connelly's stories of teachers in a racially troubled school (1996), and Wieder's (2004; 2001) recent oral history project of White South African teachers. These and many other researchers have found narrative to be a powerful form of research that captures the richness and complexity of teachers' professional understandings (Carter, 1993, Doyle, 1997).

Whether teachers realize it or not, narrative is used in their daily lives as they "story" classroom experiences and events into "scripts" that help make sense of their teaching. Story as a research method can be used in the construction of cases for research analysis, as well as cases for educating both inservice and preservice teachers (Carter, 1993). The personal, practical knowledge embedded within these stories can be powerfully used to aid other teachers in the development of their own scripts for teaching. According to Carter (1993), story provides a "constructive process" uniquely suited to help teachers in an examination of their lives.

In this study, an examination of the participants' lives before, during and after their teacher education was central in the creation of a chronological "map" for each teacher. These individual maps charted important events and experiences of their journeys that assisted them in their well-known ability to teach a mostly Hispanic student population. In addition, an attention to their current lives as teachers was included. The ongoing story of learning to teach is a profoundly personal endeavor deeply tied to one's identity. In such research, both researcher and teacher are involved in a joint process involving the construction of a narrative that is continually "restoried" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). As in real life, this process involved a "continual unfolding where the narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow" (p. 9). The maps constructed in this project highlighted the current location as well as distances traveled in these teachers' journeys. The maps also pointed to new and exciting directions for future travel.

Case Study and the Nature of Narrative Inquiry

The preponderance of White teachers in the American educational system is a phenomenon well suited for case study research. Case studies are most often written in story form, and stories about real teachers can provide insights that are personally instructive for teachers (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995, 2003). In this study, the stories of White female teachers in the context of the American Southwest were examined with the

hope that their experiences would contribute practical wisdom for other teachers in this region of the United States. Admittedly, understanding the paths taken by these particular teachers was of specific, intrinsic interest to the researcher. Developing a deeper understanding of their stories for the purposes of teacher education was the primary task of this project. In developing narratives of the stories told by the teachers in this study, this "collective case study" was "intrinsic" in nature (Stake, 1995, p. 138). It was not presumed that this collective case study would produce conclusions with the capacity to speak to all teachers across the United States. It was intended that the audience for this project, however, would be able to compare this case to others of a similar nature, and draw their own, unique conclusions.

Case studies have the ability to both extend and confirm the experiences of the researcher and the audience (Merriam, 1988). This flexibility allows the researcher and the audience the intellectual space to construct their own understanding of the case at hand (Stake, 1995). With sufficient description given to events particularly relevant to the ongoing development of the participants' ability to bridge with their students, the individual case studies of the teachers in this study were compared in a cross-case analysis of the commonalities within the stories they told. This form of inquiry offered both the researcher and the audience the opportunity to consider complex meanings that can be applied to deeper understandings of their personal identities and teaching situations (Stake, 2003).

Qualitative research that relies heavily on story in the development of case studies raises obvious questions related to subjectivity. According to Stake (1995), however, the inherent subjectivity within qualitative research should not be seen as something to be eliminated. Rather, this subjectivity should be seen as "an essential element of understanding" (p. 45). The researcher's role in narrating a journey about another teacher's story is a delicate situation where inevitable judgments are made about what to include in the research record. Admittedly, in highlighting only certain commonalities between the teachers in this study, the researcher understood that only a partial glimpse of each unique narrative would be provided. In this type of narrative inquiry, the researcher does not claim to have complete access to another's experience. It is simply an attempt to capture the participants' self-representation in order to learn from their collective wisdom (Johnson, 2002).

Another limitation of this particular research genre lies in its perceived inability to be generalized to other studies. However, the patterns and themes within case studies can still be used to help "make sense of the dilemmas and problematics of teaching" (Carter, 1993, p. 10). Cases of teaching have the power to represent a variety of different meanings. As in most qualitative research, there is not one "correct" interpretation (Janesick, 2003). Carter (1993) argues the interpretational issues within story are its source of strength as well as weakness. Case studies provide insights and connections that are helpful in a consideration of teaching, but they can also result in raising more

questions than answers. The highly contextualized, situational nature of stories within case research does not claim to be explanatory for teachers in all settings. This reality is distressing for those who would like to tidy up the profession with neat, little technical answers that do not take into account the art of teaching. For those who realize the depth of complexity within teaching, story opens up the many possibilities for how teaching can be done.

Narrative inquiry can also be difficult in that teacher participants do not always feel they have a voice in research process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Classroom teachers are sometimes offended by language used in the research process. They resent the divide between theory (academia) and practice (the real world) in education. In addition, empowering teachers to give an honest and forthright account of their teaching can be difficult as well as ethically dangerous without the presence of trust in the researcher/participant relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Too often, the stories told about teachers by researchers are not very flattering (Carter, 1993). Without a certain amount of care taken in cultivating a safe researcher/participant relationship, research of this nature can become uncaring (Noddings, 1988).

It was the researcher's intention to develop a working relationship with the participants of this study that was comfortable, trustworthy, as well as caring. In order to establish this kind of relationship, the researcher developed a habit of listening and sharing that gradually emerged in the mutual telling of stories (Connelly & Clandinin,

1990). In establishing this relationship, it was important for the teachers in this study to be involved in the clarification of interpretations emerging from the narrative record. This kind of collaborative relationship was cultivated in a gradual process. Such a relationship prevented the narrative from becoming a simple account of what the teachers believed the researcher wanted to hear. Such a relationship aided the construction of a more truthful narrative that did not become a "Hollywood plot" in which all problems were resolved in the end (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10).

Data Collection

A questionnaire, four classroom observations, and a series of three, semi-structured interviews conducted in the spring of 2006 were the main forms of data collection. Together, these sources were used to form individual case studies of the stories told by the participants. Multiple sources of data enabled the researcher to "triangulate data" in an effort to verify and extend interpretations that emerged from the study (Stake, 1995, 2003). The following sections outline each step of the data collection process, beginning with a description of the setting for this project.

Research Context: "Cactus View High School"

This study was conducted in a major city of the Southwestern United States. The urban schools of this city, as in many other urban areas of the United States, mainly serve

minority students from various levels of lower socio-economic status. This city is located in a region of the United States experiencing tremendous population growth, especially in numbers of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. The dramatic growth in the Hispanic community of this region has been accompanied in recent years by strong political reactions against this population's explosive growth. This reaction can be seen in voters' support of new laws that have emphasized the importance of using English as the main language of the classroom. Such laws have devalued and dismantled bilingual education as a classroom option for Spanish-speaking students within this region. In addition, this city is an hour from the United States-Mexico border. Negative press about illegal immigration and issues related to the border are an ever-present backdrop in examining these issues. It should be noted that data collection occurred in the spring of 2006, a period of heightened, national tensions over issues related to immigration. During this particular semester, citywide demonstrations and school walkouts mirrored similar events across the country.

"Cactus View High School" (a pseudonym) was the home base for this project. Cactus View is an urban school located within this major city of the Southwestern United States. Cactus View has a large, sprawling campus with several, red block buildings almost completely surrounded by a high security fence. Located in a strong, Hispanic community, the school faces a number of challenging issues not uncommon to low-income, urban neighborhoods throughout the United States.

Cactus View High School has a student population that is more than 90% Hispanic. Four percent of the student population is White with smaller percentages of Asian, African American, and Native American students. Of their teaching staff, 59.5% is White, and 38.9% is Hispanic. Although the number of non-White teachers at this school is much higher than the national average, a majority of the teachers are still White. Although White students and teachers at this school and in this region are commonly referred to as "Anglo" by some members of the Hispanic community, they are simply referred to as "White" in this study. As acknowledged earlier, there are several inherent complexities in labeling the race and/or ethnicity of a particular group of people. The researcher simply chose to use this terminology as it was most closely aligned to the terminology used in similar literature.

White teachers who teach in a school where they are actually in the minority are placed in a position quite different from other White teachers who teach in schools where the dominant student population is White. While the teachers in this study are part of the dominant culture of power in society, they teach in schools where they are in the role of the "Other" (Benham, 2003). They may view their students as "diverse," when they are actually the ones who are different at their school.

The researcher chose Cactus View for its growing reputation in the city as a proactive, friendly school with rising test scores. The researcher also chose this school, because the Principal was a former colleague at a different school more than ten years

prior to this study. This Principal had always been an extremely friendly and enthusiastic administrator, and it was believed he would be open to the ideas of this research project. Since Cactus View was well known in the community as a minority school with a mostly Hispanic population, it looked like the perfect spot to begin a search for a group of exemplar teachers with a strong commitment to teach in a predominantly Hispanic school.

Participant selection process

In an initial meeting, the Principal was asked to identify teachers at Cactus View with the following criteria. First, the teachers had to be White and female. The vast majority of teachers in classrooms across the United States fit this profile, as discussed in the review of literature.

Second, the teachers also needed to show a long-term commitment to teach in a school that mainly served students from cultural backgrounds different from their own. A long-term commitment of over five years was important, as research shows many new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001).

Third, the long-term commitment of the teachers needed to include a commitment to bridge the cultural divide between themselves and their students. As stated earlier, those committed to such a journey are able to (a) reflect on one's own cultural identity as

a teacher and its impact on their teaching; (b) build culturally relevant classroom practices that improve students' academic achievement; and (c) give strong attention to culture in the classroom in a deliberate attempt to form stronger relationships with students. Studying teachers who were committed to these areas is important, especially as a wealth of educational research on the inherent problems between White teachers and ethnic minority students currently exist in the literature. Identifying teachers who were actively committed to working through the problems of this mismatch added an alternative, more hopeful view of the possibilities for bridging this gap.

After being presented the above criteria, the Principal immediately identified ten White, female teachers for selection in this study. The ten teachers from this initial list included a number of teachers who taught in unique programs such as the special education department and the child development center at Cactus View. In order to focus more in-depth on a smaller group of teachers, the researcher only contacted those teachers on the list who taught traditional classroom subjects. This decision narrowed the list of potential participants to three science teachers, one math teacher, and one English teacher. Each potential participant was given a letter explaining the goals and purposes of the study. Once contacted, each of the five traditional classroom teachers agreed to participate in the study.

Questionnaire

The initial form of data collection was a short, open-ended questionnaire designed to gain initial insights into their awareness of the potential for cultural divisions between themselves and their students. Teachers were asked to describe an example of how differences in cultural backgrounds could cause divisions between teachers and students and what could be done to help decrease these potential cultural divisions. In addition, this questionnaire asked teachers to share a powerful experience with cultural diversity at their school. The letter and questionnaire for teachers can be found in Appendices A.

Classroom observations

In order to gain a deeper understanding and sense of Cactus View overall, the researcher conducted a series of visits in each participant's classroom during a three-week period in February of 2006. During this time, each teacher's classroom was observed approximately 1-2 hours at a time for a total of four classroom periods. As much as schedules permitted, different classes on different days of the week were observed to get a more holistic view of each teacher's classroom throughout the week. This plan enabled the researcher to observe different courses as well as different students.

Classroom observations served as a backdrop for the current location of each teacher's journeys. These informal observations were critical for several reasons. First, time spent in classrooms provided a better sense of each teacher's style, personality, and

relationship with students. Seeing these unique teachers in action confirmed they *were* exemplar teachers with a lot of practical wisdom to share. Second, classroom observations greatly informed the analysis of their stories later on in this project. Last, and perhaps most importantly, the time spent in classrooms allowed the researcher time to get to know each participant a bit more personally, so that time spent in interviews would not be so awkward initially.

Teacher interviews

The primary form of data collection in this study came from teacher interviews. Participants in this study met with the researcher in three, semi-structured interviews designed to help uncover their personal stories or "journeys" of understanding themselves as teachers in a predominantly Hispanic high school setting. Interviews provided important biographical information that could not gathered from classroom observations.

Interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and were scheduled after the four hours of classroom observation were completed. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Typically teachers were interviewed in their own classrooms during their prep hours or after the formal school day. During these times, students frequently interrupted the interviews. Students obviously felt comfortable with regularly dropping in to see these teachers. The school day for these teachers went far beyond the formal, five periods a day standard for most secondary classroom teachers.

As the series of interviews progressed, each of the participants was clearly becoming more and more comfortable with the research process. The ability of these teachers to be transparent in openly sharing very personal details of their lives both in and outside of Cactus View was quite striking. It is believed the small amount of time spent previously in these teachers' classrooms was beneficial in getting them to talk candidly during the interview process. By the time all three rounds of interviews had been completed, a close and genuine rapport with this very special group of women had been established.

In the initial interview, the researcher was interested in putting together a broad picture of the journey that brought each teacher to Cactus View. Loosely structured interview questions allowed the teachers to reflect on childhood and adulthood experiences that prepared them to teach in their current setting. Also included were questions exploring events of their first years of teaching and practical wisdom gained from their current teaching assignment. The future teaching aspirations of these teachers were explored as well. In addition, teachers were given opportunities to describe their initial encounters with teaching in a culturally rich school setting.

Throughout this first interview, the researcher was especially reliant on the "journey" metaphor to provide deeper reflection than might normally have been gained through a simple retelling of their life stories. Additional metaphors were created when each teacher was asked to describe the road taken on her teaching journey. Similar

metaphors such as "green lights," "landmarks" and "rough roads" were also used to encourage rich descriptions of the highs and lows of their respective teaching journeys. A complete synopsis of the questions for the initial participant interviews is found in Appendix C.

The second round of interviews focused specifically on each participant's view of themselves as a White teacher in a predominantly Hispanic school setting. Teachers were asked to explain why they had such a strong personal and academic connection with the students at Cactus View. Teachers shared daily practices that built positive relationships with students. Teachers were also given opportunities to share personal stories they believed would help new teachers just beginning their teaching journeys. A range of interesting experiences provided further insight into some of the natural ways they have bridged the cultural divide with students. A synopsis of the questions asked in the second interview is found in Appendix D.

With two of the three interviews completed, events and experiences shared from the questionnaires and the first two interviews were chronologically organized for each of the five, teacher-participants. From these lists, a popular computer graphics program was used to create visual "maps" of each participant's individual teaching journey. Superimposed on the background of these maps was a picture illustrating the metaphor each teacher used to describe their journey as a teacher. Important phrases taken from the interviews were typed in to describe specific experiences along their journeys. The

creation of an actual, story map of each teacher's journey was built on Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) notion that teacher stories form a "landscape" that can be "mapped" out for the purpose of understanding practical and professional knowledge (pp. 24-25). Using this creative approach to illustrate the information from these teachers' stories offered a unique, hands-on approach to reflection and story.

These "maps" were the basis of the third interview. In this interview, the researcher presented her visual interpretation of the main events of each participant's teaching journey and asked for clarification. Clarification of the map served as a correction or "member check" for potential misinterpretations on the part of the researcher (Merriam, 1988). The teachers were asked to study this interpretation of their life journey to see what could be added to make the map more complete. Teachers were encouraged to draw in representations of important students as well as other events that had not been shared in previous interviews. This hands-on opportunity for each participant to clarify her map served as a final chance to contribute further data about their lives. A synopsis of the third interview questions is found in Appendix E.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative research is a complicated process of interpretation. In a study with a strong reliance on narrative, the researcher did not compile volumes of data that were easily interpreted. Instead, the analysis of data was a continuous, ongoing process that

involved as much time as the actual fieldwork. Data from the stories told by each participant were regularly revisited in order to reveal events, themes and patterns in building an ongoing narrative (Janesick, 2003). In this study, the researcher used the information collected to create individual narrative, case studies that highlighted each participant's journey as a White teacher in a predominantly Hispanic high school setting.

Much of the initial analysis of data was done between each round of interviews during the transcription process. Throughout, the researcher used a "critical life events" approach as the organizing framework for the analysis of data collected (Johnson, 2002, p. 153). In this critical life events approach, the researcher focused primarily on experiences perceived as critical in each teacher's journey to bridge the cultural divide with students. Experiences directly connected to race, ethnicity, and culture were highlighted as critical as well as experiences connected to a heightened understanding of lower socio-economic status were highlighted as "critical life events," as issues of lowered socio-economic status were common in the Cactus View neighborhood. Although experiences related to race, ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status were of primary interest to the researcher, experiences that created a heightened understanding of relationships were also of interest. Once these individual events and experiences were identified, they were chronologically organized into a time-line for each teacher.

In answering the first research question, "What are the stories and experiences of White women teachers who are committed to bridging the cultural divide between

themselves and their students?" the researcher used questions from both the questionnaire and the interviews to identify events viewed as critical in shaping each teacher's commitment to their students. Once a time-line of "critical life events" was created for each teacher, a code was given to describe each event or experience. Some of the initial codes included: "growing up," "adversity," "empathy," "helping," "management," "decision," "cross-cultural," "relational," "beliefs," and "conversations." Once this initial round of coding was completed, the teacher time-lines were compared for themes and similarities in their critical life experiences. This comparison revealed several commonalities in the types of stories told by these teachers. Similar codes were combined to form five main categories: "cross-cultural experiences," "empathy," "facing challenges," "strong beliefs," and "conversations with students."

As a next step, the original transcripts were entirely revisited to search for further experiences matching the above, main categories. During this process, the researcher compiled a list of specific quotes and stories providing evidence of each teacher's experiences within each specific category. Specific page numbers were included along with researcher notes to help organize and relocate data if needed. Once this process was concluded, the researcher had a list for each teacher that outlined experiences within each of the five different categories. Examples of these categorical lists are in Appendix F.

In an effort to focus the analysis of this data, the researcher decided the category of "strong beliefs" did not completely fit the definition of an event or experience,

resulting in its omission for the purposes of this study. The categories of "empathy" and "facing challenges" were combined, as empathy was judged to be a result of the challenges faced by the teachers in this study. These decisions resulted in the three main categories that formed the basis of the case studies written for each teacher in this project. These categories were "cross-cultural experiences," "facing challenges," and "conversations with students."

The second main research question, "What have been the peaks and valleys that have fueled their ongoing journeys to bridge this cultural divide?" was an extension of question one. This question asked for specific instances of the highs and lows of their journeys to bridge the cultural divide with their students. This question was answered mainly through interview questions asking participants to identify critical peaks and valleys in their life experiences. Explanations of both kinds of events were needed to construct a realistic as well holistic narrative of the many types of experiences that fueled their journeys as teachers.

Determining if an event was a peak or valley was a difficult task, if the event was not specifically identified as one or the other in interviews. To review, peaks were high points both in and outside of the classroom that served as mountaintop experiences in the participants' lives. Valleys were low points, or extremely difficult points in their lives both in and outside of the classroom. In answering this second question, the researcher returned to the lists of final categories to form broad conclusions about the nature of these

teachers' experiences. Specific instances of "cross-cultural experiences" were coded as a "peak" or "valley" for each teacher, as were the categories of "facing challenges" and "conversations with students." In this coding activity, it was clear some experiences were more neutral in nature, so the term, "plains" was created to match the other metaphors. The codes for these experiences were then analyzed for commonalities between participants.

The comparison of these teachers' stories and their view of their experiences as peaks or valleys was not intended to create generalizations about the level of each teacher's commitment to their students. Each teacher's story was obviously a unique case of experiences. Within each case, however, were certain commonalities that were immediately evident to the researcher. Commonalities between their cases were of particular interest to the researcher as possible explanations for these teachers' well-known commitment to their students. Such a commitment was viewed as related to these teachers' ability to bridge the cultural divide with their students. Specific information regarding these findings is included in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This project brought together a unique set of exemplar teachers ranging in ages between 30 and 60. As stated earlier, two broad research questions were the basis of a cross-case analysis focused on the "journeys" of five, White females with a long-term commitment to teach in a predominantly Hispanic high school:

1. What are the stories and experiences of White, female teachers who are committed to bridging the cultural divide between themselves and their students?
2. What have been the "peaks" and "valleys" that have fueled their ongoing "journeys" to bridge this cultural divide?

Even with the wide range of ages and stories of the teachers in this study, it was clear this group shared multiple types of common experiences. Significant cross-cultural experiences and personal challenges repeatedly emerged as stories told within the interviews, indicating a clear commonality between the teachers, despite individual differences as educators. Stories of conversations with students were clearly another type of common experience they shared as White, female teachers in a predominantly Hispanic high school. In a cross-case analysis of the data, these three types of events within each teacher's story emerged in answering the first research question. In addition, each teacher's view of these experiences as peaks and valleys was similar as well.

Findings pertaining to the second research question immediately follow the participant case studies.

In the following paragraphs, each teacher's unique style and personality will be described along with a short summary of their background. In the narrative of these individual case studies, cross-cultural experiences, personal challenges, and conversations with students were presented as the main experiences contributing to each teacher's ongoing journey to bridge the cultural divide. Throughout this chapter, many of the teachers' actual words were included as illustrations of these three main themes. As with all names in this study, each of these teachers was given a pseudonym for the purposes of privacy. I begin with the youngest participant, a 30 year-old teacher named Vanessa.

Participant Case Studies

Vanessa

Vanessa was in her sixth year as a science teacher at Cactus View High School. Vanessa usually dressed in neat jeans and a crisp t-shirt and had curly-brown hair that was frequently up in a ponytail. Vanessa's large, animated eyes were accented by dramatic, dark makeup. Sometimes it was difficult to tell her apart from her students.

Vanessa's high energy and enthusiasm for both her students and science were immediately evident upon our first meeting. Hanging from the ceilings in her classroom

were colorful, life-size skeletons made by her anatomy students. A bright blue ocean scene recently painted by some art students was located on another wall. Crowding the back bulletin boards were photographs taken of past labs. Bordering the chalkboards were hundreds of student pictures, as well as occasional cards and hand-drawn pictures from her students. Organized in rows across the front lab counter was an assortment of snacks and candy for an ongoing academic decathlon fundraiser. It was clear that exciting things happened in her crowded, little classroom.

Vanessa was extremely close to her students, chatting with them before, during, and after class. She spoke very quickly, and had a quick sense of humor with them. Students often joked with Vanessa, and she gave it right back to them. It was obvious students were at ease with Vanessa and enjoyed being a part of her classroom.

Even though her own K-12 experience took place in private schools, Vanessa has student taught and worked exclusively in public high schools. Vanessa described her teaching journey as a "roller coaster." When I asked her to explain why she used that metaphor, Vanessa gave me the following explanation:

> Because it's fun [the roller coaster]! After I get off the ride, I want to get back on again. There's a lot of adrenalin. There's fear; there's twists and turns that I wasn't even anticipating…and it's expensive to get on the ride, and it's a really short ride…you have to pay a lot to get onto the ride, but once you are on the ride,

> you just want to get right back on…It's expensive time-wise…it's expensive emotional-wise. Expensive in so many ways, but we keep coming back.

Despite the ups and downs of the teaching "roller coaster," Vanessa raved about Cactus View's staff and students. Repeatedly, Vanessa declared she would never want to teach or do anything else than what she was doing and where she was currently doing it.

Although Vanessa described her growing up years as that of a typical, middle class family, an abrupt and traumatic event occurred in her secondary years. Vanessa's father went through a painful bankruptcy that dramatically changed her family's standard of living. By her own admission, the financial and personal stress put on Vanessa's family during those years gave her a powerful, dual-perspective of both having and lacking financial security. During the financially difficult years, Vanessa found that by working hard in school, she attracted her teachers' attention. This was much needed attention her parents were unable to give at the time. As a consequence, Vanessa viewed school as a haven from the stresses at home. Even though she described her middle school and high school experience as a very difficult time marked by a lot of trouble fitting in with her peers, Vanessa found emotional rewards and personal affirmation by performing well in school.

Vanessa's cross-cultural experiences

Vanessa's cross-cultural experiences began with her immediate family. Vanessa's father, an American-born Jew, met her strong, Belgian Catholic mother in Europe. Vanessa's first language was not English, but French, her mother's first language. As her father was non-practicing, Vanessa grew up in the Catholic Church. Vanessa even attended Catholic schools her entire K-12 experience. When the children in Vanessa's family were baptized Catholic, her Jewish relatives disowned them. Despite not being raised in the Jewish faith, Vanessa was encouraged by her father to read and watch a great amount of information about the Holocaust. When asked if she identified more as a Catholic or a Jew, Vanessa couldn't give a definitive answer:

> I don't know. I really don't. I thought it was cool that I could say I was half-Jewish…all the interest in the Nazi Party…I could say, 'Hey, my dad's Jewish.' [Being half-Jewish] made me feel like I was special. It was weird in a kind of twisted way, because of all the morbid curiosity about what happened [during the Holocaust]. I mean, it's horrible, but at the same time, it's like a train wreck. I couldn't stop looking at it. I did research on it, a lot of that stuff, because I couldn't fathom hating anyone that much.

Vanessa's early interest in recent Jewish history provided a better perspective on being treated differently, or singled out as a minority.

The majority of children that went to school with Vanessa were from middle-class, White families. Even before her father's bankruptcy, Vanessa never fit in well with the "popular" girls at school. At the all-girl Catholic high school Vanessa attended, her inner circle of friends came from many different cultural backgrounds and walks of life. Interestingly, Vanessa hadn't remembered feeling the "minority in the minority group…" until our interviews.

> All of us were not accepted for one reason or another. But I didn't see it at the time. Yeah…you know, now that I come to think about it, we had a lot of different people in our group.

This circle included friends who were Indian, Vietnamese, Jewish, Chinese, and Hispanic. It also included one girl who was very overweight and another girl who was definitely seen as coming from the wrong side of the tracks by the other students at the school. In addition to this diverse circle of friends, Vanessa's family was extremely close friends with a large Hispanic family. Even though Vanessa's own neighborhood was mostly White during her growing up years, she was not insulated from intimate relationships with people from other races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.

Before coming to Cactus View, Vanessa's first teaching job was in an extremely diverse school in a smaller, more rural city within the Southwest. This particular school had a large Mexican migrant population that moved between different areas of the country picking crops for large farming operations. Although Vanessa found it

challenging to adapt her curriculum for students who were continually coming and going from her classroom, she really enjoyed the makeup of this new group of students. In her opinion, the "migrant kids" were the students who really loved to go to school. She believed they saw school as a break from the pressures of home, much like her own experience in school. "At school they could be a kid. They could socialize. They could goof off. They loved the fact that I was a young teacher, and that I wanted to be there…and I was happy to see them…" Vanessa viewed the migrant students as having more respect for education than many of the richer students at that school. As a result, Vanessa bonded tightly with this particular group.

Vanessa's experiences in facing personal challenges

Vanessa faced several challenges as a K-12 student. Vanessa told many stories of being teased and excluded by her classmates, both for her appearance as well as their perceptions of her abilities in school. The greatest challenge for Vanessa, however, was dealing with her father's very public financial difficulties and subsequent bankruptcy from his medical practice during her middle school and high school years. According to Vanessa, her classmates and their parents knew of the family's financial difficulties. These parents encouraged their children to stay away from Vanessa, causing her to feel like an outcast.

Many aspects of Vanessa's family life changed with the bankruptcy. Vanessa's father lost his medical license and never practiced medicine again. Her family lost everything except their house. While her mother worked several jobs to keep the family afloat, Vanessa, as the oldest of four, was expected to take care of her younger siblings and run the home while her parents were away. Vanessa was only able to continue going to her school as an "adopt a student." Vanessa did filing and other office work at her school's convent as part of this scholarship. Vanessa had a single school uniform and was required to maintain a high grade point average in order to stay at the school. Vanessa also worked at a local grocery store to contribute money to her family's financial situation. Things were so tight financially that on several occasions Vanessa's family received Thanksgiving and Christmas meals from a local Catholic charity.

The financial difficulties faced by Vanessa's family took a toll on her parents' relationship. "I remember hating going home, because my parents were fighting all the time." Even though Vanessa didn't always feel like she fit in at her school, school was still a welcomed break from the stresses she experienced at home. As a result of these experiences, Vanessa has always bonded tightly with students going through similar financial and family difficulties.

Vanessa believed her strong perspective on both having and lacking financial security made her extremely sensitive towards the economic stresses and physical needs of her students. As the advisor for Cactus View's academic decathlon team, Vanessa

understood her students' families did not always have extra money to send with their students at out of town events. To help with this situation, Vanessa organized yearly fundraisers that helped defray some of the cost for meals on the road. Vanessa also kept a "snack drawer" well stocked with food for hungry students at school.

> I learned that kids are often too proud to ask for financial assistance. I did not want to embarrass students, so I started to bring snacks to practices after school. I found out that for some of these kids, that if I did not bring the food, the kids would have had no food that day. That's pretty powerful… After I started bringing the food and the kids realized why, they were so grateful. We never really came to an agreement that they needed the food or else they wouldn't eat, but they knew that's why I brought it... It was unspoken; I still have a snack drawer to this day, and at the beginning of the year, I always let the kids know where it is. The funny thing is, the kids don't take advantage of it. Some kids even bring things to add to it. It's turned out to be a really neat little tradition.

Despite the challenging experiences in her life, Vanessa repeatedly commented on her love of the challenges she has faced as a teacher. One of Vanessa's biggest thrills came from winning a student over during the school year.

> I like having a kid walk into my class, 'I hate chemistry. I hate anatomy. I hate school.' And having them change and enjoying going to school and like going to

> my class and at the end of the year, wanting to do more science classes… That is a total thrill.

Vanessa recently experienced this thrill with a student on her academic decathlon team. According to Vanessa, "Richard" only joined the team to spend more time with his girlfriend. In the beginning of the season Richard was a "C" and "D" student who was more interested in playing guitar for his band, than in studying for his school subjects. Recently, however, Richard won second place in the essay portion of a large academic decathlon competition. On the trip home from this competition, this student joked with Vanessa,

> Miss, I hate you. I didn't care about school at all, didn't care about it. [I] didn't want to be here, and now that I'm in this decathlon group, I want to learn stuff, and I want to study… I am so mad at you for doing that to me!

Getting through to a kid like Richard was the kind of teaching challenge that excited Vanessa the most at Cactus View.

Vanessa and conversations with students

Vanessa's extremely familiar style with students was an asset to individual and whole group conversations with students in and outside the classroom. One of the most powerful and memorable conversations Vanessa has had was with a student who came to sit by her at a football game, early in her tenure at Cactus View. Vanessa was sitting

alone, and was glad to see "Enrique," but was completely surprised by the conversation that followed.

Enrique came from a very dysfunctional home. His father was in prison, and his mother was a cocaine addict. While they talked, Enrique asked her advice on what he should do with his life. Enrique went on to tell Vanessa he had been asked to deal drugs for a gang in his neighborhood:

> Miss, I need a job. Nobody's going to hire me with my parents' background. I have been offered a job to sell on the street. I could make so much money, if I did it…but what do *you* think?

The hour-long conversation that followed centered on what else Enrique could do with his life.

> I would never think that a kid would want to come up to me and ask me if he should "deal!" Never in a million years would I have ever thought I would have that conversation with *anybody*! It [was] kind of scary, but it [was] kind of cool.

Enrique wanted to go on to college, but he didn't know how he could ever afford it. After that conversation, Vanessa helped connect Enrique with the wrestling coach at Cactus View. The coach talked Enrique into going out for the wrestling team and took him into his own home. Eventually Enrique entered the Navy. To this day, Enrique has called Vanessa every year to report how he is doing and what part of the world he is

currently visiting. This was just one of several, important conversations Vanessa has enjoyed with students facing similar challenges.

Vanessa also told several stories about conversations she has had with entire classrooms of students. According to Vanessa, students at Cactus View often had a very poor opinion of themselves as students in a school in the "Mexican" part of the city. Sometimes when students were confused and frustrated with difficult classroom tasks, they responded to Vanessa, "Well, miss, what do you expect? [We] go to Cactus View." On other occasions they complained, "[We] can't understand that, 'cause [we're] Mexican." Such statements infuriated Vanessa, and she did not hesitate to express her frustration with her students. Vanessa used such situations to get students to understand how wrong such statements were, preferring instead to use the conversation to affirm and motivate her students.

> I look at them and I'm like, what? That's a total cop-out! (I get so mad when they say that, because I hate that mentality.) Don't use [your ethnicity] as an excuse. It's not a good excuse. Laziness is a good excuse. Procrastination? That's a good excuse. Not studying? That's a good excuse. Being Mexican? That's a terrible excuse!

Although Vanessa understood why students viewed themselves in that way, she was not afraid to point out the fallacies in their thinking. Vanessa used such conversations to

communicate to her students they were much more capable to do academic work than they realized.

Vanessa's close relationship with her students allowed her to speak with them about many other topics as well. Recently a student told a Jewish joke in front of the class. Vanessa just couldn't let the situation pass without comment. "I had to tell him it offended me. He's like, 'Miss, you're Jewish?' No, but my father is, so that makes me part Jewish. He's like, 'Yeah, but I tell Mexican jokes, too.'" To the whole class, Vanessa explained it wasn't right to make fun of anyone's background. According to Vanessa, this was also a big problem with the tendency for students at Cactus View to call everything, "gay." "I won't let them [say something or someone is "gay."] I hate that. I don't like it when people do that, and I have no problems telling them either."

As mentioned before, the semester in which these interviews were conducted coincided with nationwide demonstrations surrounding the issues of immigration. Conversations about ethnicity were common as many students wrestled with their own identity as "Hispanic." It was difficult for these students to see how the label, "Hispanic" included other ethnicities such as Cuban and Puerto Rican. To Vanessa's students, being "Hispanic" simply meant being "Mexican." This view became clear when the ethnicity of a single Asian student became the focus of just such a conversation.

During this conversation, one of Vanessa's Hispanic students flippantly gestured "slanted eyes" and commented that the small number of Asian students at Cactus View

were simply "Chinese;" in other words, they were all the same. This lack of understanding for the richness of Asian ethnicity was another situation Vanessa could not ignore. Vanessa explained this student's gesture and lack of understanding was offensive to her and many other people. That day Vanessa took a lot of time away from her regular lesson to help her students learn about the location and history of "Laos." Vanessa felt it was important to help her mostly Hispanic students learn to treat others with the sensitivity and understanding they also craved. "[The Hispanic students] want so much recognition as a culture, but it seems like they weren't willing to recognize or give the respect to another [culture], and it didn't seem fair to me." On this and other occasions, conversation was more important than science instruction.

Lynne

Lynne was a science teacher going on her tenth year at Cactus View. She was a petite woman in her late thirties with medium-length blond hair and a beautiful smile. Her classroom reflected her love of marine biology. A large, tropical fish tank was against one wall, and posters of ocean life covered much of the classroom walls. Like Vanessa's classroom, pictures of students adorned Lynne's classroom walls as well. Lynne was extremely positive and upbeat in her manner with students. In her quiet and professional way, Lynne continually circulated around her classroom, speaking with students about a variety of school and non-school-related topics.

From age 7-17, Lynne and her younger brother lived in the foster home of a Hispanic woman who lived in the Cactus View neighborhood. Lynne attended elementary and junior high in the Cactus View School District before moving to another school district in her later secondary years. When asked about her experiences as a foster child, Lynne succinctly described them as "definitely difficult." After years of spousal abuse, their foster mom got divorced. The state reimbursement for Lynne and her brother's foster care became the sole source of income for what remained of the family.

> We were very poor…definitely food stamps, WIC (aid for Women, Infants, and Children), the whole thing… We saw all that, lived through all that. [We] lived through no electricity, no phone…I was in a broken home, single mother, no male figures, the partying, the drugs…

Eventually Lynne's brother ran away and was placed in a different foster home. Child Protection Services (CPS) removed Lynne from the foster home the summer before her senior year of high school. Years later, Lynne learned her foster mom had schizophrenia, explaining some of the hardships faced during those years.

Lynne described herself as an average student in high school. Even though her foster mother said she would never graduate, Lynne always knew she would. Once she graduated from high school, Lynne received a grant that paid for her to go to the local university. Unfortunately, Lynne passed only two classes her freshman year causing her to lose her money to attend school. "I was so excited I was going to college, so excited!

And then I failed, and it was devastating…" Without any family, Lynne had to find an apartment, job, and learn how to survive on her own. After many years of working and attending the local community college, Lynne transferred back to the university eventually graduating with a teaching degree just before she turned thirty years old.

Lynne's first and only teaching job has been at Cactus View. She described her teaching journey as "a big growth journey…you start out like you're naked; you don't have any tools; you don't know anything." Lynne's description of her journey was reflective of the amazing amount of life learning she has had to acquire on her own during extremely difficult circumstances.

Lynne's cross-cultural experiences

Lynne's experience as a foster child within the same Hispanic family for over ten years was an ongoing cross-cultural experience that definitely had a strong impact on her ability to relate to and bridge the cultural differences between herself and her students. When asked to give examples of specific experiences that have helped her relate so well to the students at Cactus View, Lynne simply answered, "I think my specific experience is that I grew up over here. I grew up on this side of town, and I'm not intimidated by it." Although Lynne's life "on this side of town" had been extremely difficult, by her own admission, it gave her many valuable years of living within the Hispanic community.

Lynne's experiences in facing personal challenges

As discussed earlier, Lynne faced numerous challenges in her ten years as a foster child. According to Lynne, her difficult life in foster care made her "a flexible person, able to adjust to any changes that came around." Dealing with a great amount of financial and familial uncertainty throughout those early years, Lynne became a fighter who did not give up easily when change entered her life.

When Lynne lost her financial aid to go to the university after her freshman year, she worked full-time for a year and later entered the local community college. Convinced she could still succeed in college, she successfully chipped away at a degree one class at a time. By her late twenties, Lynne gained confidence when she was able to transfer back to the university. As she considered her future, Lynne decided she wanted to become a science teacher. Unfortunately, Lynne's application to the college of education was twice denied. Discouraged, but determined to get into the program, Lynne made an appointment with the Dean of the education college. The Dean listened to her story and gave Lynne some advice on how to get accepted into the program. According to the Dean, Lynne's application could be made more attractive with some volunteer hours and an academic renewal for a grade point average still affected by her unsuccessful first year of college. Lynne followed the dean's instructions and was finally admitted to the education program at the university. Although it had taken over ten

years, Lynne worked her way back into the university and eventually graduated with a teaching degree in science.

Lynne's first year at Cactus View was not an easy one. Hired one day before school started, Lynne was quickly assigned to teach two areas of science she had previously struggled with in college. During that first year, Lynne had many difficulties with classroom management. Frustrated and struggling with her students throughout her first semester of teaching, Lynne went to a colleague in the science department who gave her some basic tips on improving classroom management.

When Lynne's students came back from winter break, she implemented many new classroom management and teaching strategies. Slowly things began to improve. That summer, Lynne took a classroom management course at the university and learned even more strategies that helped her become the classroom teacher she is today. Lynne's ability to meet challenges head on demonstrated she was not afraid to work hard and ask for help along the way. "Seeking out help is not a sign of weakness! It's a sign of strength! If I see that I'm lacking in something, I'll find something to help me strengthen that area."

When asked about her refusal to give up despite the challenges in her life, Lynne replied:

> I was always very goal-oriented. I always looked into the future, because that's all I could look forward to. That's all I had. You know, in growing up the way I

> did…all I could think about was the future. I can't wait to get out of here. When I failed at the university, I had to look ahead…what am I going to do with my life? I didn't want to work at [a fast food restaurant] forever. I knew the only way I was ever going to do that was to go to school.

According to Lynne,

> [The challenges in my life] have given me perseverance, strength, and extreme flexibility. I'm able to adapt very well to different situations, because I've had to. [I'm a] survivor… I think the [secret for] the survivor, underneath it all is a positive attitude…I don't know where it came from…but I never let the negative things in my life bring me down. I always tried to find something positive to hang on, to bring me forward.

Lynne's upbeat, never-give-up attitude translated into a classroom teacher who was extremely positive and refused to give up on students. Lynne knew the importance of education firsthand.

> I'm a real nagger, so if [students] don't turn something in, I'm after them. I mean, other teachers will be like, 'Oh, well, they didn't turn it in, so what?' I'm not…I'm on them. 'Where is it? Where is it? Where is it…you know?'

It didn't bother Lynne that she was different from other teachers who didn't believe it was their job to remind students of missing homework. "You've got to push them, you really do, and they'll meet you. They have for me."

Most of Lynne's students knew she went to the same elementary and junior high school many of them attended. But, Lynne has never shared the specifics of the difficulties she faced as a young girl.

> Sometimes I wish I could get up on the stage and talk to the freshmen just coming into the school and say to them, 'This is the journey I've had in my life…these are the obstacles I have had to overcome…' to make them realize that just because you're in a bad situation, [you don't have to let it] affect your attitude towards school.

Even though some of the challenges Lynne experienced in her life were still too painful to openly talk about with her students, the impact of surviving and coming through these challenges played a big role in Lynne's ability to relate very closely with the students at Cactus View. "I truly believe that if a student wants to be successful, no matter what their background in the home, they can be successful…I believe that, because that is how I grew up."

Lynne and conversations with students

Lynne frequently spoke on the importance of talking with students and learning about their lives. "I love listening to their stories. I love hearing about the prom. I just like talking to them. I really do." Although Lynne was more guarded than Vanessa in what she revealed about herself with students, Lynne still wanted them to be able to talk

frankly with her about personal questions. According to Lynne, students were sometimes able to talk more openly with her than their own parents about matters concerning science and their changing bodies, due to her matter-of-fact manner in answering student questions.

> My kids are like, 'Are we going to [study] reproduction?' I'll talk about reproduction and how the body works, because they don't have a clue, and nobody will tell them! They want to know so bad, you know. I'll get some of the most bizarre questions, but the fact they are comfortable enough to ask me, makes me think, wow, that's good.

Lynne spoke at length about the way she believed a teacher ought to speak with students. "I don't talk down to students. I talk with them and among them. I talk to them as people." Lynne went on to give advice to new teachers.

> Get to know [your students.] Walk around the tables. Listen to their conversations. Ask them, 'What did you do over the weekend?' Try to get a feel for who they are. If you show that personal interest, they're going to relax a little bit around you.

Lynne shared a group discussion she recently had with a class that was really struggling with their grades. The students were unhappy with a new seating chart Lynne had made to curb the extremely social behavior in the class. Lynne told her students, "I'll be frank with you. There are more failing students in this class than any of my others. I could just

not care and leave you the way you were, but you know what? I do care." Lynne went on to discuss her students' practice of copying each other's work and consequently not understanding the same material at test time. Lynne spoke about making the right choices in life. Lynne told them she cared about their grades, but added they needed to choose to care about their grades as well. When asked how the students reacted to this conversation, Lynne replied, "They were great…the best day in a long time."

When Lynne realized students were failing, she didn't hesitate to speak with them about their situation.

> If it's just a single student slipping, I'll go over and ask them, 'What's going on? Are you having trouble? Do you need some help? You know, ask me. Don't be afraid to come talk to me.' And they're not. They'll come ask me…I do not intimidate my students. You want them to be comfortable in your classroom and you want them to be comfortable enough to approach you, if they have questions or problems. I give that sense of comfort and ease in my classroom by just the way I address them and speak with them.

Lynne saw a direct relationship between the way she talked with students and classroom management. According to Lynne, the more comfortable students were in her classroom, the fewer management problems she had.

Shari

Shari was the third science teacher at Cactus View. She was in her mid forties and had worked at Cactus View for twenty years. She was a tall woman with medium-length blond hair peppered with gray. Her large eyes and mysterious smile always seemed to suggest she was hiding an incredibly great secret. Although quiet, Shari displayed an extremely quick wit with her students. Shari had a dramatic flair for science, and students hung on her every word. Shari obviously loved what she was doing, and her students responded by working very hard for her.

Throughout Shari's classroom were shelves upon shelves of biology specimens that would take several hours to thoroughly investigate. A snake, a lizard, and several other caged creatures lined the walls of her classroom. Pictures of students crowded her bulletin boards. Numerous recent newspaper articles about Cactus View student achievements were taped to the classroom door. A hand-drawn diagram of a cell and several chemistry equations took up most of the chalkboard. It was hard to imagine anyone being bored in this classroom.

Before Cactus View, Shari worked at several different schools, some of which were very difficult experiences. Shari described her journey of teaching as one where she just kept moving, until she found her "niche." Experiences in other schools gave her a broader view of teaching. Several times Shari has reminded teachers who complain about Cactus View, "You don't know how good you've got it. You should see what

other schools do…" Shari loved her job and rarely thought about retirement. Although her husband "calculates it [retirement] every so often…I just forget, yeah. I don't even know how many years it is…I'll keep doing it [teaching] as long as I feel like I'm doing a good job, and I'm having fun." With this outlook on teaching, it appeared Shari will continue teaching for many years to come.

Shari's cross-cultural experiences

Shari's cross-cultural experiences began in a low-income neighborhood of another large metropolitan city in the Southwest where she lived from until her teenage years. In her diverse neighborhood, Shari had many Hispanic friends. According to Shari, she wasn't really aware of the diversity in her old neighborhood until many years later when she realized students at Cactus View had many of the same Spanish surnames her friends had had during those early years.

In junior high, Shari's family moved to the rural outskirts of the city. As a result of this move, her new classmates associated Shari with a new culture of people. Even though her family didn't own any horses, her new classmates labeled her as a "cowboy" or "roper." In this growing, new area of the city, Shari attended three high schools before graduating. Undoubtedly, these school transfers gave Shari a useful perspective on the difficulties of learning to break into a new school.

Shari's teaching experience prior to Cactus View was quite varied. Her first full year as a teacher was in a small, rural junior high school with a student population that was extremely diverse in both ethnicity and religion. During that first year, Shari came face to face with the poverty of a student she drove home one night:

> I gave a kid a ride home, and it was a shack…just pieces of corrugated steel over a post. That was his house…and I wanted him to study for his test at night? He didn't have any light, no electricity…

Seeing this student's home was an eye-opening experience Shari never forgot.

Shari's next teaching job was in a small, rural high school with another very diverse group of students in race, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Shari's experiences as a teacher in this school were very positive, but after a couple of years at this second school, she decided to move to a bigger city. Her new position was at an upper middle-class, predominantly White high school. Though not specifically diverse in culture, Shari found the overall student culture of this extremely privileged school to be very different from her previous experiences. Although there were definite exceptions, a majority of the staff, parents, and students at this school were too "uppidity" for Shari. After two years, Shari took a job at Cactus View and has been there ever since.

One of the most significant cross-cultural experiences Shari has experienced was found in her marriage into a Hispanic family. Shari's experience as the "minority" in the family have given her a small window of understanding into what it means to be a

minority, as she has been occasionally treated as an outsider by her Hispanic relatives. Both positive and negative experiences within this family have immersed Shari in Hispanic culture. Shari and her husband have adopted two little girls of Hispanic origin. Shari's family also lived in a diverse neighborhood of a nearby school district where both girls attended predominantly Hispanic schools.

Shari's experiences in facing personal challenges

The challenges Shari has faced in her life were directly related to some very difficult teaching situations experienced in her first years as a teacher. As set out previously, Shari's first teaching assignment was at a very diverse junior high with a lot of problems. During that year, one of her seventh-graders murdered another student in a gang fight. That year, teachers were forced to make sure students walked in single file lines in either direction of the hallway due to several stabbing incidents at the school.

On the last day of school, a group of students threw water balloons, sticks, and rocks at Shari and the other teachers as they walked to their cars. One teacher's car was totaled as students beat it with crowbars. According to Shari, "the Principal just watched through the window and never did anything. They came at us, 20-30 kids and attacked." Needless to say, Shari did not return to that position the following year.

Shari's bad experience at that school did not result in her giving up on teaching. Shari interviewed for teaching jobs all over the state, securing a job at a high school in a

very small, rural town. Although Shari really enjoyed this second teaching assignment, she eventually made the move to larger city. This new position was in a high school that served an upper middle class neighborhood with much less student diversity than her previous schools. According to Shari,

> [This new school] was the rudest place I have ever been. The attitude of the staff and students was to look down on me. The students did, because I didn't have as much money as them. A group of students actually got together and came to see me after school one day and said, 'You know, miss, you really need to dress better. If you would dress better, we would respect you more and probably we'd learn more.'

This kind of shallow attitude was very difficult for Shari to endure.

On her questionnaire, Shari wrote of a challenging incident at this school involving the volleyball program she helped coach.

> I was coaching Junior Varsity volleyball… We played Cactus View at Cactus View. Our varsity coach warned me ahead of time that Cactus View was low-class, poor, dangerous to Whites, and prone to cheating any way they could! Her varsity players echoed these comments loudly on the bus. I was horrified. Two of my best players were Hispanic-one's dad worked at Cactus View. They sunk in their seats. One of my players started to join in on the varsity comments. I stopped her, and our JV team had a discussion right then about: 1) What evidence

> is there for these conclusions? 2) What about our teammates who are Hispanic? How do they feel? and 3)What attitude do we want going into this game? I was proud that my girls made no more comments. I was overwhelmed by the power of the disgust of the varsity coach and her team. It was a mindless, senseless, mob mentality wave of power that could not be turned back.

Experiences such as these led Shari to apply at other schools in the same city. When Shari got her job at Cactus View, she was immediately struck by the contrasting attitude of her new students. "The general attitude was 'we don't care what you wear, and we don't care how big your house is. We don't care what you drive…we just care how you treat us.'" Shari had finally found her ideal place to teach.

Shari and conversations with students

Shari discussed at length the importance of talking to students "like people." Shari shared a recent incident where she and a group of other teachers were given crowd control duty at a career fair in the auditorium. Their job was to keep the students from leaving halfway through the different presentations.

> The other teachers there, when a kid would come in through the door, they would just yell at them, 'If you come in here, you have to stay! Sit down! Get inside there!' The [students were] like, 'What? What?' [The students didn't] know

> [what was going on]. All they [knew was that people were] just screaming at them.

When Shari took the time to explain the necessity of having to stay in the auditorium, the students simply replied, 'Oh, okay.' According to Shari, if teachers would "just talk to [students] like they're people, instead of ordering them around like dogs," students would be much more agreeable and reasonable in their behavior.

Shari related another story involving a very special student who was seen "as a danger and a misfit" by the rest of the school. "Manuel" was Shari's student for three consecutive years. Shari spoke fondly about her relationship with this student: "I just loved the way he looked at the world and thought things differently. He would come in every day and tell me something that was going to change how I looked at kids." A year after graduating from Cactus View, Manuel sent Shari a letter "thanking me for how I talked to him and for not judging him." Shari's daily relationship in talking with Manuel played an important role in what had been a very rocky school experience for this student.

Shari admitted she didn't always know how to talk with her students. In the beginning of her teaching career, she struggled with classroom management. By her own admission, Shari was the kind of teacher who yelled first and asked questions later. Over time, she learned to combine humor in speaking with her students about their misbehavior. "You don't have to yell at them to make your point."

Shari related an example of how she sometimes combined humor with the way she spoke with students who were tardy. "Instead of yelling at them [for being late], I'm like happy. 'Oh good, you're tardy…excellent, excellent, the tables needed cleaning, thank you.'" By speaking with students in a positive way, even when they are in trouble, Shari has learned a lot about how to manage her classroom. A situation that can have a deteriorating affect on students' attitudes can be used to enhance the teacher/student relationship.

Brenda

Brenda was a math teacher with sixteen years at Cactus View. A tall woman of almost six feet, Brenda was in her mid-forties and had short, smartly styled blond hair complimented by bright make-up and stylish glasses. In the classroom, Brenda was constantly on the move, answering student questions, checking homework, and providing much-needed positive feedback. Brenda also had a great sense of humor. Brenda's booming laugh made students feel at ease.

Immediately evident upon entering Brenda's classroom were the student pictures on the large wall opposite to the door. Nearly one hundred 4 x 6 photographs taken by Brenda of the previous year's graduates were used to line an enormous bulletin board. This graduation "border" communicated a positive message to the current year's students, inspiring them to join the happy faces of recognizable older students dressed smartly in

their graduation caps and gowns. In explaining the prominence of her graduation photo display, Brenda explained that in her opinion, graduation was the capstone experience for both her students and herself as their teacher. Graduation was an event Brenda looked forward to every year, and this prominent graduation photo display certainly reinforced the importance of this event.

Brenda took a great deal of personal pride in teaching at Cactus View. During her entire K-12 experience, Brenda grew up in the Cactus View district and went to its schools. As a result, Brenda well understood the people and the issues faced in this neighborhood. This understanding gave Brenda almost instant credibility with her students. As a proud graduate of Cactus View, Brenda regularly reminded students it was their responsibility to work hard to improve their school's reputation in the larger community.

> That's why I tell my students, if you are not actively working to show the best of your school and your community…if you do something like join a gang, if you do something like carry a drug or do drugs, you are reinforcing and substantiating what people believe about this school and your community and your culture…. That's why you're in a sports program…that's why you're in band, because you're doing something to say, 'Hey, this is what our community is about, not that.'

Brenda did not pretend to be an expert at teaching, even though many others saw her as one. "I'm still trying to figure this thing called teaching out…" Brenda described her teaching journey as "a real adventure of discovery. I feel like Lewis and Clark…it's just been a real adventure..." As the chair of her department, part of this adventure was dominated by past struggles to build a math curriculum that really worked for the students at Cactus View. According to Brenda, wrestling with the math curriculum created a strong sense of community, resulting in a "very special" math department.

Brenda's cross-cultural experiences

Brenda grew up in a Cactus View neighborhood and attended Cactus View district schools her entire K-12 experience. As a result, Brenda and her family had constant exposure to a diverse group of friends and classmates. Another strong cross-cultural experience in Brenda's life was her close relationship to a Czech grandmother who immigrated to the United States as a young girl. Brenda's mother and aunts spoke Czech in their home, although she never was able to speak the language herself. In Brenda's opinion, being around another language much of her life was great training for her as a teacher of students who mostly spoke Spanish (another language she did not speak). Brenda's grandmother frequently spoke of the difficulties she faced as an immigrant to the United States, encouraging Brenda to be proud of both her Czech and American heritage. Brenda believed her grandmother's experience as an immigrant gave

her an appreciation of the problems and difficulties faced by her immigrant students and their families.

As a young teacher, Brenda's first teaching assignment was in an elementary school right outside a farming community and military base in the Midwest. Being away from her home of twenty-some years for the first time was itself an unusual cross-cultural experience. Prior to this move, Brenda had lived her entire life in the Southwestern city where she had been born. Eventually Brenda moved back home to get a secondary math degree and was eventually hired to teach math at a middle school in the Cactus View District. After a number of years at the middle school, Brenda was hired to teach math at Cactus View, her old high school. After a few years at Cactus View, Brenda became the head of a very diverse math department, comprised of individuals from many different cultural backgrounds.

Brenda's experiences in facing personal challenges

One of the most significant challenges Brenda has faced involved her department's efforts to create a math curriculum that really met the needs of the students at Cactus View. At one point, the department did not have textbooks and had to write their own curriculum for the students each night. Students moved to a different classroom every quarter, making it difficult for teachers to really know their students very well. Sometimes students from three different academic quarters would be lumped

together in one classroom, forcing teachers to teach several preps within one period. It was a scheduling nightmare and a very low point in Brenda's early career at Cactus View. "There were nights when I walked out to the car and was in tears."

Eventually, a burned out math department agreed they needed to revamp their program. According to Brenda, dealing with the difficulties within their curriculum, despite several differences of opinion on what to do, actually helped bond the math teachers into a very cohesive group. Without those difficult, past years of curriculum work, the math department would not be the tight-knit "family" they had now become.

Even though, by her own admission, Brenda hasn't always liked the challenges in her life, she believed they were good for her. "I need to challenge myself…I think I need it. I don't always like it…but it's been good for me, the challenges." As the current math department chair, Brenda has had to face a continual stream of curriculum changes and benchmarks set by their district. Brenda's approach to these new changes was extremely positive.

> [This next year] we have to rearrange our curriculum and everything…it's going to be a very difficult, very challenging, very stressful process. But in the end, I think it's going to be very good. And my personality says I have to think of it that way, because if I don't think it was going to be worthwhile, it would kill me.

Brenda and conversations with students

Brenda spoke a lot about the conversations she has had with students at Cactus View. Like many of the other participants, Brenda believed it was extremely important to get to know her students through conversation. Brenda looked for opportunities to discover new things about her students. "Oh, you're in folklorico? What kind of dances are you doing?" or "if you know a student is from Mexico, 'oh, well, where in Mexico?'" These simple attempts at conversation became an important type of bridging Brenda believed all good teachers would attempt with students. "Wouldn't you want to know your [students]? Wouldn't you, if you knew a child is from another state, wouldn't you ask them where they're from?" Brenda had a difficult time understanding that what she did to reach out to students was not something all teachers did naturally.

Brenda talked a lot with students, despite a rigorous math curriculum. Every time she got a new group of students, Brenda let them know that she was a proud graduate of Cactus View. When students said things like, 'Oh, well, you know, we're just a ghetto school,' Brenda defended Cactus View vehemently. "Don't you dare talk about my school! No. I don't talk about my school that way. It's been my school longer than you've been alive!" Despite cultural differences, having the same school in common with her students gave Brenda a lot of clout to speak frankly with students.

Several years ago, another high school within the Cactus View district experienced a fatal student shooting on campus during school hours. This shooting

received a lot of media press and was the topic of much discussion at Cactus View. Brenda and her students discussed the damage this shooting did to the entire district's reputation.

> I spoke to them about [the shooting], you know. What has that done? Anybody who was on the fence, people who have it set in their minds that the "Southside" is bad, "Southside" is gangs, "Southside" is drugs…which way do you think they are going to think [now?] So…if you aren't actively doing something to show how good the community is, then you're just letting the gangs be here. If you're just letting… if you're just being apathetic and don't care about what's going on, then you have absolutely no right to complain that people think you're a gangster, you're a drug dealer, you're a pimp.

These were strong, heart-felt words Brenda did not hesitate to talk about with students. Later Brenda shared,

> I have no idea what kinds of pressures these kids have for drugs and gangs…I [do] know not every kid is in a gang, so obviously some can choose. There's something there that keeps them from being in a gang or doing drugs. [So I tell my students,] 'If you don't like what society is saying about you, your side of town, your culture, your race, whatever, then don't feed that.'

On several occasions, Brenda talked with students about Cactus View's ongoing battle against graffiti, or "tagging." When someone "tagged" the bathrooms, the

bathrooms were closed to figure out who might have been responsible for the graffiti. Eventually the bathrooms were cleaned up and reopened. A closed bathroom on campus caused a fair amount of distress and frustration for students. In those situations, Brenda spoke about the need to be respectful to the property of the school as well as the people within it.

> I do tell them, 'we are not animals; we don't have to mark territory. We write on paper; we don't write on desks. We don't write on the walls and in the bathrooms, because animals have marked territory, and you're not animals. We don't do that.'

Discussing these kinds of issues was important to Brenda, and according to her, "the students get it..."

As stated earlier, interviews with teachers took place during the spring semester of 2006, a time marked by immigration walkouts and demonstrations across the country. This heightened immigration awareness sparked many classroom conversations about ethnicity. Working through the immigration issue, Brenda told the story of one student who asked others before class began, 'Are you Hispanic or Latino? Do you speak Spanish?' Brenda's students invited her to join what became a very serious conversation. Brenda shared with students, "I don't know if you can say there is [one] Hispanic culture. Now, I'm from the outside looking in…" Despite Brenda's status as an "Anglo," students wanted to know her opinion on an issue that meant a lot to them.

Brenda also related an interesting conversation with a student who was one of the organizers of a student walkout that semester at Cactus View. The student asked why Brenda and some of the other teachers were upset with the students not being in their classrooms. Although the faculty and administration supported the first walkout, the reaction to subsequent demonstrations was more difficult. The student listened to Brenda's response, "I understand you want to protest. I understand that, but after [the first demonstration] you don't protest every day. You don't leave every day." Later, Brenda shared, "[The administration] was trying to keep kids in class, but some kids wanted to ditch. They just wanted to leave… It kind of hurts."

Theresa

Theresa was an English teacher going on her twenty-first year at Cactus View. Approaching sixty years old, Theresa had short, reddish-brown hair and a warm, infectious smile that took up her entire face. Admittedly given up on fashion in favor of comfortable clothes and shoes, Theresa was extremely comfortable with herself as an older teacher. Being extremely positive, Theresa's energy and love of people was immediately evident. Preferring to be a "roving" teacher despite her tenure in the department, Theresa taught in four different classrooms each day. She felt it was important to allow younger teachers to have their own classroom.

Coming from a middle-class, urban neighborhood in the upper Midwest, Theresa was the only one of the five participants who did not grow up in the Southwest. Like Vanessa, Theresa's entire K-12 experience took place in private, Catholic schools. After graduating from high school, Theresa continued her education in a convent where she lived for five years. During this time, Theresa received a teaching degree in secondary drama and began her first teaching assignment in 1969, a time of heated tension between different races and ethnicities in the United States.

Despite a difficult decision to eventually leave the convent, Theresa had no regrets. In a long and fulfilling career as a teacher, Theresa has taught a wide variety of subjects and age groups in a number of areas across the country. Theresa described her teaching journey as one of "self-discovery." In addition to the many things she has learned about herself over the years, Theresa repeatedly spoke of the many things she has discovered from her many students. "I learned more from the kids…" "It's really not what I teach, it's what we work together on…" Such statements were typical of her ongoing commitment to learn from and work with students. A firm believer in the student need for choices and alternative educational strategies, Theresa tried to incorporate critical thinking into every activity she planned for students.

As an older teacher, Theresa shared that in the last few years, her students frequently called her "mom." Theresa was quite comfortable with this common mistake.

In her open style, Theresa joked with students when they apologized for their error, "That's alright…is your mom nice? Yeah? Alright, then I don't mind."

Theresa's cross-cultural experiences

Theresa, as set out previously, was the only participant in this study who grew up in an area outside of the Southwest. Her experiences as a young girl in a large metropolitan area of the Midwest, however, still afforded her many opportunities for cross-cultural experiences. Theresa's city had very strong, established ethnic neighborhoods. Even with her own strong, Irish Catholic identity, her family attended a German parish and regularly mixed with neighbors of other ethnicities as well. One of Theresa's earliest childhood memories was waking up one night and being allowed to stay up and listen to their Polish neighbors' stories of the Holocaust. Exposure to these and other stories of injustice would have a lasting impact on a young Theresa.

During her childhood years, Theresa's family established a strong friendship with an African American family who lived in her neighborhood. Both families had several little girls that often played together. The father of the African American family was a successful lawyer who volunteered his legal services in the South during some of most turbulent years of the Civil Rights movement. At social gatherings, Theresa's family heard many stories of his experiences dealing with the injustices faced by African Americans in the South. Theresa's friendship with this family's children was unsettling

to some of their neighbors. On one occasion, Theresa remembered being very angry with a particular neighbor who told her she couldn't be a friend to those "n_____." Again such experiences heightened Theresa's sensitivity to injustice and inequality.

The Catholic Church was always a focal point for Theresa's family. During her teenage years, Theresa was involved in many service projects to help people in their surrounding community. One of these service projects took Theresa into an outlying rural area populated by Hispanic migrant farm workers during the summer. On this occasion, Theresa befriended some little children whose parents were farm workers, inviting them to an evening party hosted by their church. When it was time for the party to begin, the children who had been so eager to come did not show up. Knowing where these children lived, Theresa went to see if she could escort them to the party. When the mother of the children opened the door to their home, Theresa caught a glimpse of the horrible living conditions this family experienced in their seasonal quarters. The poverty faced by this migrant family was an experience Theresa never forgot.

After her difficult decision against the renewal of her vows as a nun, Theresa left the convent. Her first teaching assignment was teaching drama and English in a small, inner city Catholic school that served a mostly Hispanic and African American student population. Even though this school was located in the city in which she grew up, the neighborhood it served was very different from her own neighborhood. No longer bound to life in a convent, Theresa was free to explore and really get to know the community

surrounding the school. According to Theresa, she spent a lot of time with students after school hours talking with them, going to their basketball games, and learning first-hand about their families and their neighborhoods. The poverty and stresses of life faced in this neighborhood were almost completely unknown territory.

> I came from this White, middle class, Catholic background that never knew a day without food or…I would be the one who could get ten pairs of shoes. You know, that kind…I don't remember not getting what I wanted or needed, ever.

Theresa recalled her experience of bringing in a birthday cake for a student at school who had never had a birthday cake in his entire life. The student was amazed when she and some of the other students sang "Happy Birthday" to him. Having this song sung to him was another experience this young man had never had before. This, and similar experiences at this school, reminded Theresa that things she took for granted in her life were not always things her students had experienced.

Sadly, Theresa's time at this small school was short-lived. After just a few years, the school was forced to close down. Theresa's next job took her into a completely different setting teaching secondary drama at a rural high school that served mostly White students who lived on the surrounding farms. As in her previous setting, Theresa threw herself right into the middle of this new community. Within a year, Theresa took those "farm kids" to the state drama championship. Theresa's approach to working with

this rural culture of students was similar to her approach with students at her previous urban, high school: "You found out you had talent anywhere."

During her time in this farming community, Theresa also worked within the Hispanic migrant population teaching adult education classes. Theresa remembered being very humbled by her adult students' respect for education, and for her as their teacher. Theresa began with the basics of English, teaching practical skills like reading road signs and signing their name. On one occasion, an older, grandmotherly woman who had "graduated" from her class invited Theresa to her home to celebrate her accomplishment. At the graduation party, Theresa remembered being treated as the guest of honor, even though she was not the graduate. This was the first time Theresa came face to face with a tamale. Theresa struggled as she tried to cut into the cornhusk of this unfamiliar food. Unfortunately, Theresa did not know one did not eat the husk!

> They must have thought, honestly…this person is an idiot! And they never said a word, never showed me what to do. They just allowed me to finally figure it out…I remember I cut a piece of that husk and I put it in my mouth, and I thought this is strange, but I didn't want to insult anybody. Can you imagine the communication going on?!

This was a humorous, but one of many powerful, cross-cultural situations Theresa experienced in the years before coming to Cactus View.

Beyond the classroom, Theresa's cross-cultural experiences included a brief and difficult marriage to an Egyptian man who was the father of her first child, John. After the divorce, Theresa and John moved to the Southwest to enter a graduate program at a large university. After several years at the university, Theresa made a decision to leave her program and began to interview for English jobs at local high schools.

Theresa was offered her job at Cactus View just days before giving birth to a second son, Andy. Theresa did not marry Andy's father. In those early years, Theresa and her two young boys lived in the Cactus View neighborhood. As Theresa's boys grew older, they attended schools within the Cactus View district, again giving her firsthand knowledge of the community in which she taught.

> [Cactus View] has become a community that I enjoy being a part of. Now I don't feel I'm an outsider coming to a job every day. I'm an integral part of the community…and even though I now live outside of the district, I still feel like I'm a part of the community.

Theresa's experiences in facing personal challenges

Theresa has faced multiple challenges in her life, both as a career teacher and a single parent. Theresa is similar to Vanessa in the thrill they both experience in winning over students to which others have given up. Several times in the course of our

interviews together, Theresa spoke of this type of challenge. Reflecting on her earlier years teaching in the tough Catholic school of her home city, Theresa related:

> I can remember my toughest [students]…I would always try to win them over. It was a challenge for me to win over a kid who was the toughest, the meanest, the one who was the most anti-social…

In her positive, very relational manner, Theresa has formed bridges across many different types of divides. "It doesn't bother me where people will put barriers or whatever. It doesn't bother me to cut through in those areas."

Several years ago, Theresa made a big push to enroll the students "nobody else wanted" into her drama classes at Cactus View. These were students who were often roaming the halls and cutting classes. In Theresa's opinion, these were the "interesting" kids who were looking for a change in their lives. "They are thinking all the time of how they can get out of something…they have creative minds!"

In getting to know some of these students' stories, Theresa's eyes were opened to a whole host of issues she had never considered. Some students were on probation; others had extremely difficult home lives. Despite the challenges facing these students, Theresa refused to give up on them.

Theresa has formed the ability to see the good in students that others cannot always see. In one story, Theresa related meeting the parents of a known gang member she recruited for one of her drama productions. Attending the production was the first

time this student's parents had ever come to the school for anything positive. "I remember saying to them, 'I really love this kid.'" The mother broke down crying. This mom had never had the experience of having a teacher tell her something positive about this son.

Theresa has been able to empathize with students' situations without feeling sorry for them. She had held high expectations for students' behavior and doesn't let them off the hook academically. Theresa has never wanted to enable students' negative behavior. In the past, she has gotten very angry with teachers who lowered their standards for class work and said, 'Oh, it's alright, you don't have to, poor thing…' "No! No, you're not a poor thing!" Theresa has always emphasized the need for her students to face their problems head on.

Theresa has followed up on students both at school and at home to ensure they were staying out of trouble and passing their classes. In receiving such attention, these students realized somebody truly cared about them. "When they would get into trouble, I would not excuse them, but I would be sitting next to them, defending them if they needed something. Nobody [had done] that for them before." Admittedly, not all of her students have risen above their circumstances. But, that has not stopped Theresa's desire to work closely with such students. "I don't want to give up. It's a challenge to try to get through to people."

Theresa's long history of refusing to give up on students, despite the challenges they have faced was linked to experiences in meeting the challenges in her own life. One of Theresa's greatest personal challenges came in her first son's teenage years. When it became clear "John" was getting into problems with gangs, Theresa decided to take a year off from teaching and move back to the Midwest. When plans to live with family and multiple jobs fell through, Theresa was "literally one step away from calling a shelter to live." Theresa's experiences that year helped her understand "how people [fell] through the cracks." After that "horrible" year, Theresa moved her family back to the Southwest where, thankfully her job at Cactus View was still waiting for her.

Once back at Cactus View, Theresa still faced many challenges reclaiming her life and her family. At their new town home in a more middle-class area of the city, John was repeatedly accused of criminal activity in the complex. Theresa realized her half-Egyptian son was being falsely accused, as he was the only dark-skinned person in the neighborhood. Theresa fought a long, uphill battle to clear her son's name from alleged wrongdoing.

During this same period of time, Theresa's youngest son battled depression and struggled in his first years of school. Eventually, Theresa discovered a friend of the family had sexually abused this son. Again, Theresa worked hard to get the help and counseling her family needed. Healing eventually did come, and both sons have grown up and have done very well in life.

Theresa and conversations with students

Throughout her teaching career, Theresa has always wanted to know as much about her students as possible. Theresa's sincere desire to understand her students' lives was interesting, as she seemed to make a deliberate effort to talk with students others were less inclined to know. Theresa has spent time talking with students about their parole, drug use, and difficult home lives at Cactus View. Theresa's genuine desire to learn from these students, however, did not keep her from confronting students. In one of several, similar stories, Theresa shared how she privately confronted a drama student who always depicted deviant behavior anytime he was asked to act in front of the class. "Where everybody would be painting a fence, he was spray painting the fence, or again, in his little drama [skits,] he would be smoking marijuana..." In the course of their conversation, this student confessed he was only in school as a requirement of his probation. "Renaldo" told Theresa, "I don't know how long I'm going to be here. Don't worry about me. I'll just sit in the back. I don't want to be here. I don't want to be in school, but I have to be." This student's honesty surprised Theresa. Instead of being discouraged by his attitude, however, their conversation was the impetus behind her campaign to enlist other students on probation to take her drama class. This conversation helped Theresa understand there were underlying reasons behind the ways some students acted out in class.

Like the other teachers in this study, Theresa believed conversation was the key in getting to know her students. Theresa has actively searched for opportunities both in and outside of class to talk with students about their culture. According to Theresa, she "honors" her students when she has made a sincere attempt to understand their lives. Theresa understood that students have sometimes "tested" her with questions about their food and music. When Theresa has been able to show that she already knows something about their culture, the bridge between herself and her students gets stronger.

Theresa related the story of a student who recently said something inappropriate in a discussion about a modern Shakespeare film they were watching in class. The [movie] opened up a whole discussion of topics, and one student was very sexually explicit in a particular comment. Theresa responded, "Well, okay… that's an interesting point, but is it something we need to discuss right now?" Instead of sending the student straight to the office, Theresa used the situation to explain the appropriateness of speaking about certain topics in certain situations. "I feel that there's a reason that kid felt comfortable in his own little way to say what he said… It [didn't] shock me, [and] it [didn't] upset me." Theresa understood this student's comment reflected a certain level of comfort and safety she had worked to establish in that class.

Peaks and Valleys

As shown in each of the preceding case studies, all five participants discussed cross-cultural experiences, personal challenges, and conversations with students as critical events in their ongoing journeys as teachers. Each of the teachers' view of their cross-cultural experiences was mainly neutral. Cross-cultural experiences were most often viewed as level "plains" that were simply a natural part of their individual identities. These teachers frequently had difficulty in communicating the impact their own cross-cultural experiences had had on their ability to teach. For example, Brenda's experiences growing up and attending Cactus View schools her entire K-12 experience was simply a part of who she was, without any significant peaks or valleys. In the same way, growing up with a strong immigrant grandmother from Czechoslovakia gave her an important understanding of the cultural challenges of her close relatives. While both experiences were important to Brenda, neither was viewed as a peak or a valley. This failure to view their own cross-cultural experiences as formative was true for most of the participants. It is quite possible that the lack of extremes in the participants' views of their own cross-cultural experiences was an indication of a high level of comfort with themselves and where they have traveled in their journeys as teachers.

There were significant exceptions to the participants' inability to view their own cross-cultural experiences as formative. Lynne's difficult ten years in a Hispanic foster home within the Cactus View neighborhood was a definite valley she would never

choose to repeat. Shari's experiences at a number of culturally different schools were also valleys she was glad to put behind her.

Additionally sprinkled throughout these teachers' cross-cultural experiences was a number of cross-cultural "peaks." This was especially true for Theresa, the only participant in this study from outside the Southwest. In fact, Theresa's own journey of understanding herself as a strong Irish Catholic and former nun included multiple cross-cultural peaks. A notable exception to these peaks was Theresa's brief marriage to her son John's Egyptian father. Although Theresa spoke openly of the difficult cultural differences between them as husband and wife, this valley did not seem to have a negative influence on subsequent cross-cultural experiences. Undoubtedly, parenting her half-Egyptian son was an integral part of her continued embrace of culture and the richness of difference in her life

The personal challenges faced by each of the teachers in this study were largely rough and difficult valleys. The level of adversity experienced in each of their life stories was surprising. Interestingly, the teachers spoke about these lows in their lives largely without regret and despair. In their conversations, it was clear that although these life challenges had been extremely difficult, they realized such experiences had enlarged them as individuals, building their character in ways that helped them as teachers.

This character building was seen most clearly in Lynne's life story as a foster child. Repeatedly, Lynne spoke of how her difficult growing-up experiences now helped

her as a teacher at Cactus View. Lynne spoke candidly about these experiences, emphasizing the positive that had come out of many troubled years. Lynne, and all of these teachers viewed ongoing challenges as a positive part of their lives. They were proud of their ability to turn challenging experiences into some of the current peaks they experienced with students.

Without exception, it was clear that conversations with students were important "peaks" in their lives as teachers. Perhaps such mountaintop experiences were better described as the "green lights" that kept them on the road with students for the long-term. Talking with students were "peak" experiences that both inspired and affirmed their ability to bridge with students from cultural backgrounds very different from their own. Such experiences were important, as being a teacher in any setting has never been without its rocky or difficult moments.

All of the teachers in this study took pride in their relational ability to talk with students about topics that were not always easy. Vanessa clearly showed this in her experiences discussing the offensiveness of ethnic jokes, gestures, and labels. Vanessa also illustrated this in her conversations with students concerning her frustration with their habit of using their ethnicity to explain their lack of performance. Due to a close relationship with students, all of the teachers were able to speak with students about a wide range of difficult topics that went well beyond the classroom. They were often willing to give up class time to discuss important issues with their students.

Taken as a whole, the journeys of these five teachers took them across a wide variety of peaks and valleys. In between the peaks and valleys were a few smooth roads where they cruised right through as a natural part of their travels. Over time, these teachers viewed many of the valleys, or low points on their journeys, as important learning experiences that inspired and even fueled their peaks as teachers. Their unusual stories and positive views of their journeys have several implications for bridging the cultural divide in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the journeys traveled by five, White, female teachers in bridging the cultural divide between themselves and their students in a predominantly Hispanic high school. In examining a number of critical peaks and valleys within each teacher's unique story, it was clear both high and low points in their lives played an important role in shaping an ongoing personal and academic commitment to students. Where these exemplar teachers had traveled throughout their lives was inextricably connected to their personal identity and relational ability, both in and outside of the classroom. It was clear the experiences of these teachers' journeys played an essential role in fueling their deep connectedness to their students at Cactus View High School.

The ability of these teachers to deeply connect with students was undoubtedly related to a long-term commitment to remain teaching in a setting in which they were the minority. An attempt to understand this connection to students and the commitment to stay in teaching is important, as there is a destructive trend of teachers continually leaving the classroom, especially in urban areas (Ingersoll, 2001). Unlike many others in the profession, the teachers in this study held a long-term commitment to remain teaching in an urban school. Although the actual road traveled in developing this commitment was different for each teacher, it is clear that life experiences (both positive and negative)

were related to a refusal to prematurely give up on students and the profession of teaching itself.

Another purpose of this study was to design a caring study that highlighted positive, more hopeful stories of White teachers in a predominantly Hispanic high school setting. In light of the negative literature written about today's White teachers' lack of ability to relate and teach an increasingly diverse student population, this study was extremely encouraging. By focusing on the positive stories of the relationships between these teachers and their students, this study added a missing element to the literature base. Clearly there *are* White teachers who are doing a good job with their mostly Hispanic students.

In giving exemplar teachers the opportunity to share the experiences of their lives, this study reinforced the importance of teacher stories as a valuable source of practical knowledge. The wisdom embedded in these positive stories reinforced the notion of story as a powerful way to capture certain subtleties about teaching sometimes overlooked in teacher education (Carter, 1993). The experiences of teachers who are clearly in teaching for the long-term are helpful for novice teachers, as they consider the future longevity of their own future careers.

The stories told in this study form an initial research base of case studies that can be used in teacher education. A deeper understanding of these teachers' stories potentially contributes to a cultural divide that is less deep and less treacherous for future

teachers. Learning how others have successfully navigated their teaching in a school primarily serving Hispanic students gives preservice teachers concrete examples of ways it can be done well.

Preservice teachers can use these narratives both for self-reflection and as a starting point for powerful discussion concerning issues facing White teachers and Hispanic students in the Southwest. Reading of these teachers' ability to empathize and talk with their students provides models of healthy, classroom relationships. Understanding how the events of these teachers' live contributed to their effectiveness with students is also important, in order to encourage similar experiences during teacher preparation.

A final purpose of this study was to give the very busy teachers of this study the opportunity to reflect on their lives as teachers. Each teacher openly reflected on personal life experiences and the impact of such experiences on her teaching and relationship with students. Although these teachers had not regularly thought of their life experiences as part of a holistic teaching "journey" to "bridge" cultural differences with their students, they agreed these metaphors were extremely well suited to a narrative of their personal life journeys. This was especially evident in the third interview. In this meeting, the teachers were surprisingly excited to see their life journeys mapped out in an effort to give possible explanations for their exceptional ability to bridge with students. Although these teachers had experienced very positive careers in education, they were

also open about their shortcomings and ongoing areas for improvement with students. The creative maps of their teaching journeys provided a tangible, hands-own visual of their past, present and future travels in teaching.

This study's focus on the journey metaphor along with the process of "mapping" the experiences of one's journey created a tool with the potential to also help preservice teachers reflect deeply about experiences with diversity. Such a deliberate focus on mapping one's life as a journey is an unusual and thoughtful approach that can also be used with novice teachers in discussions of issues facing teachers in diverse, urban school settings. Such reflection may provide a deeper, more meaningful picture of preservice teachers' own cultural identities in addition to future possibilities for bridging the cultural divide. New and creative ways to encourage this level of introspection is of critical importance in preparing teachers to be culturally responsive to increasing numbers of culturally diverse students across United States.

In reflecting upon the ongoing nature of the teaching journey, honest dialogue with preservice teachers about the peaks and valleys of teaching must be emphasized. Teaching involves a lifetime of both high and low moments. The peaks and valleys these exemplar teachers have traveled in their journeys provided hopeful accounts for preservice teachers to consider as they continue on their own journeys.

Surprisingly, there were many similarities between the journeys experienced by the teachers in this study. Like the culturally relevant teachers in Ladson-Billings'

studies (1994; 2000), these teachers' commitment to students was intertwined with varying degrees of commitment to issues of social justice. Although there were other themes that emerged from their stories as well, three common types of important experiences were repeatedly communicated: 1) stories about cross-cultural experiences, 2) stories about personal challenges, and 3) stories about specific conversations with students. In a cross-case analysis of each teacher's journey, these were the three types of stories judged as most frequently experienced and inextricably intertwined with an ongoing commitment to bridge the cultural divide with students. These three types of stories have many implications for teacher education.

Cross-Cultural Experiences

Despite a wide range of experiences shared in the interviews, each of these five women had highly unusual stories and experiences that did not "fit" typical descriptions of what researchers have found to be true of many White females in education. These women were not the culturally isolated teachers frequently described in educational literature (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Howey & Zimpher, 1996; Parson & Brown, 2001). Each teacher participant shared significant stories of cross-cultural experiences, prior to, during, and after their teacher education programs. These were women who had lived and shared their lives with people from different cultural backgrounds in many varied ways.

Each of the teacher's immersion into the Hispanic culture of the school was an ongoing journey that actually started many years prior to their coming to Cactus View. All of the teachers were raised in families who were closely involved with friends and neighbors from many different cultural backgrounds. With the exception of Vanessa, all of the participants had lived in culturally rich neighborhoods in at least one point in their early lives. Both Lynne and Brenda had long-term experiences growing up in the Cactus View neighborhood and attending district schools. In addition, Theresa had lived and taught within the Cactus View neighborhood and sent her sons to Cactus View schools for several years as well. Although most teachers do not live near or in the school districts they teach (Macleod-Weeks, 1999; Maldonado-Colon, 1999), living within the Cactus View school district and similar Hispanic neighborhoods during these teachers' lives gave them unusually close, cross-cultural experiences. First-hand experiences with people unlike their own cultural backgrounds contributed to the sensitivity they exhibited towards the Cactus View community. It is possible this close access to the culture enabled the teachers to relate and bond with students on a very genuine and natural level. Since such relational ability does not seem to come naturally to all White teachers of racial and ethnic minority students, this study suggests the cross-cultural experiences of these teachers' lives was directly related to their success in bridging with the predominantly Hispanic students at Cactus View.

For the teachers in this study, familiarity with the cultural background of their students was especially important in understanding serious issues and injustices experienced within the entire Cactus View community. In living within the Cactus View neighborhood, Theresa was well aware of some of these difficult issues. Theresa related a story of having car trouble on a neighborhood street on her way home from Cactus View one evening. The police officer who stopped to help Theresa informed her, "You're not safe, you know…let's get your car out of here. This is not a safe neighborhood." When Theresa calmly explained she lived just around the corner, the policeman was very surprised. Theresa's familiarity with the neighborhood gave her a relaxed attitude in a situation others with less cross-cultural experience may have viewed as stressful. It is not difficult to conclude such familiarity translated into a similar attitude towards a school setting others often viewed in a negative light. For Theresa and the other teachers in this study, their ability to be so comfortable within a different culture gave them great pride. This pride was an integral part of their connection with students.

Shari's marriage into a Hispanic family and Theresa's brief marriage into an Egyptian family also gave them significant, first-hand experiences with culture. Both Shari and Theresa spoke candidly of the peaks and valleys within their cross-cultural marriages. Having bi-cultural children gave both of these teachers unusually close experiences that aided in bonding with the Hispanic community at Cactus View.

The cross-cultural highlights in the stories of each participant included a wide range of experiences that involved adapting to many types of cultural situations. These instances of personal adaptation suggest the importance of challenging cross-cultural experiences. In addition to Vanessa's significant experience with immigrant Mexican students at her first teaching job, she also experienced firsthand cultural differences concerning both language and religion with her American Jewish father and her European, Catholic mother. Brenda also experienced a different culture being raised under the strong influence of her Czechoslovakian immigrant grandmother and relatives. For Shari, Brenda, and Theresa, experiences teaching in a rural, farming community were also important opportunities to learn both normative, as well as different ways of living, and the associated adaptations necessary to teach within a completely new culture of students. Even though many of these cross-cultural experiences were not specifically within the Hispanic community or even related to race and ethnicity, these and many other types of experiences gave the teachers valuable time within a specific cultural community.

For some of these teachers, their cross-cultural experiences were ongoing, long-term experiences. Lynne's ten-years in a Hispanic foster care home was an example of this ongoing, cross-cultural experience. For others, some of their cross-cultural experiences were short, yet startling episodes not easily forgotten. Shari's first-hand experience in seeing the desperately poor living conditions of one of her students, and

Theresa's firsthand experience of seeing the temporary quarters of a migrant family in the upper Midwest were examples of such episodes. Both long and short-term experiences played a part in shaping their identity as teachers, giving them varying degrees of understanding for both culture and socio-economic status.

Similar to Laurie Johnson's study (2002), each of the women in this study had experienced multiple opportunities in sharing leadership roles with people of many different, cultural backgrounds. Although these opportunities took place in a variety of venues throughout the teachers' lives, this commonality was most clearly seen in their experiences as teachers at Cactus View, where almost half of the faculty was Hispanic. It was likely the unusually diverse staff at Cactus View benefited the teachers, as it regularly afforded them the opportunity to observe and emulate teachers who either didn't need to bridge the cultural divide, or who had been successful at such bridging.

Both Vanessa and Theresa spoke of powerful Hispanic mentors who helped them develop new programs and learn new roles and responsibilities at Cactus View. In addition, the unusual camaraderie formed within Brenda's math department was further evidence of the importance of these close, shared relationships. Brenda spoke of the camaraderie, as well as the diversity within the math department as one of its greatest strengths. Close cooperation among the faculty was the norm at Cactus View, and inevitably this cross-cultural cooperation benefited these teachers' students as well.

Cross-cultural experiences played a powerful role in helping the teachers feel more comfortable and share more fully in a setting in which they were the minority.

Additionally, the same cross-cultural experiences gave these teachers opportunities to build important cross-cultural relationships with people possessing an insider's view of race, ethnicity, and discrimination (Johnson, 2002). Again, forming close relationships with Hispanic colleagues contributed to the comfort level and ease in which these White teachers operated in building close relationships with their mostly Hispanic students. Multiple experiences in cross-cultural situations appeared to have fostered important empathy for the alienation and feelings of aloneness experienced at times by ethnic minority students in the dominant society. A window of understanding into what their students have experienced, derived from the teachers' own backgrounds, inevitably played a significant role in helping them share deeply in the lives of their students.

As said earlier, the cross-cultural experiences of these teachers' lives have many implications for teacher education. First, teacher educators must continue to advocate for cross-cultural experiences as an invaluable prerequisite for education programs across the country. Colleges of education must work harder to recruit students possessing a wide variety of deeper cross-cultural experiences prior to their acceptance into teacher education programs. In addition, colleges of education would do well to actively recruit students from high schools within racially and ethnically diverse minority neighborhoods.

Second, to ensure preservice teachers possess significant, cross-cultural experiences, teacher education admission requirements must be periodically revisited to guarantee such experiences are a priority (Johnson, 2002; Reed, 1998). Even as educational research has repeatedly emphasized the need for multiple, in-depth, cross-cultural experiences prior to entry into teacher education programs, the same literature emphasizes the need for cross-cultural experiences to be an integral component throughout these programs (Johnson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Reed, 1998). Educators must work to ensure that cross-cultural experiences both prior to, and within teacher education programs are not given "lip service" only. Cross-cultural field experiences cannot be allowed to fall away from the curriculum once students enter education programs. Structuring meaningful cross-cultural experiences as an integral component of preservice coursework is an especially important responsibility to those entering teacher education from more culturally insulated backgrounds.

Facing Personal Challenges

As set out previously, all five teachers' journeys revealed another important commonality. These exemplar teachers' journeys experienced a large share of valleys in their lives. Many of these difficult times were also very lonely experiences. With a superficial look at the behavior and appearance of these teachers, it would be hard to expose the difficult roads faced in their lives. The grace and respect with which these

teachers treated students, the humor they used, and the perpetual smiles they wore were evidence of extremely positive outlooks on life, despite the difficulties of many points along their journeys.

Throughout the interviews, the teachers regularly commented on the importance of these challenges, or valleys, in their lives. Each teacher realized that walking through the valleys, or low points, along their journeys made them stronger individuals and better teachers. Even though the adversity experienced for many in this group was surprisingly difficult, each was extremely candid in retelling the details of these events, often commenting on their ability to see the positive side of these very negative experiences. These teachers had overcome many challenges in their lives, and they were hopeful they could motivate and empower their students to do the same.

Lynne showed this amazing ability to not give up on herself and her future during ten years in foster care. Throughout those extremely difficult years, Lynne's foster mom told her she would never graduate. Lynne, however, always knew she would get through school. Focusing on a bright future was all Lynne had to look forward to in facing the difficulties of her foster care situation. "I never let the negative things in my life bring me down. I always tried to find something positive to hang on to bring me forward."

One of Vanessa's past challenges had been a very difficult student teaching experience. Her cooperating teacher refused to help her with any curriculum materials, and gave her very little support. In addition, the upper-middle class students at the school

were extremely disrespectful. "It was a horrible experience, but at the same time, I know that if it didn't happen to me, I wouldn't have been as prepared for my first year…"

Another example of this ability to look for the positive in very difficult situations was seen when Theresa found herself "literally one step away from calling a shelter to live." In this difficult valley, a very special group of people helped reconnect Theresa with her faith. "It was a horrible experience, but one of those just when you think of as the worst, it was the best experience." The unusual, positive spin that Lynne, Vanessa, and Theresa used in describing some of the deepest valleys in their lives was a common theme in the attitude of all the teachers in this study.

Positive attitudes towards the valleys in their lives played a role in helping each teacher face current teaching challenges. In fact, many of the teachers spoke fondly of challenges in general, citing their importance as each tackled new challenges along their journey. While a "challenge" is frequently viewed in society with a negative connotation, many of the teachers in this study embraced, and viewed the word "challenge," in a more positive light. Both Vanessa and Theresa spoke frequently of "loving the challenge" of getting through to the toughest students. To Vanessa and Theresa, the initial distance across the divide between them and their students was not viewed as intimidating. If anything, it was an exhilarating challenge for them to build and cross the bridge. It was likely these teachers' love of a challenge was linked in some part to their past of overcoming numerous challenges. Facing a significant number of

challenges along their personal journeys helped create a fighting spirit that did not give up when situations got tough. It was possible this fighting spirit was the motivation behind their refusal to give up on students.

Many of the challenges faced by the teachers were similar to challenges faced by some of the students at Cactus View. For example, Vanessa empathized with students who were teased and didn't fit in with the popular crowd. Vanessa also remembered how financial hardship in a family could make it difficult to pay for meals at extra-curricular events away from home. Lynne also understood financial hardship, as well as abuse and dysfunction in the home. Shari specifically mentioned empathizing with students having a hard time in chemistry, a subject she had always struggled with in school. Shari also grew up "poor," and had the experience being the new kid at several different schools. Brenda spoke of confidence issues with which she struggled her entire life. Brenda believed her own issues with confidence gave her an ability to empathize with students who also struggled with confidence in their math ability. Theresa empathized with the financial difficulties of students who became single parents. Theresa also empathized with parents whose children were in trouble. While these challenges were not specifically linked to culture, experiencing such "valleys" gave these teachers a greater understanding of similar issues sometimes faced by their students. Having experienced these challenges in their lives created understanding that brought these teachers closer to their students.

Each teacher's heightened level of empathy for students facing similar challenges was important, but in no way did it result in an attitude of sympathy. Although each cared deeply about their students, these teachers did not feel sorry for them as a matter of course. Empathy allowed them to strongly advocate and empower students facing difficult circumstances without "letting them off the hook" for their behavior. As each teacher understood the importance of fighting through difficulties, student excuses for poor performance were not readily accepted. "Valleys" were events calling for hard work, if students were to climb out of such valleys and succeed. The teachers communicated this attitude through empowering classrooms and high expectations for students' academic work and behavior.

Each of the teachers in this study viewed education as the vehicle to help students face their own challenges. Their view of education was frequently discussed in the classroom. Challenges in these teachers' lives gave them high expectations for their own students to be successful in school, despite difficult circumstances. These high teacher expectations communicated a strong belief and hope in students as individuals.

This research project points to the inescapable conclusion that regardless of racial and ethnic background, individuals familiar with the challenges and issues facing urban neighborhoods have an advantage in connecting with students from similar urban areas. Such teachers will be more likely to possess an increased capacity for empathy, rather than sympathy in the classroom. Too often, preservice teachers are naïve to the issues

and challenges facing many students within a culturally rich school environment. This lack of understanding may account for why many new teachers become discouraged and frustrated early in their careers, ultimately leaving the profession. Recruiting preservice teachers with a familiarity with the issues and challenges faced by many Hispanic student populations is no guarantee of their future success as teachers. However, such recruiting efforts will encourage a future teacher force that will not be easily discouraged and leave the profession prematurely.

Conversations *with* Students

Finally, all five teachers in this study told numerous stories about conversations with students. As extremely relational teachers, some of these conversations were ongoing, informal, daily experiences. Other conversations were specific instances of powerful interaction with students. As suggested earlier, these teachers' "peak" experiences in talking with students were perhaps better described and understood as "green lights" that confirmed and validated their long-term commitment to teach at Cactus View. Talking with students may have been an important part of the pedagogical fuel that kept these teachers on their journey at this particular urban setting.

Each of the teachers in this study took great pride in their ability to talk with students about difficult subjects both individually and in groups as a whole. Neighborhood violence, immigration demonstrations, and offensive ethnic jokes and

attitudes were just a few of the many serious topics these teachers were discussing with their students. To these teachers, conversations about topics beyond the classroom were sometimes more important than regular, classroom instruction.

The conversations each of the teachers engaged in were similar to what Flores-Duenas (1999) describes as "platica;" "heart-to heart, intimate talk that allows for the discussion of personal matters important to students" (p. 48). Flores-Duenas argues this type of talk is an important "cultural strategy" that teachers should use regularly in connecting with their Hispanic, bilingual students (p. 48). According to Flores-Duenas, platica is a distinctive form of talk among families of Mexican heritage. It is conversation marked by a mutual respect that is not limited by issues of societal power. The ease in which this study's teachers engaged in this type of conversation suggested earlier experiences in their lives contributed to their ability to deeply connect with students through "platica."

In talking with students about serious subjects, these teachers communicated their care for students both in and outside of school. The understanding, acceptance, and respect communicated to students through open-ended conversation opened up the opportunities for deepened relationships with students. Such communication was only possible due to earlier steps taken to talk more informally with students. All of the teachers in this study admittedly relied on the relational groundwork laid by talking with students on a daily basis. Shari and many of the other teachers voiced their inability to

understand how other teachers couldn't just talk with students "like people." Each found it difficult to understand why some teachers wouldn't want to get to know their students in this way.

It was significant that each of the teachers in this study had a good sense of humor and enjoyed hearing about their students' daily lives. In return, students seemed to enjoy being in their classrooms, as it was clear these teachers obviously enjoyed talking with, and learning about them. These teachers relished every opportunity to talk with students, whether it was during class time, in the hallway, after school, or at extracurricular events. They wanted to know about athletic events, the prom, the fieldtrip, and generally, the less serious experiences in students' lives. Learning about the little things in students' lives opened up the relational possibilities for future bridging with students. When opportunities for more serious conversations arose, students were already willing to meet their teachers halfway. Despite the cultural differences between them, students already knew they could talk with their teachers about difficult topics. Talking with students on one level laid the relational groundwork for closing the gap further through deeper conversations.

Noddings (1992) argues, that opportunities for dialogue of this nature rarely happen as classrooms continue to be very teacher-centered. Despite a wide range of different relational styles between the teachers of this study, none of them had top-down classrooms where they saw themselves as more important than their students. These

teachers were skilled in talking *with* students, rather than *to* students. This subtle shift away from a position of power revealed their strong commitment as student-centered teachers.

Theresa was a good example of this student-centered approach in talking with students. Throughout our interviews together, Theresa repeatedly spoke of coming alongside her students to learn from them, claiming they had much to teach her. The positionality of Theresa and all of the teachers in this study can be described as being much more horizontal than vertical (Freire, 1974). This more horizontal approach to dialogue and conversation assisted the teachers in meeting students halfway across a bridge of potential cultural differences. Through conversation, students understood their teachers genuinely cared about them. These students understood it was safe to be on the bridge with these teachers.

The importance of caring dialogue cannot be overemphasized as one of the most important vehicles in building relationships with students. The idea of dialogue as a key component in building relationships with students, however, is not new (Freire, 1974; Noddings, 1992). According to Noddings, dialogue serves an important purpose in its ability to connect teachers and students in significant caring encounters (1992). Without such encounters, students of all backgrounds are more at risk in their performance at school. By talking with students about a variety of topics, both serious and not, the teachers in this study routinely added to, instead of subtracted from, their students' sense

of self-worth (Valenzuela, 1999). In bridging the cultural divide, such dialogue was an ongoing, essential component in the relationships established with students.

Teacher education programs would benefit by taking a more deliberate approach in cultivating the relational attitudes and actions exhibited by the teachers in this study. Teacher educators must model the same attitudes, deliberately talking with preservice teachers about ways to form healthy relationships with future students. Again, such an emphasis on dialogue and reflection within teacher education is not new (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Unfortunately, discussions of how to hold conversations with students include basic pedagogical strategies frequently overlooked in the teacher education curriculum. It is important that teacher educators prepare those going into teaching as naturally relational, positive people who look forward to the challenges of teaching in the 21st century.

In working to encourage the growth of positive teacher-student relationships within the curriculum of teacher preparation, the concept of "caring" needs to be understood and embraced in a much deeper way. This seems reasonable, as "teachers often cite caring as the primary reason for their career selection" (Parsons, 2005, p. 31). Again, honest talk about the importance of using conversation to form relationships with students needs to be deliberately included in the preservice curriculum, in order to develop a future force of teachers who are more culturally responsive.

As part of this honest dialogue, a discussion of the concept of "platica" would seem appropriately incorporated into the formal pedagogy of teacher education coursework (Flores-Duenas, 1999). Such caring talk includes keeping high expectations for students in tough situations. Unfortunately, many of these relational, caring basics of conversation do not come naturally to all future teachers. Linking the importance of caring conversations with preparing the culturally relevant teacher may be an important starting point in fostering future relationships similar to the ones enjoyed by the teachers in this study. Again, such conversations are essential in encouraging teachers to meet their students halfway across a bridge of cultural differences.

Again, discussions with preservice teachers about their metaphorical "journeys" may be a promising way to encourage the type of reflection needed in developing the culturally relevant or culturally responsive teacher (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003, Johnson, 2002; Milner, 2003). Discussions concerning the peaks and valleys of life may encourage preservice teachers to consider the impact of past events on their own journey to teach students from different cultural backgrounds. Such discussions may also bring to light deeper reflections and realizations that might not have otherwise been considered, as was the case with many of the teachers during the interview process.

Similarly, discussions concerning the continuing nature of a teaching journey may also be important for preservice teachers. Such a focus will serve to remind novice teachers of an ongoing journey filled with both high and low experiences that make them

better teachers. Talking with preservice teachers about the importance of learning from difficult challenges and moving forward in a positive way seems like a good place to start. Again a more realistic view of the ongoing journey may ultimately encourage a longer commitment to stay in teaching once preservice teachers enter the classroom.

An Ongoing Journey

Each of the teachers in this study envisioned their teaching experience as an ongoing journey. Each readily admitted they had much to learn about doing a better job with students. Each of the teachers shared they were continually working to improve their curriculum and spoke of the importance of continued learning to keep their teaching fresh and relevant for students. The oldest teacher, Theresa, had just entered a new degree program in the community and was very excited about her studies. Theresa, as well as all the other teachers saw themselves on their teaching journey for many years to come.

Although the teachers saw their journey as ongoing, it was unclear if they truly recognized their journey as one to bridge the cultural divide between themselves and their students. In interviews, the idea of "bridging the cultural divide" was a notion many had never previously considered. At times, some of the teachers were at a loss to explain what they were specifically doing to relate so well to their mostly Hispanic students. The degree to which each teacher considered her own "Whiteness" was also not clear.

Additional interviews may have enabled a better understanding of their own racial identity. Although some of the teachers acknowledged their understanding of how some students might have preconceived, negative attitudes towards them as "Anglos," it did not emerge as a regular consideration of themselves as teachers at Cactus View.

In addition, much of the language used during interviews could be characterized as "color blindness" (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Because of this, it was unclear whether existing cultural differences between the teachers and their students were consciously considered. Further, at several points throughout the interviews, individual teachers appeared uncomfortable making cultural distinctions between themselves and their students. Even though it was clear the teachers understood some of the difficulties presented by the cultural divide, they had difficulty articulating specific cultural differences. Strong identification with their students as a result of their many, varied cross-cultural and personal experiences had significantly narrowed the cultural divide.

It seems likely these teachers were so naturally relational, they weren't really cognizant of doing anything out of the ordinary to bridge the cultural divide. In forming deep relationships, they were bridging with students as a natural part of their daily routine at Cactus View. Is it possible these teachers were meeting their students so far along the bridge that they didn't recognize any distance between them anymore? Could such a lack of recognition be labeled as "color blindness?" Additional, follow-up interviews would

be needed to shed light on the degree to which each teacher considered cultural difference as well as their own Whiteness.

Implications for Further Research

In learning the stories of the teachers in this research project, it was clear most of them possessed a lot of wisdom in how to cultivate a healthy, relational balance with their students. A well-developed understanding of this balance gave these teachers to care for students in ways that were both significant and appropriate. It may be their ability to manage their classrooms was linked to a sophisticated understanding of this relational line. Engagement with students on a personal, but professional level, both in and outside of school, allowed them great freedom to bridge the cultural divide. Although many of the teachers admitted they had previously stumbled in the area of classroom management, management was not one of their current challenges. It is possible their enhanced ability to talk *with* students served as a management tool that has been underestimated in educational literature. Understanding that relational line within the context of classroom management, and how building relationships is linked to bridging the cultural divide with students is an area worthy of further study.

In conducting a similar future study, I would place a greater focus on experiences the teachers believed had critically contributed to their personal identities and philosophies as White teachers in a predominantly Hispanic school setting. The

questionnaire may have been far more effective in collecting data, if the teachers were asked to list such experiences, and then followed up more specifically in the interview process. Although I would continue to emphasize the importance of reflecting on an ongoing journey to bridge the cultural divide, further interviews would be needed to better understand the interplay between their identities, philosophies, and relational bridging activities with students. Three interviews only scratched the surface in examining the critical life experiences shaping the teachers' commitment to teach in a predominantly Hispanic school. More time talking with teachers would greatly improve this study, and produce a more thorough examination into the impact of life experiences on successful relationship building in teaching.

Would a similar group of highly recommended teachers from a similar elementary, middle school or high school yield the same kind of experiences? That would be an interesting research project. Perhaps a deliberate search for exemplar, White female teachers from more culturally insulated backgrounds would yield even more useful information in understanding the transformation in narrowing a much larger cultural divide between teachers and students. Learning from the experiences of a more insulated group of teachers offers a potentially more helpful group of cases for the continuingly high numbers of similar, White preservice teachers entering teacher education. Such projects would be useful and productive foci for further study.

My Own Journey

It only seems appropriate to conclude a study of these teachers' journeys by discussing how this experience has impacted my own journey as a teacher educator and researcher. In addition to the wealth of practical knowledge I gained from the study of their journeys, I learned much about my own teaching journey. Early on, it was clear I had a long way to go in understanding myself as a White, female educator living in a more privileged neighborhood of this same city. Despite confidence in my own understanding of culture, I struggled with perceptions of myself as the "norm," and the largely homogeneous student body as "different." As a person of power and privilege in society, I was constantly reminded of my own arrogance and lack of understanding the real dynamics at Cactus View.

In the city where this study took place, most "Anglos" perceive the neighborhoods surrounding Cactus View as a dangerous place where poor minority students go to tough, gang-filled schools. Even though I had expected a lot of positive things from this school, I was still surprised by the clean-cut look and kind and polite manner of the majority of students at Cactus View. I did not expect to find the impressive level of academics in each teacher's classroom. Such surprises showed that before the beginning of this study, my knowledge of the difficulties surrounding this neighborhood had already interfered with my expectations of this particular school. Although this was the kind of introspective reflection I had hoped to inspire in the

teachers of this study, it was humbling to realize it was the type of ongoing reflection I still needed on my own journey as a White teacher.

As a teacher educator, it was clear the individual experiences of these teachers' journeys have obviously contributed in varying degrees to their relational ability to bridge with the students at Cactus View. The empathy gained for students from significant cross-cultural experiences, as well as challenges in their own lives, likely enhanced these teachers' ability to initiate and engage in significant dialogue with their students at Cactus View. Positive dialogue of all types demonstrated these teachers' belief in, and refusal to not easily give up on their students. These regular, caring encounters with students were "green lights" that in part kept these teachers energized at Cactus View. It was likely these relationships were also "green lights" that affirmed students at Cactus View as well.

Teacher education needs to find ways to encourage this level of empathy in the selection and recruitment of future teachers. Once teachers enter our programs, we also need to find ways to structure further significant experiences that will encourage frank talk about the importance of caring dialogue as a cultural strategy with Hispanic students. Perhaps the student-centered, more horizontal approach in talking *with* students of all backgrounds needs to be discussed with preservice students as an integral, pedagogical component of the caring and culturally relevant teacher.

This study's findings should not be seen as prescriptive for bridging the cultural divide with Hispanic students only. It is believed the findings in this study reiterate important understandings helpful for teachers in a variety of different cultural settings, not simply the rich, cultural settings in the American Southwest. Regardless of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, all students benefit from positive teachers with a large range of cultural and personal experiences that enhance their ability to empathize with students. Students of all backgrounds benefit from teachers who are able to talk with them in ways that support healthy bridges. Unfortunately, some bridges between teachers and students are in danger of falling down, as they are frequently not well anchored in strong relationships. It is through these strong relationships that students will be willing to meet their White teachers halfway across the bridge, regardless of cultural differences. In order for this to happen, teacher educators must learn to encourage similar meetings in their preservice teachers' journeys. Taking a more deliberate role in guiding preservice teachers across this relational bridge allows teacher educators to become an integral part of this ongoing journey. Learning to bridge the cultural divide can be difficult work, but with reflection and dialogue about the ongoing journey, the divide need not be so deep.

APPENDIX A: LETTER FOR TEACHERS

Dear teachers,

My name is Crystal Soltero, and I am a graduate student pursuing my PhD in teaching and teacher education at the UA. I am interested in conducting a study that seeks to understand the stories of White, female teachers who teach in schools where the majority of the enrollment are students from ethnic minority backgrounds. My passion for this topic stems from my ten-year experience as a social studies teacher at Amphitheater High School. I want to observe teachers who are deeply committed to teach in a culturally diverse school setting. I also want to understand the events and experiences of their life histories. I believe a deeper understanding of teachers' classrooms and life histories will reveal important stories of the journey they are traveling to bridge the cultural differences between themselves and their students.

Your Principal has recommended you as a teacher who has an exceptionally positive, academic and personal reputation with your students. I invite you to be involved in a study this spring that will involve approximately four hours of classroom observation in the initial months of the semester, followed by three, one-hour interviews to take place after classroom visits have been completed. The information collected will be used to form anonymous case studies to illustrate what exemplar teachers are doing in culturally diverse settings of the Southwest. I believe your stories will provide preservice teachers with concrete examples of the practical knowledge you have learned from your experiences as teachers.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please complete the attached questionnaire. Please understand that participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may decide to withdraw from this project at any time, if you choose. If

you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you very much for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Crystal Soltero

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name

2. Total number of years teaching

3. Total number of years teaching at your current site

4. Main subjects and corresponding grades taught

5. Describe an example of how differences in cultural backgrounds can cause divisions between teachers and students.

6. Describe some practical ways teachers can help decrease potential cultural divisions between themselves and their students.

7. Please describe a powerful experience you have had at this school dealing with cultural diversity. (Please use the back of this page if more space is needed.)

APPENDIX C: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your childhood and K-12 experiences. In what ways did your growing up experiences prepare you to teach in your current setting? In what ways did it not?

2. When you think back to your earliest thoughts about becoming a teacher, was this current teaching situation the setting you envisioned? Please explain.

3. Describe your first teaching experience in a school setting where many or most of your students came from a different cultural background than your own. Was this unknown territory for you? Please consider the comfort level, preconceptions, and expectations you had at the time.

4. Describe some of the highs and lows of your teaching experiences in that setting. What did you learn about yourself in the process?

5. If you think about your teaching career as a "journey," how would you describe it? What have been the main landmarks along the road of teaching that have made you the teacher you are today?

6. Describe any "green lights" you have had along this journey that confirmed you were following the right road in teaching students from a different cultural background than your own.

7. Describe any "Mt. Everest" moments in your teaching career that have kept you on this journey.

8. Describe any "rough roads" or "detours" you have encountered on this journey. Describe times when you felt like you took a wrong turn or had gotten lost. Have you ever felt like you were going in "reverse?" If so, please explain.

9. Describe points in time that marked a "right turn" or new direction you took on your teaching journey.

10. What helps you refill your professional "fuel tank" as a teacher? What unusual or untapped resources have you discovered that have helped you as a teacher?

11. As you look back over your teaching career, are there any "side trips" you would like to do over or experience again? Where do you still hope to travel on this journey? Future destinations?

APPENDIX D: SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do people say when they find out what you do for a living? (Why do you think they have this kind of reaction?)

2. How would you describe what you do as a teacher to a person who has no real knowledge of your school?

3. Why do you think you connect so well on both a personal and academic level with the students at this school, despite your own background as a White female?

4. In what ways has this connection with your students grown over the years?

5. What do you do on a practical, daily basis in your classroom to address the cultural background of your students?

6. Share some personal stories that might help new teachers who are just beginning their journey to teach in a school where most of the students are from a cultural background that is different from their own.

7. What life experiences do you think have been the most helpful to you in learning to teach in this setting?

APPENDIX E: THIRD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Take some time to look over my interpretations of your journey. Have I made any mistakes in the chronology of your life history? Where could I improve this "map?"

2. What could I add to make this representation of your journey more complete? Are there any missing experiences in your travels that you believe have been critical in shaping your ability to connect so well to the students at this school?

3. Share some stories of memorable students who have traveled with you over the years.

4. Where would these students be placed your map?

5. Why do these students stick out in your mind?

6. Overall, what has this journey taught you about yourself and your students?

7. Where do you see the road leading from here?

APPENDIX F: EXAMPLES OF CATEGORICAL LISTS

Theresa's cross-cultural experiences:

1. Living in an ethnic neighborhood in a big city in MI for her growing up years.
2. Has a strong sense of being Irish Catholic… there were Polish, French and German parishes in town.
3. Early childhood remembrance of waking up to hear stories from their Polish neighbors' about the Holocaust and asking her mother about it afterwards (3,5).
4. Strong sense of duty towards the "less fortunate" fostered by their involvement in the Catholic Church.
5. Youth work with migrant children in MI; had an early experience where she saw the horrible living conditions of a migrant "home" first-hand.
6. Friendship with a successful black lawyer's family in their neighborhood and being told she couldn't be friends with those "n_____" (3,4)
7. Living in the convent.
8. First HS job: a small, inner-city Catholic school with mostly Hispanic and African American students; teaching where others wouldn't go (1,16-17)
9. Spent a lot of time seeing and learning about her students' neighborhood from her students; homes were both "abominable" and "amazing." (1,18)
10. Next job was teaching drama in a farming community north of the city.
11. Taught adult ed. to migrant adults in that farming community. (1,2 and 2,24)
12. Experiences with gay friends in WA
13. Difficult short marriage into an Egyptian family.
14. Living in a SHS neighborhood and getting to know the families of her mostly Hispanic students.
15. Mentoring under "Alicia Martinez"
16. Worked closely with Frank Morales learning how to do prevention work.
17. Worked closely with kids in gangs (1,28)
18. Cultural exchange with Mexican teachers.

Lynne and Facing Challenges

1. Growing up in a dysfunctional foster home was extremely hard.
2. Finally opened up to her friends and one special teacher about her terrible situation at home….this led to her contacting CPS to get her out of there.
3. "I have overcome adverse obstacles in my life….but I've always, you know, been very positive; I've always looked for the positive things." (1,3) (also 1,18)

4. "I was not expected to graduate at all you know; I felt like my foster parent, ugh, 'you're too dumb, you'll never graduate…you never…I always knew I was going to graduate." (1,4) Graduated from HS and got financial aid to go to the university
5. Says her difficult life in foster care made her "a flexible person, able to adjust to any changes that came around…" (1,4)
6. "No, I definitely don't get rattled." (1,4)
7. Flunked out of the university her freshman year and lost all her financial aid. "I was so excited I was going to college, so excited…and then I failed and it was devastating…" (1,5)
8. Had to find an apartment, a job, and learn how to survive on her own…worked one year full-time and then went back to the community college, one class at a time.
9. "…I could only afford one class a semester, so I started out with one, and started slowly chipping away…" (1,5)
10. Worked at night, went to school during the day… "Thank God I did that when I was young." (1,6)
11. Denied entrance into the college of ed two different times…went to the dean of the ed college to find out what she needed to do to get admitted.
12. C: "You don't give up!" L: "No, I know. I am a fighter; that's true." (1,7)
13. Hired at CVHS one day before school began and found out she would be teaching two subjects not in her major
14. "I didn't even have a chance to get nervous." (1,7)
15. Struggled with management issues that first year.
16. Spoke to S. about her management problems and got some helpful tips that helped her classroom situation improve…rapport with students started to improve…
17. Took university course on management that next summer and says that really helped.
18. "I'm a fighter…I mean, if I see that I'm lacking in something, I'll find something to help me strengthen that area" (1,9). L is very proactive.
19. "…it makes you understand who you are as a person, if you can get throughout that first year…it makes you realize who you are as a person as far as overcoming obstacles…" (1,17)`

Vanessa's conversations with students

1. Giving extra attention to "Martin" and "Leah"
2. Conversations with "Enrique" about whether or not to "deal"
3. Talking with students before, during and after class…knows students very well

4. Conversations with students about not allowing them to make excuses of who they are and where they live to explain performance (good quote on 2,1)
5. Conversations about the use of the word, "gay" to describe everything (2,15)
6. Conversations with students about immigration, ethnicity and culture (2,15)
7. Discussion with students about "Leah" being Laotian and not Chinese (3,2)

"Ada, that's like calling you a 'wetback.' (3,3) "They want so much recognition as a culture, but it seems like they weren't willing to recognize or give the respect to another one, and it didn't seem faire to me." (3,4)

8. Conversation with students about inappropriate Jewish and Mexican jokes (2,15)
9. Finding new and creative ways to curse (2,15); use of humor is huge
10. "I've become much more approachable where I'll have kids actually come to me for counseling reasons…for being comfortable enough to come to talk with me about things they would never talk to their parents about…" (1,17)
11. Many students felt comfortable telling V about "discipline issues that aren't necessarily my own." (2,5)

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